Who are the Abenaki and Where Do They Live Today?

Abenaki is the name of a Native American Tribe that can be classified into two categories: the Western and Eastern Abenaki. Historically the Western Abenaki people lived in what is today known as Eastern New York, Northern Massachusetts, parts of Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire and north toward Quebec, Canada. As members of the Seven Nations and Wabanaki Confederacy, Abenakis interacted with their Native American neighbors to the North, South, East and West on a regular basis. Families and tribal members moved across these areas at their own will, long before any of the political boundaries created by the governments of the United States or Canada.

The map on the right depicts the locations of contemporary Abenaki groups. The pink squares represent the Canadian Abenaki Reservations. The orange squares represent the four Abenaki tribes that make up the Vermont Abenaki Alliance: the Elnu, Nulhegan, Missisquoi and Koasek Abenaki Tribes. Notice how these lines divide the Koasek territory in half. Families and tribal communities are easily separated by these imaginary and often randomly assigned state lines.

State Recognized within Vermont, means that each tribe has proven their ancestry to the Vermont government. Many other Abenaki groups and individuals exist but remain unrecognized because they have yet to apply for Recognition. Because of this, they cannot legally say they are Native American.

Do you think that it’s fair for tribes to be required to prove their ancestry to the government? Circle your answer.

YES  NO

Briefly explain your answer.______________________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________________
ABENAKI CLOTHES MAY NOT LOOK LIKE WHAT YOU EXPECTED

For thousands of years, the Abenaki people wore clothing which was woven using the long skinny fibers inside the milkweed plant. They also wore leather and furs.

Images of Native American people drawn on one of Samuel de Champlain’s map.

When the French people came here, they traded their shirts and cloths for Abenaki furs so 18th century Abenaki clothing doesn’t look like what you might expect.

Abenaki men began to wear white linen shirts with wool breech cloths and leggings made from wool and decorated with silk ribbons. Red and blue were very common colors. They also wore white shell “moon” necklaces because of their protective qualities. Women wore “peaked hoods” that were pointed, wrap skirts, and leggings to protect their legs with white chemises which were under garments that were worn by French women.

Do Abenaki clothes look like what you imagined? YES NO.

Why do you think they are or are not like what you imagined them?

Francine Poitras Jones. 18th Century Abenaki Couple. 2015. Acrylic painting on canvas.

Slowly Abenaki people wore less and less traditional clothing. By the 19th century, most Americans didn’t know what Abenaki clothes looked like because most Abenakis wore the same style of shirts, pants and dresses as other Americans.

Citizens of the Elnu Abenaki Tribe at a Spring Social. Photo courtesy of Melody Walker Brook.
REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE

Look around your classroom and home. How much plastic can you see? Plastic is used every day, by many people around the world. But have you ever wondered what happens to all of your plastic when you’re done using it? If you throw it away in the trash, it usually ends up in a landfill -- a large hole dug in the ground that is filled with trash and then buried. But just because the plastic is underground, does not mean it is no longer a problem for us.

Plastics cannot break down and decompose like food can. It can take more than 400 years for plastics to break down completely. That means that every piece of plastic, from water bottles to plastic cling wrap, still exists on our planet. The best thing we can all do to keep our oceans and natural resources safe are the 3 Rs: reduce, reuse and recycle. Reduce means to use or have less of something. Try to use less plastic. Talk to your family and see if they would be willing to use fabric grocery bags for shopping instead of plastic bags.

Reuse the plastic items around your home instead throwing them away. If you cannot reuse them, recycle the plastics at home and at school.

Recycling keeps plastic out of landfills and helps to make new products without creating additional plastic. Look for a symbol like the one on the right to see which bins are recycling bins.

Now that you’ve learned about the 3 Rs, let’s explore Abenaki cultural objects that are made with repurposed materials.

What do you recycle in your home?

____________________________________
____________________________________
____________________________________
____________________________________

For more information visit abenakiart.org and abenaki-edu.org
©Vermont Abenaki Artists Association and Abenaki Arts & Education Center. All Rights Reserved. 2018.
Abenaki Artists Reuse Materials

From a very young age, children are taught to care for the environment and to reuse things. Some Abenaki artists use reuse items that they find instead of throwing them out or buying something new.

This rattle on the left was in the *Alnobak: Wearing Our Heritage* exhibit. Lori Lambert from the Nulhegan Abenaki Tribe made this rattle by reusing a regular household item. She chose to use a can of Calumet Baking Powder to honor her grandmother who used this brand of baking powder to make fry bread. wood, beads, leather, metal cones, and thread.

Every year, millions of pounds of Tyvek plastic house wrap scraps are sent to landfills because the pieces are too small to use. The basket on the right was made by Vera Longtoe Sheehan. She plastic house wrap and silk fabric from a dress to make the basket.

Can you think of an example of something that you would reuse at home? What is it and how would you now use it?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

What kind of item is it?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

What materials were used to make this item?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

For more information visit abenakiart.org and abenaki-edu.org
©Vermont Abenaki Artists Association and Abenaki Arts & Education Center. All Rights Reserved. 2018.
WHAT’S IN A NAME?

All cultures change over time and Native American culture is no different. Over long periods of time language, clothing and daily lifestyles have changed.

In the old days, the Abenaki people called themselves Wabanaki (pronounced wo ba na key). Sometimes we still use that name but today the legal name for our people is Abenaki. Today we use the word Alnobak (pronounced all no bak) as the word for people so the title of this exhibit means, “People: Wearing Our Heritage.

We consider ourselves to be people from the Dawnland because we live in the East where the sun rises and where the sun first shines at dawn or day break. The old Abenaki word for the Dawnland is Wobanakik (pronounced wa ba na kik). However, today most Abenakis refer to our homelands of Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine and Quebec as N’dakinna (pronounced nn da kin na). Although most Abenakis still live in N’dakinna some have move to other states and even Europe.

ABENAKI WORD SEARCH

ALNOBAK
DAWNLAND
FEATHERS
FUR
LEATHER
MILKWEED
NDAKINA
TRADE
WABANAKI
WOBANAKIK

For more information visit abenakiart.org and abenaki-edu.org
©Vermont Abenaki Artists Association and Abenaki Arts & Education Center. All Rights Reserved. 2018.