



# French Heritage in Iowa

## Contents

- I. Native American People in Iowa: Using Nature!
- II. French People and Native American People Traded with Each Other
- III. Advantages of Trade Goods
- IV. French People Adopted Native Things Too!

### Teachers' introduction

This set of learning activities is designed for 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> graders.

The activities will help the students learn about the history of Iowa as it relates to the time period when French and French-Canadians were engaging in the fur trade and settling here.

They help students develop their reading skills, and align with standards having to do with historical information. They also present the cultural impact of the interactions between Native people and the French explorers and traders. At the end of each section, an activity ask students to think about a "big question."

These activities represent just a brief introduction to the topic!

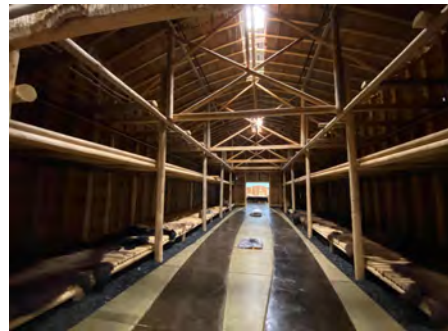
Each of the four sections consists of:

- a multi-paragraph text for students to read
- a set of new vocabulary words they'll encounter in the text
- one or more activities aimed at helping them consolidate their understanding of the material and think about some bigger questions

## I. Native American People in Iowa: Using Nature!

Here are some words you will need to know: do you know them already?

- Native American or Indian
- tribe
- moccasins
- pelts
- beaver and otter
- canoes
- birchbark
- buckets
- squash
- tapped for sap
- lodge
- reeds



Reproduction (Copy) of a Native American lodge,  
outside and inside

And look at the pictures of...

- a lodge
- a maple tree being tapped
- a birchbark bucket



Reproduction of a maple tree being tapped for its sweet sap



A bucket made of birchbark



*Now, read this text and get ready for some activities!*

Five hundred years ago, before Iowa was a state, the people of Native American tribes lived here. (Sometimes we say “Native American” and sometimes we say “Indian.” They mean the same thing.) Some of the Native American people who lived here were from the Meskwaki tribe, the Ioway tribe, and the Otoe tribe.

The Native people found everything they needed in nature. They made clothes like dresses and shoes (moccasins) out of deerskin. They made blankets out of bear pelts. They made fur coats out of beaver skins and otter skins. They made knives out of sharp stones. They made canoes out of birchbark or from big tree trunks. They made buckets to store things out of birchbark, too.

To eat, they hunted deer, and they fished in Iowa’s rivers and lakes. They grew corn, squash, and beans. They tapped maple trees for the sap so they could make maple sugar.

And for houses, they bent long skinny tree trunks to make a frame. Then, they put large pieces of tree bark or mats made of reeds on the frame to make a big house or lodge, where more than one family lived together.



## ACTIVITIES

**A. THINK:** The Native Americans used things from nature! What did they use?

1. What did they use **PLANTS** for? Find two uses and write them here.

They used plants \_\_\_\_\_

They used plants \_\_\_\_\_

2. What did they use **ANIMALS** for? Find two uses and write them here.

They used animals \_\_\_\_\_

They used animals \_\_\_\_\_

3. What did they use **STONES** for? Find one use and write it here.

They used stones \_\_\_\_\_

### **B. WRITE:**

What are the names of the Native American tribes who lived here?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

### **C. DRAW:**

Look at the pictures of the Native American lodge. Draw a picture of a lodge! Can you draw the long skinny tree trunks for the frame, and the big pieces of tree bark to cover it? How many families will live in the lodge that you draw?

## II. French People and Native American People Traded with Each Other

Here are some words you will need to know: do you know them already?

- ocean
- trade
- kettles
- axes
- knives
- cotton
- wool
- earrings
- bracelets
- decorate
- mink
- muskrat
- bison/buffalo



These are reproductions (copies) of trade goods.  
How many can you name?



This is a mink. It is one of the animals that were trapped for their fur



This is a metal kettle hung over a fire for cooking



*Now, read this text and get ready for some activities!*

Four hundred years ago, people who had come to North America from across the ocean arrived in the area that is now the state of Iowa. These people were from France, and they spoke French. They saw the furs like the beaver, the otter, and others, that the Native people used, and they knew that they could sell those furs back in France—especially the beaver, which was made into hats!

So, the French people came into Iowa to trade for the furs with the Native people. We sometimes call those Frenchmen who came to trade "voyageurs" (which means "travelers" in French—it's pronounced vwa-ya-zhoor).



The French traded things that were made in France for the furs that the Native people had. We call these things "trade goods." They are things like metal pots and kettles, metal axes and knives, cloth made of cotton or wool, blankets made of wool, silver earrings and bracelets, and small glass beads to decorate clothing or belts. All of these trade goods are things that the Native people could not find in nature, so they were happy to trade furs for them!

The Native people in Iowa trapped animals for their furs. The most important one was the beaver. But they also trapped otter, mink, muskrat, and fox. And they also hunted deer and bears, and even bison (or buffalo), in many parts of Iowa! They could trade these furs and skins for trade goods from the French.



These are rolls (“bolts”) of cloth ready to be traded

## ACTIVITIES

A. **THINK:** What animal furs or skins did the Native Americans trade?

Write five of them here.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

**B. THINK:** Give examples of these kinds of “trade goods”!

You can use it **to cook**:

You can use it **to cut wood or food**:

You can use it **to make clothes**:

You can use it **to decorate clothes or yourself**:

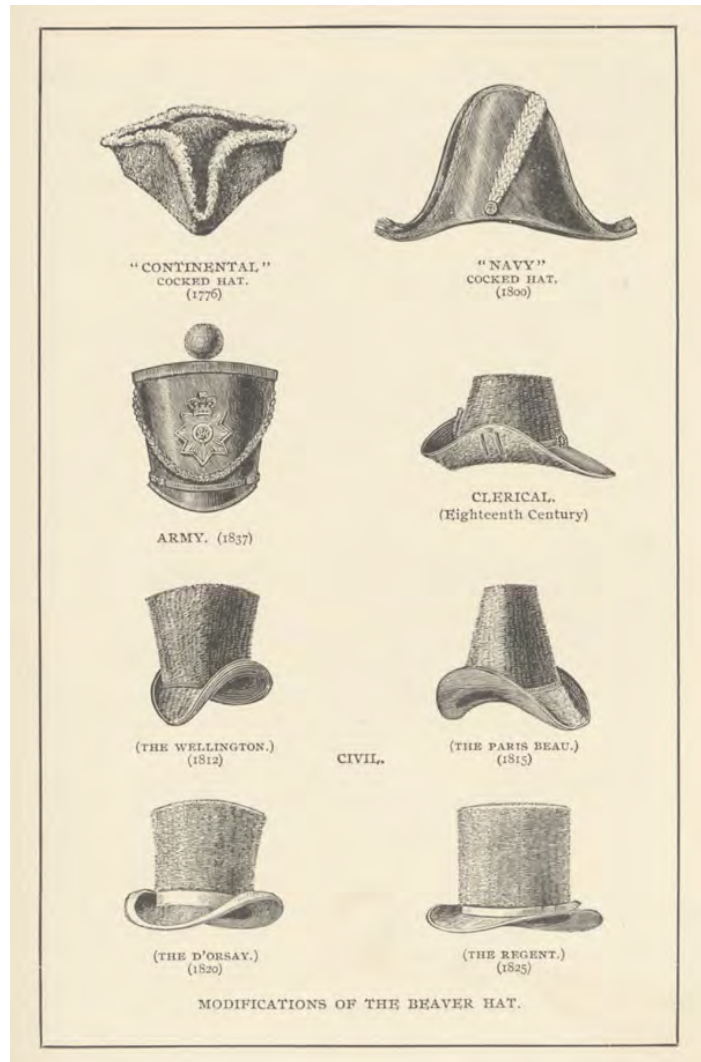
**C. RESEARCH:**

1. Look at the photo of a beaver skin (also called a pelt), which is being stretched to make it round. Beavers still live in many places in Iowa. Do some research: where do beavers live, in nature? What other animals were trapped for their fur?





2. Look at the image of the kinds of hats that used to be made out of beaver skin. Can you find pictures from history where people are wearing hats like these? Does anyone wear hats like these today? Which is your favorite? Why?



### III. Advantages of Trade Goods

Here are some words you will need to know: do you know them already?

- advantage
- clay
- colorful
- sew
- weigh
- jewelry
- warmth
- invented



These are glass beads like the ones the French traded

*Now, read this text and get ready for some activities!*

Why did the French people want the furs that the Native people traded? Mostly, they sent the furs back to France where they sold the furs. The furs were made into hats or used to make other items of clothing.

Why did the Native people want the trade goods that they got for the furs? Even though they got many things from the natural world around them, they found that some trade goods had many advantages (an advantage is something about an object that we think is good).

What were the advantages (the good things) about the trade goods?

A metal knife was stronger than a stone knife. A metal kettle was easier to cook over fire with than a clay pot. The Native people also liked having cloth for their clothes: it was more colorful than deerskin and it was easier to sew. Wool blankets were almost as warm as buffalo robes, but they didn't weigh as much! Silver bracelets and earrings and glass beads were pretty, and different from the jewelry that the Native people made from shells and stones. Metal fishhooks lasted longer than hooks made of bone.



But we will see that even though the Native people liked to trade for these goods, they kept many of their own goods. They didn't stop using deerskin for clothing and animal furs and skins for warmth. And the French people even started using things the Native people had invented!



## ACTIVITY

**THINK:** Some trade goods had advantages that were very useful for the Native Americans. What were the advantages of these trade goods?

- a metal kettle \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

- cloth to make clothes \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

- a metal knife \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

- silver earrings \_\_\_\_\_

---

---



Rings, and beads made into earrings



Metal fishhooks

## IV. French People Adopted Native Things Too!

Here are some words you will need to know: do you know them already?

- survive
- Mississippi River
- Missouri River
- narrow
- adopt/adopted
- straps
- thorns
- baskets



Before you do this part, you might want to watch part or all of a video called “Where Are Your Pants?” about a French voyageur’s clothes. (This video was made for the reconstructed fort at Colonial Michilimackinac in Mackinaw City, Michigan. Many of this voyageur’s clothes are adopted from the Native people!)

Here is the link:

[https://youtu.be/pBIk\\_ybtEes?si=Jf6cQOjQ881REycW](https://youtu.be/pBIk_ybtEes?si=Jf6cQOjQ881REycW)

*Now, read this text and get ready for some activities!*

The French people who moved into Iowa to trade for furs were moving into a place where there were not cities or even roads. They needed to learn from the Native people how to survive on this land! The Native people had survived here for many, many years.

Because there were no real roads in Iowa (just narrow paths), the best way to travel was on the water. Iowa has the Mississippi River to the east and the Missouri River to the west, and many other rivers and lakes. The Native people had learned that the best way to travel was in a birchbark canoe. It was light and strong. It could carry many people and a lot of furs and trade goods! The French started using the birchbark canoe too—we say, they “adopted” the canoe from the Native people. In Iowa, people also made canoes out of logs.



This birchbark canoe was made the way the Native people made theirs. It is on the St. Joseph River in Michigan

The French also adopted some clothing used by the Native people. The Native men usually wore deerskin leggings, which were like pants with no tops to them. (They tied the leggings to their belts with straps to hold them up.) The leggings made of deerskin were very strong and it was good to wear them when the men were walking through the woods to protect their legs from branches and thorns. They were heavy, but they were stronger than pants made of wool or cotton cloth. So, the French men often wore leggings.



This man is wearing deerskin leggings under his long shirt and vest. He works at Colonial Michilimackinac in Mackinaw City, Michigan

When the Native people made maple sugar, they often stored it in buckets made of birchbark, which in some Native languages were called “mockoks.” The French saw that this was a good idea: these buckets were light and easy to make. So, the French used mockoks to store and to carry maple sugar and other things too. The French who came to live in Iowa also ate one of the important foods that the Native people grew: corn!

These are two mockoks made of birchbark: what could you put in them?







## ACTIVITIES

### A. THINK:

1. Why was the birchbark canoe a good way to travel? Give two reasons.

---

---

2. Why were the leggings good to wear in the woods? Give one reason.

---

3. Why were “mockoks” good to store maple sugar (or dried corn)? Give two reasons.

---

---

### B. MAKE A LIST!

- The Natives adopted some things from the French: what trade goods did they use? Write at least three.

- 
- 
-



- The French adopted some things from the Native people too: can you name them? Write at least three.

- 
- 
- 

***C. BIG QUESTIONS:***

1. Why do people adopt things from new people that they meet and live with? Write what you think.

---

---

---

---

---

2. Have you or your family ever adopted things, like new food, from other people you've met? Write the names of those things.

---

---

---

---