Chapter 3: Canoe Journeys

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I learned to make coiled cedar root baskets about 14 years ago from master basket weaver Elaine Timentwa Emerson.

There’s more to basket weaving than the simple act of weaving. You spend time going out to the mountains at certain times of the year to gather the materials (cedar roots, bear grass and wild cherry bark). And then preparing them takes time, too. In the end, only about one-third of your time is actually spent weaving your basket. The fun part is getting together with others to weave. There’s always a lot of visiting and laughter and food, and an elder who tells of the legends and stories about your ancestors and language. And no one even cares if they finish their basket — they just want to hear the stories.

While non-Indian influences have changed the way of life of our ancestors, modern technology is bringing us back together, again. Driving a car to collect basketry materials may only take hours, instead of the days or weeks it took our ancestors. Telephones and the Internet give us information on areas to gather materials, and it brings us closer to all of the basket-weaving friends we’ve made.

ACTIVITIES

1: Art is critical to any nation’s culture. As a class, discuss how art contributes to society in general. Then, look through The Seattle Times for articles and images about the arts. What purpose do newspaper articles about art serve to the community?

2: This article discusses the idea of “nourishing one’s soul” — what exactly does this mean? As a class, discuss ways in which humans nourish souls. What is important to you with regard to the type of career you decide to pursue? Look through the Business section for articles about what satisfies people at their job besides money.

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