

Ahtna Cultural Education Curriculum

Lesson Plan: Kentsiis - Moccasin



Nay'dini'aa Na' Hwt'aene Ugheldze' Xuk'anotta – Nurture the Land and People Project

Cultural Development

Introduction

Our mission in providing an Ahtna Cultural Education Curriculum is to teach the community about our culture as the Indigenous people of *Nay'dini'aa Na'*, Chickaloon Village. We hope to provide a better understanding of our history and culture as we move forward in living, preserving, and restoring our traditions. In Chickaloon we learn by doing. This idea that you learn by just trying and allowing oneself to fail, problem solve, and eventually succeed. This kind of reverse engineering is reminiscent of many indigenous learning systems which focus on holistic knowledge. To teach about the values in indigenous learning methods and teach about respect for environment and indigenous materials.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our tribal matriarch Katherine Wade. Her vision for culturally immersive education impressed the importance for a living environment of traditional learning for our children and tribal citizens.

Reflection

To address the immediate need to provide Ahtna cultural restoration and preservation. Writing a complete Ahtna Cultural

Kentsiis

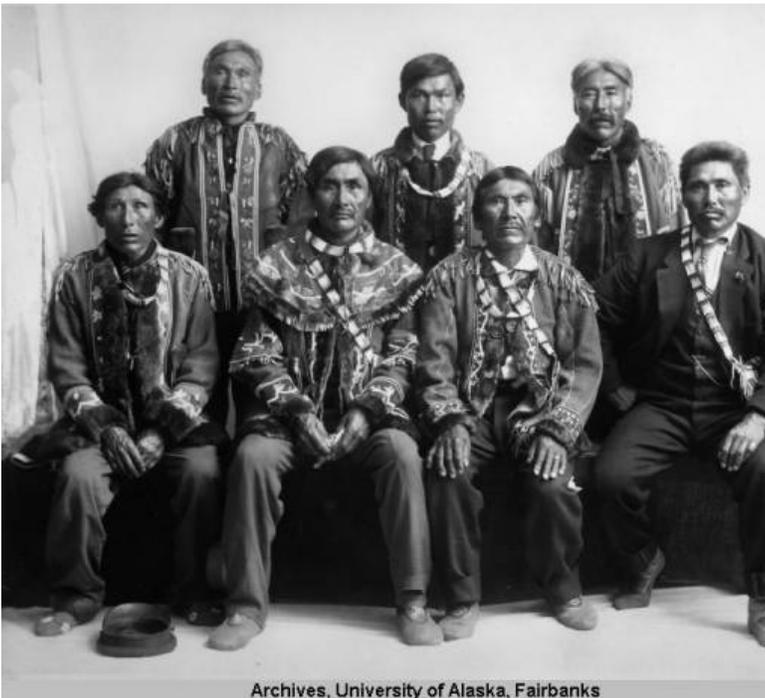
Moccasin Unit



Figure #1 moccasin project picture

Overview and Goals

This lesson is called *Kentsiis* or Moccasin. In this lesson we will be teaching participants how to identify the several different types of Ahtna Athabaskan moccasins and their purposes. The goal is to make traditional Ahtna Athabaskan moccasin slippers and to educate several Ahtna Athabaskan words involved with the activity.



Archives, University of Alaska, Fairbanks

Figure #2 1915 Chiefs meeting in Fairbanks, example of their moccasins



Ahtna Cultural Education Curriculum

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Exploring *Kentsiis* – Moccasins

Kentsiis is the Ahtna Athabascan word for moccasin. Ahtna Athabascans have several different types of moccasins from slipper moccasins, dance or celebration moccasins, boot moccasin and pant moccasins.

Traditionally Ahtna Athabascans used moose hide or caribou hide to make their moccasins with different types of fur. Beaver fur is more commonly used for the men and white rabbit or arctic fox and the finer furs were used for the women. Both the men and the women could sew moccasins, but traditionally women did the majority of the skin sewing.

A **moccasin** is a **shoe**, made of **deerskin** or other soft leather, consisting of a sole (made with leather that has not been "worked") and sides made of one piece of leather, stitched together at the top, and sometimes with a vamp (additional panel of leather). The sole is soft and flexible and the upper part often is adorned with embroidery or beading. Though sometimes worn inside, it is chiefly intended for outdoor use, as in exploring wildernesses and running. Historically, it is the footwear of many indigenous people of **North America**; moreover, hunters, traders, and European settlers wore them. Etymologically, the *moccasin* derives from the **Algonquian language Powhatan** word *makasin* (cognate to **Massachusetts** *mohkisson* / *mokussin*, **Ojibwa** *makizin*, **Mi'kmaq** *mksin*), and from the **Proto-Algonquian** word **maxkeseni* (shoe).- Wikipedia

Design

In the 1800s, moccasins usually were part of a Canadian regalia, e.g. a **powwow** suit of clothes. The most common style is that of the **Plains Indians** moccasin.

Moccasins protect the foot while allowing the wearer to feel the ground. The **Plains Indians** wore hard-sole moccasins, given that their territorial geography featured rock and cacti. The eastern Indian tribes wore soft-sole moccasins, for walking in leaf-covered forest ground. Moccasins are usually all brown, the same color. - Wikipedia



Figure #4 Chief Gary Harrison slipper moccasins gifted to him

Ahtna Words

1. ***Kentsiis*** – Moccasins
2. – Moose hide
3. – Caribou hide
4. – Fur trim
5. – grass insulation
6. ***Ts'aex*** – Thread
7. ***Tl'ankaani*** – Needle
8. ***Lindeldots'I*** – Scissors
9. ***Lay'dak*** – Thimble
10. ***C'ezes nats'ayi*** - Leather Strip



Figure #5 Chief Gary Harrison slipper moccasin gifted to him

Ahtna Phrases

- **Su'u** - I don't know
- **Ugheli** - Good
- **Gaani yidi nt'aeyi** - What is this?
- **Gaani lu' ____** - This is a ____.
- **'aen'** - Yes
- **Kole** - No
- **Nts'e doht'ae** - How are you all?
- **Nts'e dit'ae** - How are you?
- **Ugheli aa' ts'ilaen** - We are all good.
- **Ugheli elae** - I am good.
- **'Aani koht'aene igge' dozolts'ii** – Come people sit.
- **Suuxdohlaex** - You all get ready
- **udi'ilket** - Pick up
- **xona** - All done.
- **N'eyiits'de nahw'snel'iil** - Lord willing (our breath) we see you all again

With Christmas (Little Day) and New Year (Big Day) drawing near, each mother was busy making beaded moccasins for each child, for her husband and herself for the holidays. What an array of footwear when they did their Indian dances. The custom in those days was that everyone in your family had to have a new pair of beaded moccasins or boots, whether you had twelve children or one.

—Eunice Carney, from



“A Special Gift,” 1997
This pair of Gwich’in caribou-skin moccasins has pointed toes, wraparound ankles made of soft tanned hide and black wool tongue panels. The floral designs were worked in glass beads with fancy metal beads

inserted at the tips of leaves and petals. Making moccasins begins with brain-tanned caribou or moose skin. Beadwork starts with a sketched outline of the design, and the pattern is then filled in, stitching the beads with sinew, nylon thread, or dental floss. Women make moccasins and other beaded items for special occasions, including memorial potlatches, dances and festivals, and the birth of a baby.

<https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=126>



Figure# Women’s dance/celebration moccasins

Reference

Kari, J. M., & Alaska Native Language Center. (1990). Ahtna athabaskan dictionary. Fairbanks, Alaska: Alaska Native Language Center, University of Alaska, Fairbanks.

From Skins, Trees, Quills and Beads: The Work of Nine Athabascans (1983) Institute of Alaska Native Arts – Skinsewing, Sally Hudson

Wikipedia – Moccasin

Alaska Native Collection – Sharing Knowledge, Smithsonian Institution. Moccasins – Arctic Studies:

- <https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=126>
- <https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=142>
- <https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=26>

This pair of summer moccasin trousers—pants with moccasin feet attached—is made of moose hide and decorated with bands of yellow, blue, white, and red trade beads. The trousers were purchased along with a matching tunic and mittens by Smithsonian collector Edward W. Nelson, who photographed the outfit as worn by its owner, a Gwich'in man from Fort Yukon.

In the past, men and women of all Alaskan Athabascan groups wore similar moccasin trousers and tunics. Along the Yukon River and its tributaries these garments were made by the Gwich'in, Koyukon, Upper Tanana, and Deg Hit'an. In southern Alaska, both the Dena'ina and Ahtna wore this type of clothing.

Moccasin trousers often had tanned caribou skin leggings and moose hide soles. Hair was left on the caribou skins when making winter trousers, and turned to the inside. Upper Tanana people wore winter trousers made of mountain sheep skins and put rabbit fur inside to insulate their feet.

Moccasin trousers were originally decorated with porcupine quill embroidery and later with glass trade beads. This type of garment went out of style among most Athabascans by the mid to late 19th century, replaced by pants and unattached moccasins. However, some in the Upper Tanana region were still wearing moccasin trousers in 1930, and the Gwich'in were making them for children at that time.

It has been proposed that moccasin trousers were invented for use with snowshoes. One advantage would be that even deep snow could not come inside as it might with shorter boots or moccasins. One Gwich'in Elder suggested that having moccasins and pants together in one piece was an advantage during times of war because people slept in them and could escape quickly if attacked at night.

<https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=142>

Eliza Jones: Yes, *nedenaadletlekk* [it is fringed]. Normally, these [beaded fringe] would be the fringed caribou. But I guess since this is a model, they used beads. And it looks like they dyed this [skin] with something red, maybe *kk'es*. *Kk'es* is “alder.” It makes a really dark red dye.

Judy Woods: That's what they use for moose mittens and stuff. They dye that with alder. They leave it in water, bark and stuff, and it turns orange. Then they soak them [skins], and it makes them, any of that moosekin stuff, dyes it this color.

<https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=26>

Engaging *Kentsiis* – Moccasins





Step 1

This is what you should find in your packet



Step 2

Arrange your patterns with the smooth side of the leather facing upward and place your vamp on the sole with the ruff side up.



Step 3

Tack together all the marked spots to your vamp and keep the piece of felt in between the leather. Your piece of felt should stay the same length as your vamp.



Step 4

The vamp should always stay flat and crimp the bottom sole then sew together and continue doing this



Step 5

This what it should start looking like



Step 6

Cut out a rounded heel and cut out felt to be sewn in between the leather



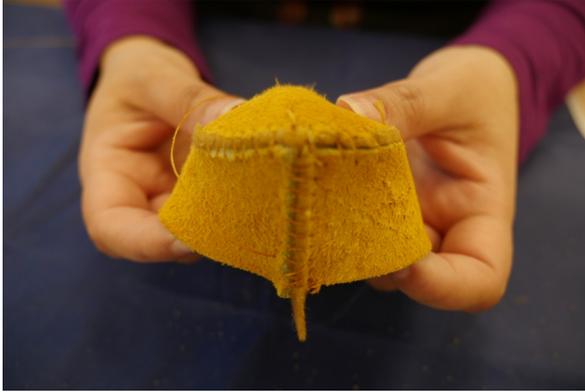
Step 7

Put the felt in between the bottom part of the heel then start sewing together



Step 8

Put a piece of felt in between the leather and sew the rest of the heel together



Step 9

This is what it should look like when you are done sewing the heel



Step 10

Turn your moccasin inside out



Step 11

Your moccasin should have excess felt sticking out



Step 12

Trim off the excess felt



Step 13

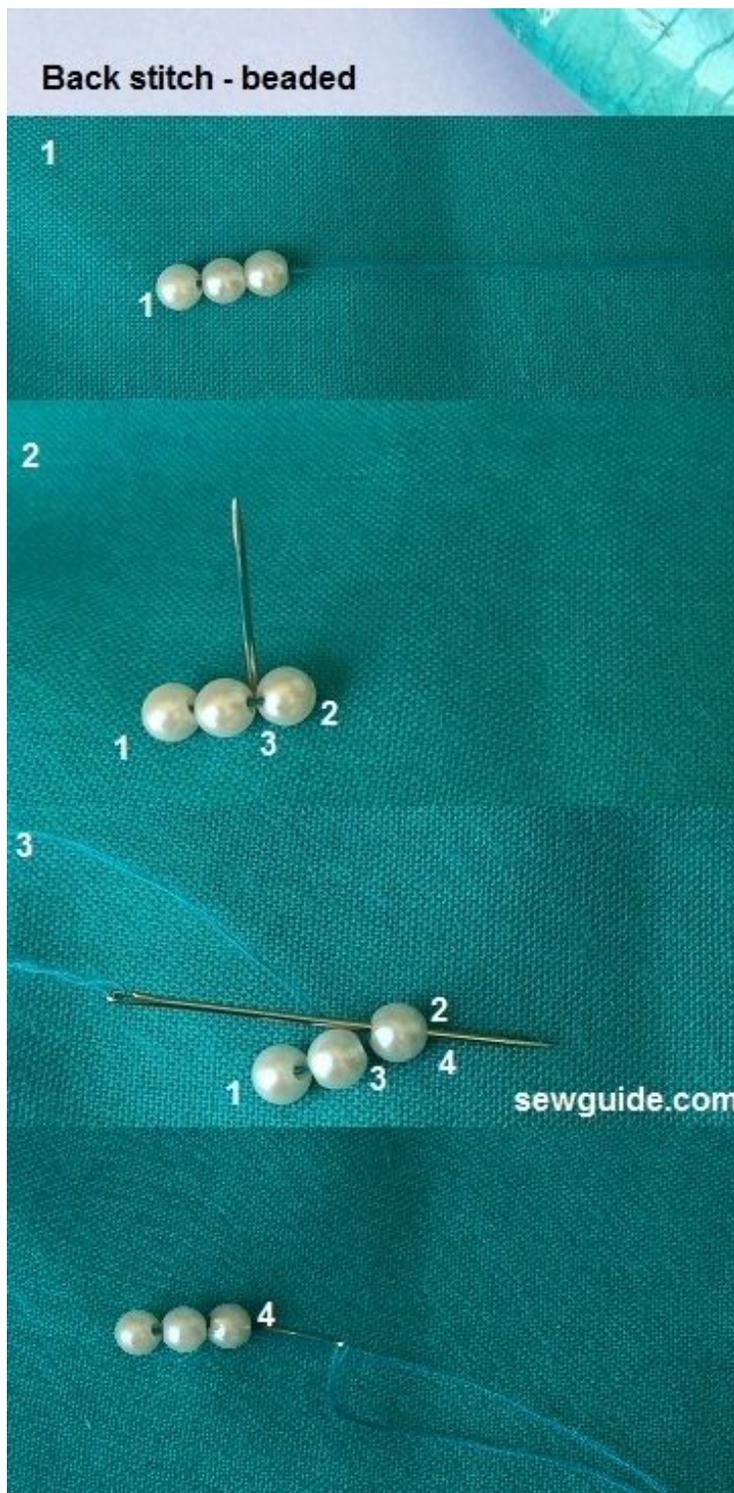
Now to add the fur. Put the fur strip in your moccasin with the skin side outward and line the fur strip along the top of your moccasin then start sewing on the fur strip



Step 14

Flip over your fur then you should be done with your moccasin.

Steps on sew applique beadwork onto your moccasin



Step 1

Bring up the needle at 1 ; String 3 beads through the needle

Step 2

Insert needle at 2 at the end of the beads and come up at 3 which is one bead back from 2

Step 3

Now come back to the end of the 3 beads (at 2) inserting the needle through the last bead

Step 4

Now continue stringing 3 beads again

Teacher Guide

Learning Outcomes: Student will be able to:

Session 1 – Sewing Items

1.) Pre-task – ½ hour before class

1. Set chairs around table.
2. Make sure table is cleared off.
3. Have 7 sewing items on table.

2.) Task – 1 hour and 45 minutes

4. Greet students in Ahtna, and ask the students to sit around the table.
Nts'e doht'ae (How are all you?) or
if one person: *Nts'e dit'ae* (How are you?)
The response is: *Ugheli aa' ts'ilaen* (we are all good) or
If one person is answering: *Ugheli etaen* (I am good)
'*Aani koht'aene igge' dozolts'ii* (Come people sit down)
Suuxdohtaex (You all get ready)
5. Remind students that it's important to have fun and not to worry about making mistakes. Laughter is an important part of learning, and when we laugh we can relax and begin to learn.
6. Instruct students if they do not know the word, they can say: *Su'u* (I don't know), and gesture by shrugging shoulders.
7. Instruct students who cannot find the words to use, they can throw their hands up in the air and say, *Ugheli!* (Good). Explain by this action along it will help them to reset their mind to start again.
8. Students will begin by learning the vocabulary words by listening.
9. Teacher will say words and point at item saying:
Gaani lu' tl'anikaani (This is needle.)
Gaani lu' ts'aex (This is thread.)
Gaani lu' tindeldots'i (This is scissors.)
Gaani lu' kon' ggaay (This is lighter.)
Gaani lu' lay'dak (This is thimble.)
Gaani lu' c'ezes nats'ayi (This is leather strip.)
Gaani lu' hnaa tsesi (This is sewing bag.)

Project Materials

- Table
- Chairs
- Small paper plates/cloth mats
- Sewing Bag
- Needles
- Sinew thread (simulated)
- Size 6 seed beads (red, black, white, yellow, light blue)
- Size 8 fire-polished beads (red, black, white, yellow, blue)
- Thimble
- Scissors
- Eye glasses
- Feather beads (36 mm)
- Bone beads (1 inch)
- Leather strips (3 inches)
- Small lighter
- Necklace

Teaching Materials

- PowerPoint
- Pocket guide

Steps to make Ahtna Moccasins

1. First we will need to pick a pattern. There are several different patterns to choose from like the slipper moccasins, moccasin pants, moccasin boots and womens dancing boot. Today we will be making slipper moccasins.
2. Traditionally these moccasins are made from caribou and moosehide. Moosehide is more thick and lasts longer than a thinner hide. So, it is always best to use Moosehide for the soles of the moccasins.
3. I have a picture of the pattern on figure 1. to follow.
4. Use a paper bag to cut out the pattern. Traditionally patterns were made from birch bark.
5. The popular backing for bead work is felt normally tan colored. Ahtna Athabascans use this felt for their vamps for their slippers and a boot band and hair pieces. It is used mainly to bead a full solid beautiful bead work. In the old days they didn't fill in a solid color.
6. The pattern is cut out to the size of the foot size.
7. Sewing is started from the toe of the slipper.
8. An extra strip of moose skin is sewn between the sole and vamp. The middle strip will keep the stitches from showing and the slipper will last much longer and look nicer.
9. Crimp the bottom piece up to shape the toe and make it look nice and round.
10. When sewing you will not crimp the vamp only the sole of the moccasin.
11. When you are done sewing the top portion of the moccasin you will then work a little water in to the stitches and then they are rubbed down with a scissor handle. This is to soften the skin and make it easier to turn the slipper right side out.
12. Then you will trip the middle strip of moose hide so it does not stick out.
13. A strip of felt or hide is used for the inner trim for the back of the heel.
14. Then fold the inside out and start sewing the bottom of the heel with the strip of felt or hide in the middle of the leather.
15. After sewing the bottom heel trim off the excess felt and start sewing the heel from bottom to the top again with the piece of felt or hide in between the leather.
16. Once you are done again work in a little water into the stitches like you did with your first stitch and fold your heel right side out.
17. At this point now we will be adding on decoration like beadwork and for trims
18. Traditionally for the slippers the beadwork would be on the vamps of the slipper, sometimes around the heel depending on the artist.

19. Your beadwork will be sewn on to a piece of felt that is the same shape as your vamp leaving a quarter inch of room to sew your beadwork on to your vamp.
20. The trim of your moccasin would traditionally be rabbit fur or beaver where women wore the rabbit fur and the men would wear the beaver fur.
21. Cut an inch-thick piece of fur that is long enough to cover the top part of your moccasin that sides around the ankles.
22. Then you will place the fur strip into your moccasin lining up the strip of fur on the top of your moccasin and face the fur side in the middle. (Try to push in as much of the fur away from where you will be stitching)
23. You will be sewing a wipe stitch all around the top part of your moccasin.
24. Once your completed sewing the fur on your moccasin fold the fur out of the moccasin.

Evaluation Assessment:

- To observe that the participants had completed in making their pair of slipper moccasins
- Ask questions to participants about some of the Ahtna words they have learned during the activity (For example: What is the Ahtna word for moccasin?)

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