

OYAMA ISTHMUS & CANAL

ELEMENTARY SOCIAL STUDIES



11255 Okanagan Centre Rd. W.
Lake Country, BC V4V 2J7

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW:

1. After learning about the history of the Oyama Isthmus and Canal, students will conduct measurements of the lakes to develop a deeper understanding of the semi-nomadic lifestyle of the Syilx People



BIG IDEA: We shape the local environment, and the local environment shapes who we are and how we live; learning about indigenous peoples nurtures multicultural awareness & respect for diversity

COMPETENCY:

Significance, continuity and change, cause and consequence, historical perspectives

CONTENT:

Relationships between a community & its environment; natural & human-made features of the local environment; cultural characteristics/ways of life of local First Peoples; the impact of colonization on First Peoples societies

WHAT WILL WE KNOW:

- Syilx connections to the Okanagan, specifically the Oyama Isthmus/Canal
- How the land has been developed by people to meet their needs

FURTHER INQUIRY:

Field Trip Suggestions

1. Kaloya Regional park.
2. Okanagan Rail Trail
3. Lake Country Museum and Archives



We respectfully acknowledge that the land on which the Lake Country Museum is situated, where this lesson was developed, is on the unceded territory of the Syilx (Okanagan) Peoples.

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Lake Country Heritage and Cultural Society

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The Oyama Isthmus and Canal

Learning Objective(s)	By observing how the Oyama Isthmus has been used and has changed over the years, specifically the different approaches of the Syilx Okanagan People and the European settlers.
Suggested Grades	Elementary
ACTIVITY	
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student handout (provided) • Rulers • Pencils/pens
Measuring the lakes	<p>Using the provided map activity, have students measure in cm how long both Kalamalka and Wood lake are.</p> <p>Then, using their findings, have them estimate how long a canoe trip from the top of Kalamalka Lake to the bottom of Wood Lake.</p>
Debrief	<p>The purpose of this lesson is to teach students about the history of the Oyama Isthmus and Canal as well as develop an understanding of the Syilx perspective and lifestyle. Here are some suggested questions to debrief the activity and relate it back to the learning objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what ways were the Syilx and settler perspectives on transportation and the land different? • For what reasons do you think the settlers believed further developing the isthmus and building a canal necessary? • How might the Syilx people have viewed the development as a positive? As a negative? • How could the development have impacted the relationship between the Syilx and the settlers? • Had you been in a position of power back then, would you have decided to further develop the isthmus and/or build a canal? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Prompt them to reflect on the history and lifestyle of the Syilx people, the perspectives of the settlers, and their findings from the activity.</i>
Historical Context	Lake Country is home to the Okanagan Syilx people who have occupied the Okanagan valley for approximately 9,000 years. The Syilx name for Lake Country is <i>K'lakokum</i> , meaning “small enclosed land” or “the land between”. This is because it is right in between three lakes: Kalamalka Lake, Wood Lake, and Lake Okanagan.

K'lakokum provided everything the Syilx People needed during the warm months, and they were able to gather, preserve, transport and store food items for the winter months. The Syilx people were semi-nomadic people. This means they traveled around the area a lot, having homes in multiple places in the Okanagan. Because they had to move their camps they did a lot of transport with canoe-like boats. However, there was one problem: all the lakes the Syilx people traveled on was separated by land. They had to figure out how they were going to get their canoes from one lake to the other.

One route they had to travel through regularly was across the Oyama Isthmus since it was right in the middle of both Kalamalka and Wood Lake, so they had to bring their boats with them to the other side of the Isthmus.

Optional Discussion Qs:

- If you were in this situation, what do you think is the best way to transport your boat and goods across the land to the other lake?

Between Okanagan and Wood lake, there is a path that the Syilx people would use to carry their boats. They looked for points where there was the least amount of land between the two lakes; a portage route. The route between Wood Lake and Kalamalka Lake is called the Oyama Isthmus. This route was used for thousands of years to transport cottonwood canoes from the shore of Okanagan Lake to the shore of Wood Lake. The Syilx People called this path the *Axts-luchus*, meaning a narrow crossing with thickly entwined willows. They made this path by cutting down willow, saplings, and other parts of trees so they could transport boats easier.

After European contact, this site was renamed 'The Railroad' by the European settlers, a translation of *Axts-luchus* and referring to the willow 'rails' found there. In 1908, the settlers decided to dig out part of the Isthmus to create a Canal between the two lakes. This allowed for transport by boat to be much easier between the two as they now didn't have to bring their boats over the land. The canal also allowed for produce and lumber to be shipped between the top of Kalamalka Lake to the bottom of Wood lake much quicker. After the Canal was built, the lake levels dropped by about 4 feet exposing a natural shelf along the lake. A bridge was built over the canal to allow settlers to continue to transport goods within Oyama.

Optional Discussion Qs:

- How does development affect the environment of the Isthmus?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What do you think were some of the benefits of making the canal between the two lakes? What were some of the consequences? ● Should there be a concept of “acceptable consequences” when it comes to land development? If so, what is acceptable? If not, how do we balance needs of a community with respect to the environment?
<p>Further Inquiry</p>	<p><u><i>Suggested Field Trips:</i></u></p> <p><u>Kaloya Regional Park in Lake Country</u> - 16061 Trask Rd.</p> <p>The Oyama Canal and Kaloya Regional Park are both at the Ithmus. Both have historical significance to the Lake Country area and are excellent locations to take the students for outings and exploration. Nearby is the rail trail and Oyama traditional school.</p> <p><u>The Okanagan Rail Trail</u>. The rail trail has sections along the Oyama side which were originally part of the railroad mentioned in this lesson. It is a great area to take the students on a walk and has heritage markers along certain locations of the trail that tell more of Lake Country’s history.</p> <p><u>The Oyama Community Hall</u> The community hall in Oyama has been there for the community since 1914. Close to the Isthmus and to Kaloya regional park, it is an excellent spot to visit and to see the heritage marker the Lake Country Museum and Archives has created that tells more history of the Oyama area.</p> <p><u>The Lake Country Museum and Archives</u></p> <p>The Museum has a wide range of exhibits and activities for your class to take advantage of. There is also a playground and field behind the building and the lake nearby that students can make use of for various activities.</p> <p>There may be the opportunity for a guest lecturer to visit your classroom or be present at the museum with the knowledge of more local history stories. If interested, please contact the Museum ahead of time.</p>



The Tale of Two Lakes

You and your friends are trying to transport fruit from your orchard in Vernon down to a grocery store in Lake country, but you only have a small Canoe to travel in. Before you go you have to let the grocery store know when you plan on arriving so they can be ready for a delivery.



Using the points on the map to measure how long Kalamalka lake and Wood Lake are in centimeters.

Kalamalka Lake is _____ cm long

Wood Lake is _____ cm long

The total distance you would have to travel on the map is
_____ cm

You know that 2 centimeters equal around 1 hour of travel by canoe.
How many hours would you estimate it would take to travel the total distance you measured?