GRADE 9-12: SOCIAL STUDIES

PEMMICAN: THE FOOD THAT FUELLED THE FUR TRADE

Purpose: Students will explore the challenges faced by the fur traders and learn how pemmican became a reliable source of nutrition. They will examine the role of pemmican in First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities and outline how pemmican supported the fur traders. Students will also be encouraged to make pemmican at home.

Estimated time: 90 minutes

Resources required:
- How to Make Pemmican YouTube Video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHkl8i97Mq0
- “Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site of Canada: Cultural Treasure” article: www.pc.gc.ca/eng/lhn-nhs/ab/rockymountain/natcul/natcul2/06.aspx
- “Life in the Wilderness” article: www.canadiana.ca/hbc/stories/wilderness1_e.html
- “Aboriginal Peoples” article: www.canadiana.ca/hbc/stories/aboriginals1_e.html
- “Coureurs de Bois” article: www.canadiana.ca/hbc/stories/coureurs1_e.html

Background Information:
The First Nations, Métis and Inuit People of Canada and Native Americans in the United States have been making and eating pemmican, a high-energy food for hundreds of years. For the European settlers they shared it with, it was invaluable. Records show that by 1870, the Hudson’s Bay Company was buying 200,000 pounds of the dried meat and berry mixture every year to fuel the fur trade. Pemmican was a very practical food; it was made of whatever meat was available – usually buffalo, moose, elk or deer, and berries; cranberries and Saskatoon berries were most common, but cherries, currants, chokeberries and blueberries were sometimes used for pemmican at feasts.

Steps:
1. To begin the class, ask students the following:
   a. Have you eaten an energy, protein or granola bar recently?
   b. What was in it?
   c. Why did you eat it?
   d. What did it taste like?
   e. Do you think your grandparents ate energy bars?

2. Tell students that they will be taking a look into the past and learning about the original energy bar: pemmican.

3. Show students the YouTube video on how to make pemmican www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHkl8i97Mq0.

Note: the video is 7.09 minutes in length.

4. After showing the clip, ask students:
   a. Do you think pemmican was made like this in the past? Why or why not?
   b. Why do you think pemmican was eaten by so many people?
   c. What are the benefits of pemmican?

5. Divide the class into three groups. Tell students they will be examining different perspectives of the fur trade by reading an article. Each group will read a different article: “Life in the Wilderness,” “Aboriginal Peoples” and “Coureurs de Bois.”

6. After reading the articles, students will share and explain the content of each article with the rest of the class. Encourage those who did not read the article being presented to questions to the presenters.

7. Next, have each student read the article “Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site of Canada: Cultural Treasures.” Instruct students to answer the following questions while reading:
   a. What role did pemmican play in their communities?
   b. How did First Nations, Métis and Inuit People make pemmican?
   c. How did pemmican support the fur traders?

8. When students are finished, discuss the answers as a class.

9. Explain to students that pemmican has been adapted by individuals to their own liking and tastes. For homework, ask students to make their own pemmican creations and bring it into the following class. While meat is traditionally the main ingredient, students may omit it from their recipes. Ensure students bring in a list of ingredients with their pemmican and do not use ingredients their classmates may be allergic to.

10. Celebrate the history of pemmican by sharing pemmican.
ADDIONAL RESOURCES

In addition to the lesson plans, share these resources with your students:

- Parks Canada “Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site of Canada: Cultural Treasures” www.pc.gc.ca/eng/lhn-nhs/ab/rockymountain/natcul/natcul2/06.aspx
- White Oak Society “Food for Thought- What the Fur Traders Ate” www.whiteoak.org/historical-library/fur-trade/food/
- Exploration: the Fur Trade and Hudson’s Bay Company “Life in the Wilderness” www.canadiana.ca/hbc/stories/wilderness1_e.html
- Exploration: the Fur Trade and Hudson’s Bay Company “Aboriginal Peoples” www.canadiana.ca/hbc/stories/aboriginals1_e.html
- Exploration: the Fur Trade and Hudson’s Bay Company “Coureurs de Bois” www.canadiana.ca/hbc/stories/coureurs1_e.html