

Great Basin Superstore

Social Studies: Standard 1, Objective 2; Standard 2, Objective 1; Standard 4, Objective 1

Time: 1 hour

Objective

Students will explain how prehistoric Native Americans living near the Great Salt Lake may have used local plants to fulfill basic living needs.

Background

Native Americans lived in the Great Basin for thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans. Archaeologists have found hundreds of places in the Great Basin where these ancient people left behind evidence of their existence. Hogup Cave is an example of one such site. This cave on the northwestern shore of the Great Salt Lake was inhabited for over 8,000 years. Hundreds of artifacts were found in the cave - pieces of pottery, arrowheads, bits of basketry, stone and bone tools, beads and pendants, moccasins and rabbit skin robe fragments, rope, and more.

By studying artifacts found at these sites, scientists have realized that these prehistoric residents had an extensive knowledge of their environment. Food, medicine, tools, fuel, bedding, clothing, containers and other useful items could be made from the plants, animals, rocks, and soil of the Great Basin. Plants were an especially important resource. They were used for food, medicine, basketry, fuel, rope, clothing, arrow shafts, bows, glue, etc. People needed to know, however, which plants were edible, which plants cured what, and which made the best baskets, as well as when and where to find these plants.

Procedure

1. Begin by discussing the basic needs of human beings (food, water, clothing, shelter, etc.) Then ask students who lived in this region before Europeans arrived. How did these people meet their basic needs?
2. Divide the students into groups of 4 or 5. Explain that each group will pretend that they are a family of Native Americans living near the Great Salt Lake 500 years ago. They will be given information (handout) about the

➤ Materials:

- "Great Basin Superstore Handout"
- Pen or pencil
- Paper

needs of their family and available plants that can help them meet those needs. Instruct them to read the information and to make a list of the problems that they need to solve. Working as a group, they should come up with solutions and write a story about how their family met their needs for the day.

3. After each group has written a story, let them share their stories with the other groups. Compare the results. Is there more than one way to approach the problem?

Discussion Questions

How did Native Americans know which plants were edible? Which could be used for medicinal purposes? (Trial and error, information passed down by oral tradition)

If you lived in the same area for five years would your resources be depleted? Why or why not? Would you have to travel farther for fuel? How could you protect these resources?

How do you think the work was divided among family members? Is work in your home divided in a similar way?

In the Great Basin in prehistoric times, what would have been the advantages or disadvantages of living alone? Living with a family? Living with a large group of people?

If people left no written records, how do archaeologists figure out how people lived and met their needs? (Studying artifacts and living sites, comparing artifacts with those of other sites and times, analyzing pollen and other organic remains)

How do our basic needs today compare with those of prehistoric people? Are they any different? How do we meet our needs today? (This is a good opportunity to consider the difference between **needs** and **wants**. How often do we use the phrase "I need..." when we really mean "I want..." How does this affect our use of natural resources?)

Reference: Activity by Elaine Barton
The Great Salt Lake Story, Utah Museum of Natural History 1997
