Wampum: Money vs. Communication

Wampum was used as decoration and communication for the Native Americans until the early European colonists came to America

Author: Joanne Munson
Grade Level: 4-5
Duration: 2 class periods

Overview

Wampum, a string of beads, is sometimes considered the money of the Indians. Wampum was also used as a form of communication between Indian tribes. When the European colonists arrived in America, wampum was used as a medium of exchange, since there was no metal for coins. Eventually wampum was mass-produced by the Dutch and became less valuable. It ceased to be legal tender in 1792 with the introduction of U.S. coinage laws.

Purpose

Students will read background information about wampum, which describes the material, size, and uses of wampum for the Indians and the colonists. Students will explore the history of wampum and calculate lengths of strings of beads in metric and the customary units.

Materials

• Wampum Background Information Sheet.
Wampum: Money vs. Communication

- Transparency or wall map of the United States
- Wampum pictures
- Paper, pencil
- Math Assessments (meters and customary units)
- Geography Assessment
- Answer keys
- Grading Rubric for Mathematics Questions

Objectives
The student will be able to:

1. Identify the uses for wampum and give historical facts.

2. Calculate the length of a string of beads and change the length to other units of measure within the metric or customary systems of measurement.

3. Find the value of a string of beads.

4. Continue the pattern of beads and use that pattern to determine the number of a color of bead in a specific length.

Procedures
Prerequisite skill: Students should have experience changing units within the metric system (e.g., millimeters to centimeters) and changing units within the customary system (e.g., feet to yards).

SESSION ONE
1. Distribute and read the Wampum Background Information Sheet.
2. Discuss the uses and history of wampum for Indians and European colonists.
3. Locate on the U.S. map where the shells were found to make wampum.
4. Locate where wampum was used on the U.S. map.
5. Students complete the math assessment using one unit (meter or feet).

SESSION TWO
1. Students complete the assessment using the other unit of measure and the geography questions.

Assessment
Mastery will be 5 out of 6 correct answers on the geography assessment. The calculations of lengths of strings, number of beads required in making a string, and pattern problems will be assessed using the grading rubric (4 points possible for each problem). Competency is 29 points out of 36 possible points for each system of measurement.

Extensions
Students could make their own strings of beads using small glass beads. They could determine the value of the strings of beads.


Sources
- www.thebeadsite.com
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- www.newton.dep.anl.gov/natbltn/700-799/nb725.htm
- www.slider.com/enc/55000/wampum.htm
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