

# SYILX TOOLS & TECHNOLOGY

## ELEMENTARY SOCIAL STUDIES



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

### ACTIVITY OVERVIEW:

1. Students will learn a brief history of Lake Country prior to European contact with emphasis on the traditional dwellings of the Syilx Okanagan People - Kekulis.
2. Using the included worksheets, students will embark on their own research to learn about another tool/technology traditionally used by the Syilx Okanagan People, or your local Indigenous peoples.



**BIG IDEA:** Canada is made up of many diverse regions & communities; learning about indigenous peoples nurtures multicultural awareness & respect for diversity

### COMPETENCY:

Inquiry processes, significance, historical perspectives.

### CONTENT:

Diverse cultures, backgrounds, & perspectives within the local communities; cultural characteristics & ways of life of local First Peoples; interconnections of cultural & technological innovations of local indigenous peoples

### WHAT WILL WE KNOW:

- Life in the Lake Country area prior to arrival of European settlers
- Researching skills

### FURTHER INQUIRY

#### *Field Trip Suggestions*

- Sncewips Heritage Museum
- 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**

**11255 Okanagan Center Road West**

**Lake Country, BC V4V 2J7**

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## Syilx Tools and Technology

<b>Learning Objective(s)</b>	Students will learn about Lake Country and the Syilx Okanagan People prior to the arrival of European settlers. They will learn about their traditional housing, Kekulis or Pit Houses, before conducting independent research on a Syilx tool of choice.
<b>Suggested Grades</b>	Elementary
<b>ACTIVITY</b>	
<b>Materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research sheet (attached to this document)</li> <li>• Resources (books, internet) that describe tools developed by the Syilx Okanagan People (or your local Indigenous people). We recommend consulting your school librarian for resources beforehand.</li> </ul>
<b>Research</b>	<p>Once the Kekuli lesson is completed, hand out the research sheet to students and go over the questions. Students may work independently or in groups.</p> <p>Bring students to the library, or wherever the resources you are using are located, and give them time to research and fill out their sheet.</p> <p>Once the research is complete, have each student/group share their findings with the class. This can be done informally (reading from the sheet) or you can give them additional time to complete a small slideshow to share their research.</p>
<b>Debrief</b>	<p>After the presentations are completed, ask the students to consider each of the tools (including the Kekuli) when answering the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How has the Syilx Okanagan Peoples way of life changed following the arrival of Europeans?</li> <li>• Looking at how the First Nations Peoples of the Okanagan lived, what can we infer about their resourcefulness?</li> <li>• What is the difference between the houses the First Nations Peoples built and the ones we build now? Which use more resources? How do they effect the environment in which they are built upon?</li> </ul>

## Historical Context

Before the coming of European Settlers, Winfield was a dense forest with occasional oases of small natural meadows, while the present orchard benchlands were covered with pine trees. Large herds of deer roamed the ranges, and bunch grass was plentiful everywhere, growing so tall and lush that anyone passing through left a trail of bent grass.

The lakes and creeks were abundantly stocked with fish, and there was a prolific supply of all kinds of wild fruits, herbs and roots. The conditions were ideal for the earliest inhabitants — the First Nations People of the Syilx Nation.

The Syilx Okanagan People were a nomadic people, following the seasonal berry and harvest, fish and game. As dwellings they used a lean-to made from saplings, chiefly evergreens or a mound-like dwelling covered with pile matting. These are called a Kekuli or Pit House. Contrary to general belief, the tepee was not used by the Okanagan First Nations Peoples. Usually, the Syilx nation situated themselves on or near the banks of a creek or adjacent to a lake.

In making these winter homes they excavated a circle from three to five feet deep, over which a framework of pole was erected. Their winter habitations were made from logs to support the structure, grass or pine needles to keep warm, and cedar bark for the siding. The sole entrance was from the centre of the roof, which served also as a smoke exit. A single pole, notched in the manner of steps, served as a ladder.

Kekuli were not only used by the Syilx nation, but many nations across BC including the interior Salish and the Secwépemc nation. Each having some differences such as being rectangular instead of circular or having multiple entrances. The corresponding slideshow includes photos of what a Kekuli looks like.

[Further Reading](#)

**Further Inquiry***Field Trip Suggestions:*

Visit the [Sncewips Heritage Museum in Westbank](#) to learn more about the living history and heritage of the Syilx Okanagan People. Set up a tour through the museum's website.

[The Lake Country Museum and Archives](#)

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.

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.

For further exploration and education, we recommend that you contact the [Okanagan Indian Band Education Services Department](#).

UBC Okanagan's School of Education's [Collection of Syilx Okanagan Educational Resources](#) has lots of information on incorporating Indigenous culture, knowledge, and history into classrooms.

The [Okanagan Heritage Museum](#) in Kelowna has an exhibit that includes a Kekuli: you can visit this website for more information:

## *Indigenous Inquiry Project: Research Sheet*

Choose a Tool or Technology, like the Kekuli that was developed by a local Indigenous group. You may want to use some of your school's resources to help choose one your group really likes, and answer the questions below about it.



1. What did you choose? Describe it and its original purpose.
2. How has this tool or technology changed over time? (Is it made of something different now? Is it prepared in a different way? Does it have a new use?)
3. How is this tool or technology used today? (Where or when do you think it's used? Who uses it and Why is it used?)
4. Which books or resources did you use to find this information? (Title and Author)