

FIRST PEOPLES

CANOE JOURNEYS AND LANGUAGE

Join us Mondays through Nov. 28, 2005, as we take a look at the contributions — past and present — of Washington's First Peoples.

During the 100 year anniversary of Washington's statehood, commemorations and celebrations took place throughout the state. Many of Washington state's First Peoples wondered what they had to commemorate, let alone celebrate, after losing so much of their land and culture. Nonetheless, the tribes were encouraged to participate, to "commemorate," statehood however they chose.

Inspired by a group of Maoris who sailed in a traditionally carved canoe from Aoteora (New Zealand) to the United States in 1979, the tribes, here, decided to recapture their own lost canoe tradition. In 1989, during Washington's centennial celebration, a group of native people carved and sailed a traditional canoe into the port of Seattle to remind everyone that the native people were still alive and practicing their traditional ways. The art of canoeing was not lost — it was on its way to being reborn.

Since that time, the tribes have continued to hold annual canoe journeys each summer. The "paddles," as they have come to be known, have grown enormously in participation. This year's canoe journey began in early July and ended August 1 in Port Angeles, followed by a week-long celebration. Months of planning and preparation go into each canoe journey. Crews are chosen with great care, as this has, once again, become an honored position in the tribes. Participants train at length to meet the challenges of the journey into the icy waters of the

Puget Sound and the Pacific Ocean. Strict rules govern conduct with zero tolerance for drinking and drug use. Following this tradition helps foster strong and sober communities.

When a canoe with its crew reaches a landing spot, the members of the local tribe come to greet them. To show that they mean no harm or aggression, the paddlers approach the shore with their paddle tips raised and then ask permission to come ashore. The tribe on the shoreline, dressed in traditional cedar woven clothing and regalia, customarily grants it and then welcomes the visiting tribe with songs and a feast prepared in their honor. Native foods are carefully prepared to nourish the paddlers before they depart on the next leg of their journey. Supporting crews also accompany the paddlers, driving from site to site, to prepare the landing and help set-up overnight camps.

Along with the canoe renaissance is a resurgence in speaking traditional native languages. Many of the Tribes in the Puget Sound areas of Washington State speak the language of Lushootseed. This is a form of Salishan. However, the Makah Tribe on the northwest tip of Washington speaks Nootkan, the same language as the native people on Vancouver Island.

Recently, the tribes joined together to get the State of Washington to recognize traditional language speakers as experts in their fields. By doing so, traditional native speakers would be able to become certified language teachers in local schools. After much lobbying and compromise, in 2002 the Washington State Legislature passed a law permitting the Board of Education to collaboratively work with the 29 sovereign Tribes to establish a First Peoples' language and culture teacher certification program on a pilot basis. The program was established in February 2003 and will continue through

the 2005-06 school year. At the end of this school year, the program will be evaluated and may be made permanent if the Board of Education agrees following consultation with the participating tribes.

Today, many Indians and non-Indians are learning traditional languages that were on the verge of being lost. Many Indian people believe that the loss of the traditional languages means the loss of traditional cultures. The pilot project and other efforts being made by the Tribes is an important step in revitalizing their culture and saving the languages.

ACTIVITIES

- 1: Consider how cultures impact each other with regard to traditions such as language and canoe trips. For instance, according to the author, the renaissance of canoe trips for Washington's First Peoples was inspired by the Maori people; discuss how the First Peoples of Washington have been influenced by other cultures and how others have been influenced by First Peoples. Was the influence positive or negative, explain. Look through today's Seattle Times for evidence of cross-cultural impacts, don't limit it to the obvious, think about a broad definition of "culture."
- 2: How would someone new to the Puget Sound describe our culture? Imagine you were new to the Northwest, and even to the United States, and you were reading The Seattle Times, write a one-page summary of the culture represented in the newspaper. In your opinion, does this representation truly represent the culture of the Puget Sound or your community? If so, why? If not, what would need to change in the newspaper to better reflect the culture of your community?



RAY FRYBERG
DRUG AND ALCOHOL PREVENTION SPECIALIST AND CHAIRMAN OF THE CANOE FAMILY, TULALIP TRIBES

"The sacred canoes have been the greatest gift that has ever returned to us, they give us a great platform to teach from and to help ourselves relearn much of what was taken from us.

Not that long ago our gatherings were outlawed, now we gather once again in the thousands and we share a richness and beauty that words are unable to describe, traveling the waters that our ancestors traveled. We see the strength that we carry when we paddle in unison, one heart, one mind, pulling together for the benefit of the whole. Today those youth who learn the true teaching from Tribal Journeys will be the ones who carry our culture into the future, in which we live culture day after day, learning to take care of each other, learning new songs and new dances, making new friends, reliving our past in a new era."



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Kimberly Craven, the author, is an enrolled member of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate. She recently completed an LLM in Indigenous Peoples Law and Policy at the University of Arizona Rogers College of Law and has numerous years working on American Indian policy.

CHAPTER 4:

NATURAL RESOURCES