



# Lesson 1 - Wisconsin's Early Forests and Its Inhabitants



## In a Nutshell

Students will learn about Wisconsin's forests before European settlement. They will act out the concept of forest succession, learn about, illustrate, and present ways in which Native Americans of Wisconsin used forest resources, and discover the beginnings of forest management in Wisconsin.

## Concepts

- Forests are a dynamic and ever-changing ecosystem.
- Native American tribes in Wisconsin had many uses of forest resources in their everyday lives.
- Native Americans in Wisconsin actively managed the forest with fire.

## Objectives

After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- Explain forest succession and the difference between primary and secondary succession.
- Describe at least four ways that Wisconsin's Native American tribes used the forest.
- Explain how fire was used by Native Americans to manage the forests of Wisconsin.

## State Standards

ELA	SS
C.4.1	A.4.4
C.4.2	B.4.1
C.4.3	B.4.4
D.4.1	E.4.11

## Total Estimated Time

1 hour 50 minutes

## Materials

Paper  
Crayons, markers, or other drawing materials  
Overhead of Wisconsin vegetation map (Insert 1.1)  
Overhead projector  
Copies of "Manabozho and the Maple Trees" (Insert 1.3) for the class  
Copies of Native American Nature Cards (Insert 1.4)

## Teacher Preparation

Make copies of "Manabozho and the Maple Trees" for all of your students. Make an overhead of the map showing Wisconsin's early vegetation (Insert 1.1). Also, make copies of the Native American Nature Cards so that each group member has a copy of his/her group's card.

## Background Information

Forests are a dynamic ecosystem. Even without human intervention, they are always changing. Succession is the natural process by which ecosystems change. It will happen on new, sterile ground as primary succession (such as after glaciers retreat or a volcano erupts). It also happens after natural disturbances such as windfalls and forest fires. This is known as secondary succession. Through the process of succession, one group of vegetation will establish itself, changing the landscape, and making the area suitable for another group of plants. Each group of plants also creates suitable living space for specific animals. Often as a forest goes through stages of



succession, different animals will be found at each stage.

Wisconsin's pre-European settlement vegetation is clearly divided into two regions (see Insert 1.1). The northeastern region of the state is characterized by cool air masses coming in from Canada. Winters are longer in this region. Boreal forests, conifer-hardwood forests, and pine savannas could be found here. This is where most of the logging in Wisconsin took place in the late-1800's and early 1900's.

The southwest portion of Wisconsin is controlled by warm, dry air from the Pacific and warm, moist air from the Gulf of Mexico. Summers are longer and warmer here. The vegetation types found in this area were prairies, oak savannas, and southern-hardwood forests. The area connecting these two climatic/vegetation regions is called the tension zone.

Glaciers are thought to have retreated from northern Wisconsin between 12,000 and 10,000 years ago. Their departure opened the area up for plants and animals to establish themselves. It is thought that Wisconsin's earliest human inhabitants arrived around 11,000 years ago. The people that lived in Wisconsin from this time until the arrival of Europeans kept no written history that we know of. What we know about them has all come from archaeological evidence.

When Europeans first arrived in Wisconsin, three Native American tribes were present. These were the Winnebago (or Ho Chunk), the Menominee, and the Santee Dakota.

These three tribes are known as the original tribes of Wisconsin. Tribes were moving around a lot in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries as they were pushed out of areas that Europeans were settling in the east. The following tribes have also been recorded in Wisconsin historical records at one time or another:

Potawatomi, Stockbridge-Munsee, Huron, Ioway, Chippewa (or Ojibwa), Petun, Kickapoo, Sauk, Miami, Fox, Illinois, Mascouten, Oneida, Ottawa, and Brothertown.

Each tribe had different customs and uses of the forest. Some forest uses depended on what part of the state the tribe was in. Hunting and gathering was more typical of those tribes in the northeastern regions of the state where it was cooler. Those in the southwestern part of Wisconsin often farmed in addition to hunting and gathering. Native Americans are known to have managed the forest with fire and to have removed trees for the purpose of planting crops. Their knowledge of forest plants was extensive. They depended on the forest for raw materials to make everything from canoes to homes to food.

### **Introduction**

Although your students may not have learned about Wisconsin's forest history before, most of them probably have some ideas as to what the land was like before it was settled by Europeans. These ideas may be based on things they have heard from their parents, friends, books, or movies. Some of these ideas may be accurate, but others could be based on stereotypes.



Tell your students to close their eyes and imagine Wisconsin before Europeans settled there. Imagine Wisconsin before its great white pine forests were logged and before Native American tribes were forced off of the land. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell? Have your students share their ideas with the rest of the class. You might want to have them draw what they imagine they would have seen. Make sure your students know that there are no right or wrong ideas.

### **Activity 1.1 - The Secret of Succession (30 min)**

We are beginning a journey into Wisconsin's forest history. Before we begin, I'd like to ask you a question. What if no trees in Wisconsin had ever been cut down? Would today's forests look the same as they did in the late 1700's before Europeans came? Give your students a chance to think about this. Let them share their ideas with the rest of the class.

The forest is not a static ecosystem. It is always changing, even without the help of people. Since we're learning about forest history, let's start at the very beginning. Assign your students the following roles: glacier, goose-grass, ferns, starflowers, blackberries, pine trees, maple trees, hemlock trees, lightning, meadow mice, sparrows, and deer. There should only be one glacier, but you should assign several students to every other role. As you read the following story, have them act out their part. You might want to come up with actions for each part before you begin reading. Read only Part 1 to the class at this time (see Insert 1.2).

### **READ PART 1.**

Have your students sit down, and explain to them that the process you just read about is called succession. Succession is when one group of plants develops an environment that allows new plants to establish and eventually replace existing plants. After the glaciers retreated, the ground was bare. We call succession occurring after that event primary succession (primary means first). Groups of plants in each stage of succession usually have animals that accompany them because the animals live well under those specific conditions.

After the glaciers retreated, the forest grew and changed through succession. Was this the end of change for the forest? Absolutely not! As we said before, the forest is always changing. It is not static. Can you think of things that might cause more changes? Give your students some time to brainstorm. Have the students that were left standing after Part 1 of the story get back up in front of the class and then continue with Part 2.

### **READ PART 2.**

Have your students sit down again. This time when the forest grew after the fire, was the ground totally barren, or empty, like it was after the glaciers left? No. There was still plant matter all over the ground and trees nearby. This kind of succession that happens after a disturbance such as fire is called secondary succession.

### **Activity 1.2 - Native American Forest Use (45 min)**



1. Have your students take turns reading aloud from the Native American story entitled “Manabozho and the Maple Trees” found in Insert 1.3. When they have finished, have them think about how many ways in this story alone the Native Americans were using or interacting with nature. Brainstorm a list on the board. The following should be included: hunting game, fishing, harvesting maple syrup, making baskets from birch bark, gathering wood, collecting water, heating stones, and hoeing fields.

2. Explain to your students that Native Americans are thought to have entered Wisconsin about 11,000 years ago. It is hard for us to know very much about these early inhabitants. Why? Explain that there are no written records that these people left behind, or no written history. Europeans did not make contact with the Native Americans in Wisconsin until the late 1400’s. This sounds like a long time ago, but it means that people had been living in Wisconsin for over 10,000 years before there were any written historical records! That’s a long time! Most of what we know of Native Americans, and most of what you will be learning about, is from after the early 1600’s when the French came to Wisconsin.

How can we learn about people who leave no written history? Ask your students if they have ever heard of the term “archaeology?” Can any of them tell you what it is? Archaeology is the study of the physical remains of the past. There are people called archaeologists who excavate, or dig up, ancient campsites of people to see how they lived. Take some time to make sure

your students understand the basic concept of archaeology. Have them come up with what kinds of things might be found from an ancient culture.

3. What do I mean when I say the word culture? Culture means the common beliefs, social life, and material goods of a certain race or religious group. I’ve been using the term Native Americans a lot. Do all Native Americans share the same culture? Let your students think about this. No, all Native Americans do not share the same culture. There are many different Native American tribes that were in Wisconsin when Europeans arrived. They lived in different places, had different lifestyles, and often spoke different languages.

Have your students take a look at the map of Wisconsin’s early vegetation (Insert 1.1). What do they notice about it? Give them some time to brainstorm. There are different kinds of plants growing in the north and south. Why do you think this might be the case? Do you think this might affect the kinds of animals that could live there? Do you think it could effect how people could use the land? Definitely!

The culture of the different Native American tribes was somewhat determined by where they lived. The northern portion of Wisconsin is in what is called the Canadian Zone. Most of the trees in this area are conifers, like pine trees, and the temperature is colder. The southern area is called the Carolinian province. It has more deciduous trees (trees that lose their leaves in the winter) and is warmer. The Canadian and Carolinian regions have different types of animals common there. In between



these two areas is what is called the Tension Zone. This is where the Canadian and Carolinian areas overlap. Native American tribes that lived in northern Wisconsin were more likely to depend on hunting and fishing, while those in southern Wisconsin lived in a climate warm enough to do some farming.

Native Americans living in Wisconsin at the time of European contact used natural resources such as trees for almost everything they did. Today, we don't interact with nature as much as people used to. We get our food from the grocery store, and our water comes out of the faucet. Even if our food comes from nature, we're usually not the ones going out into nature to get it. Native American tribes, however, got almost everything they needed from the forests of Wisconsin.

Divide your students into six groups. Explain that each group is going to get a Native American Nature Card (Insert 1.4) that is going to explain one way that a tribe used the forest to live. Each group will read the information provided on the card, and then present the information to the rest of the class by making a poster about what they learned.

Once all of the groups have presented, ask the students if they are surprised by how much the Native Americans used the forest. Based on what they have already learned, can they think of other things that the forest would be used for?

### **Activity 1.3 - Fire As A Management Tool (15 min)**

Not only did Native Americans in Wisconsin use products from the forest, but they also managed the forest for

those products. What do I mean when I use the word manage? Let your students brainstorm some ideas. To manage something means to work on it to try and change it for a certain purpose. That is exactly what Native Americans did with the forest. Native Americans in Wisconsin managed the forest with fire! To do this, they would purposely set fire to parts of the forest.

One reason that fires were set was to drive game out of the forest. This helped Native Americans in their hunting efforts. Another reason to set fires was to bring animals into the forest. When old plants on the forest floor are burned away, fresh green plants are encouraged to grow. This provided lush food for animals. Fire was also used to clear the land for those who farmed, and sometimes to control pests.

To manage an area with fire, a Native American could take a coal from a fire and put it into a big clam shell. The clam shell was put inside a deerskin pouch and carried to the forest. A torch would be made out of birchbark, and once out in the forest it would be touched to the hot coal. This birchbark torch would then be used to set piles of leaves and twigs on fire. Men would keep the ground fire under control. In just a few days new plants would begin to grow in the burned area of the forest.

### **Conclusion**

Remember when you closed your eyes and imagined the forest before Europeans arrived in Wisconsin? Would you imagine it the same way if I asked you to do that again? Who was surprised by all of the Native American's uses of the forest? Who was



surprised that Native Americans managed the forest with fire? There are many parts of Wisconsin's forest history that will surprise you. This was only the beginning!

### Extension Activities

- Read The Land of Gray Wolf by Thomas Locker with your class. It is an excellent book relating how Native Americans used fire. You can also use Exploring the Environment Through Children's Literature: An Integrated Approach by Carol M. and John W. Butzow which has a chapter dedicated to the above-mentioned book.
- Have your students develop their own myth about how something came to be in their own life. Illustrate them and share them with the class. You could even put together a myth book for your classroom.
- Watch Earl's Canoe: A Traditional Ojibway Craft with your class. This video was produced for the Smithsonian Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies
- Get a copy of the Ojibway Coloring Book from the Minnesota Historical Society. Copies can easily be made for your students to use.

### Evaluation

- Evaluate students on their presentation of the Nature Card information.
- Have your students write definitions to the following words: primary succession, secondary succession,

archaeology, culture, management, and wigwam.

- Conduct a class discussion about how Native Americans used the forest as a resource and evaluate students on their participation.
- Have your students create and illustrate lists of how Wisconsin's early Native Americans used the forest.

### Resources

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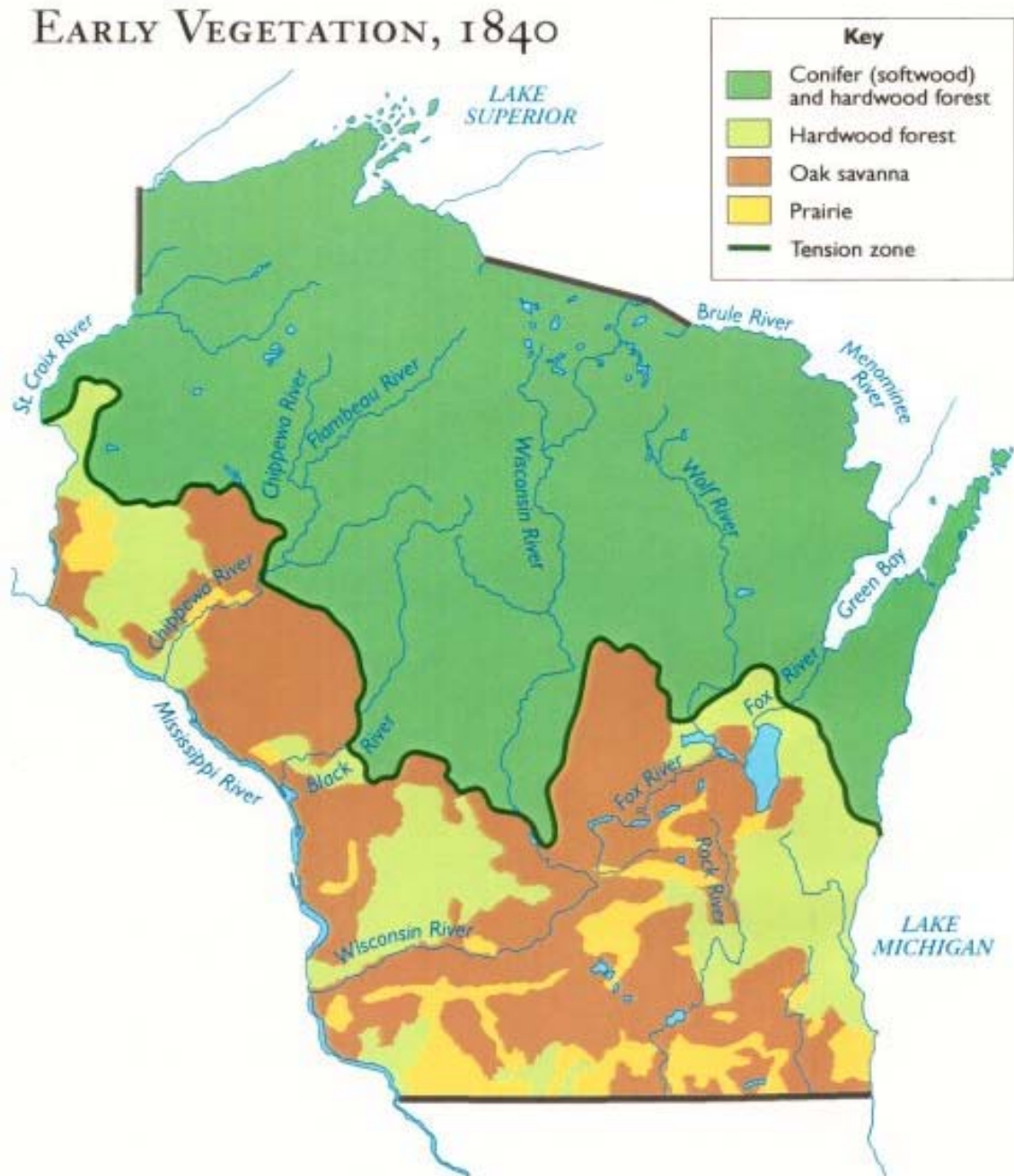
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Insert 1.1



Wisconsin Cartographer's Guild and Malone, Bobbi. Mapping Wisconsin History - Teachers Guide and Student Materials. Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin; 2000.





## Insert 1.2

### Part 1

Many thousands of years ago, most of Wisconsin was covered in a big sheet of ice called a glacier. Only the southwestern portion of the state was not under ice, but it was still much colder than it is today. Scientists think it was about 12,000 years ago that the glaciers over Wisconsin finally started to melt. As they melted, they retreated to the north.

Eventually, plants such as goose-grass and starflower began moving in from the south. These plants grow well in open sunlight, and they were soon covering the ground. Ask your students what kinds of animals might like to live in an area covered with grasses and flowers. Animals such as meadow mice, snakes, woodchucks, and other animals that lived in open fields moved into the area. Pretty soon larger plants were growing up as well. Blackberry shrubs and ferns grew up over the field plants.

After many years, a single tree seedling sprouted out of the grasses. Its seed must have blown in the wind from a southern forest. It was a white pine tree, and white pine trees grow very well in the bright sunlight. Pretty soon there were white pine trees everywhere. Brush-dwelling birds such as warblers began moving into the area. What was once a meadow was slowly changing into a pine forest. As the pines got taller, they blocked the weeds, grasses, and wildflowers from the sun, and these plants died. The field-loving animals such as the meadow mice and snakes could no longer live in the area. The forest was so thick with pine trees that even pine seedlings could not grow. There was not enough sun for them.

With all of the shade from the pine trees, shade-loving tree seedlings like hemlock and maple began to grow. When a pine would fall down from wind, a space would be created that let the sun shine through to the shorter hemlock and maple. This sunshine allowed the trees to grow taller. Deer moved into the area. They now had places to hide and food to eat. Chipmunks and squirrels moved in, too.

### Part 2

The pine trees towered over the rest of the forest. They shaded out many other trees from sunlight. One day, there was a great storm in the forest. A bolt of lightning struck one of the very tall pine trees and it caught on fire. It had been a very dry summer, and a section of the forest quickly burned. Many burned trees lay on the ground, and many more burned tree trunks were left standing.

Just three years later, the forest floor was already covered with new grasses and wildflowers. The goose-grass and starflowers were again able to grow there because there were no longer big trees shading the ground from the sun. What do you think happened next? Succession! Ferns and blackberry bushes came in and then pine trees and pretty soon hemlock and maple.





Disturbance like fire, wind, insects, disease, and death from old age provide growing conditions for different plants. The death of one tree opens the canopy and allows sun-loving trees an opportunity to grow. All of these changes are natural and they result in succession. A natural forest is always changing!



### Insert 1.3

## Manabozho and the Maple Trees (Anishinabe – Great Lakes Region)

Taken from *Keepers of the Earth: Native American Stories and Environmental Activities for Children* by Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac

A long time ago, when the world was new, Gitchee Manitou made things so that life was very easy for the people. There was plenty of game and the weather was always good and the maples were filled with thick sweet syrup. Whenever anyone wanted to get maple syrup from the trees, all they had to do was break off a twig and collect it as it dripped out.

One day, Manabozho went walking around. “I think I’ll go see how my friends the Anishinabe are doing,” he said. So he went to a village of Indian people. But there was no one around. So Manabozho looked for the people. They were not fishing in the streams or the lakes. They were not working in the fields hoeing their crops. They were not gathering berries. Finally he found them. They were in the grove of maple trees near the village. They were all just lying on their backs with their mouths open, letting the maple syrup drip into their mouths.

“This will not do,” Manabozho said. “My people are all going to be fat and lazy if they keep on living this way.”

So Manabozho went down to the river. He took with him a big basket he had made of birch bark. With this basket he brought back many buckets of water. He went to the top of the maple trees and poured the water in so that it thinned out the syrup. Now thick maple syrup no longer dripped out of the broken twigs. Now what came out was thin and watery and just barely sweet to the taste.

“This is how it will be from now on,” Manabozho said. “No longer will syrup drip from the maple trees. Now there will only be this watery sap. When people want to make maple syrup they will have to gather many buckets full of the sap in a birch bark basket like mine. They will have to gather wood and make fires so they can heat stones to drop into the baskets. They will have to boil the water with the heated stones for a long time to make even a little maple syrup. Then my people will no longer grow fat and lazy. Then they will appreciate this maple syrup Gitchee Manitou made available to them. Not only that, this sap will drip only from the trees at a certain time of the year. Then it will not keep people from hunting and fishing and gathering and hoeing in the fields. This is how it is going to be,” Manabozho said.

And that is how it is to this day.





## **Insert 1.4**

### **Native American Nature Card #1**

#### **Birchbark Canoes**

Water was the chief means of travel for most Native Americans living in Wisconsin, so the birchbark canoe was a very important item. The Ojibway, or Chippewa, are known for their canoes. Men and women worked together to build these canoes. Men did most of the woodworking and women did the sewing and “pitching” (gluing). The first step was to choose the right birch tree from which to get the bark. The tree had to be big and the bark had to be in good shape. Just finding the right tree could sometimes take hours. While the men found the right tree, the women collected roots for sewing the bark together and gum from trees for pitch (used like glue).

Once the proper tree was found, the bark could be removed all in one piece in the springtime when the sap was flowing and the temperature was just right. A level bed of sand was then prepared on which to build the canoe. The bark was laid out and a canoe form (like a mold) or an old canoe was put on top of it. The bark would then be wrapped around the mold and staked down. Gunwales (the top edge of the boat) were made out of cedar.

Next came the cedar ribs of the boat, which gave the boat its rounded shape. These pieces of cedar were very hard to bend. Boiling water had to be poured over them to make them bendable. Many of them would be broken during the making of a canoe. The bent ribs would be left in the canoe to dry, and then removed so that cedar planks could be put in the bottom of the boat. The ribs were then put back in to hold down the planking.

The canoe was then turned over so that the women could do the pitching. Pitch was made from spruce tree gum and deer tallow (part of deer fat), and was used like glue to hold together the places where the bark may have ripped or where sewing had to be done. This made the canoe watertight, meaning it would not leak.

These birchbark canoes were very light, but they were able to carry a lot. Some of them were estimated to be able to carry 2000 pounds. That’s like putting about 13 adults in a canoe! There are Ojibwe tribe members who still make traditional birchbark canoes today.



Image courtesy of Joseph E. Velazquez, original artist





## Native American Nature Card #2

### Wigwam

Many Native Americans in Wisconsin lived in wigwams during the late fall and winter months. The frame of a wigwam was made with saplings, or young trees. The ends of the saplings were sharpened and then stuck into the ground in the shape of a circle. The other end of the saplings were bent to form a dome shape and tied together in the middle with strips of basswood bark. The dome was usually 12 or 15 feet across.

The frame was then covered with cattail leaf mats or sewn rolls of birchbark or elm bark. These mats were also tied on with strips of basswood bark. One woman could put together a wigwam by herself fairly quickly.

Inside of the wigwam there would be a fireplace in the center with a hole at the top of the wigwam to let smoke out. Still, the inside of the wigwam would be very smoky. Given the choice of fresh air or warm air, warmth won out. Inside the wigwam, people would sit on beds of evergreens that were then covered with animal skins or mats.

Wigwams were easy to build, which was good since tribes had to move around a lot, while hunting. The saplings for the frame could be found almost everywhere. The mats and the bark coverings could be rolled up and carried along!



From the pamphlet *Kenosha Past To Present* produced by Bernadette S. Tacki, Alvina M. Lijegren, and Patti Landa for the Kenosha Unified School District



## Native American Nature Card #3

### Cradleboards

Native American women often kept their babies on cradleboards. These cradleboards were made out of wood with a footrest at one end and a hoop at the other. The hoop could support a covering for the baby and provide protection if the baby was to fall forward. Often times, small dangling objects were hung from the wood to amuse the baby.

Babies could be laced onto cradleboards, and in the winter warm wraps made of deer skin could be put around them. The cradleboard was very handy for mothers. They could strap the cradleboard on their back and go about their daily chores. In crowded homes, the baby could be out of the way and still see what was going on. Cradleboards were even hung in trees, to keep the child away from boiling water or knives that the women were working with.



Kansas State Historical Society



## Native American Nature Card #4

### Birchbark Containers and Baskets

Birchbark containers were very important in Native American life in Wisconsin. Women used the baskets for picking berries, sorting things, storing things, and cooking. The bark had to first be heated so that it was bendable and then it was cut out in whatever shape the woman wanted to make. The bark could be folded and then stitched together. Some had lids and others were even watertight, meaning they would not leak.

These birchbark containers were often decorated. Bark would be peeled off in flower shapes. They were also sometimes decorated with the dyed quills of a porcupine. Different colors were obtained from natural plant dyes. Baskets made in Wisconsin were often sewn together with sweetgrass so that the baskets smelled good.



Ontario Native Women's Association.  
Thunder Bay, Ontario

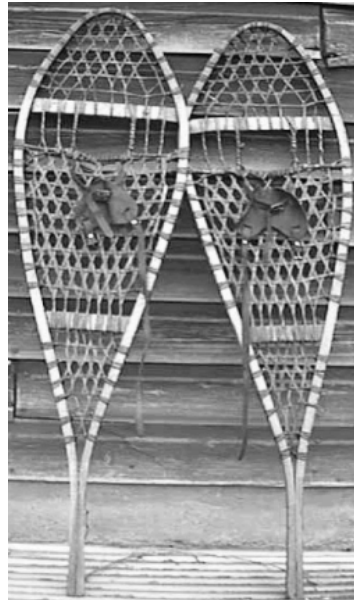


## Native American Nature Card #5

### Snowshoes

You have probably used snowshoes, or at least seen them. Native Americans in Wisconsin made their own snowshoes to make winter travel easier. They were made from wood strips that had to be heated and bent into the shape of a snowshoe. Wooden crossbars were added to help support the frame of the snowshoe, and sinew (animal tendons) was woven to fill in the spaces.

There were all sizes and shapes of snowshoes, depending on where they were being used and what for. More than just a person's weight had to be supported by the snowshoes. In winter, Native Americans might be traveling with meat from a hunt. They might also be carrying items to trade. In the winter, entire camps were often moved, and so people would be carrying all of their possessions. This was no easy task, but snowshoes made it possible.



Courtesy of [antiqueskis.com](http://antiqueskis.com)



## Native American Nature Card #6

### Bows

Bows were common weapons and hunting tools for Wisconsin's Native Americans. Most of them were made out of a single piece of wood that was rubbed and polished to be made smooth. Bows could be over four feet long! Each one, however, was custom made for who would be using it and what would be hunted.

Bows were effective weapons of war. They were also helpful in providing meat for food. It is important to remember, though, that besides wood, forest animals were often used to make needed materials. Bows provided tribes with animals, and therefore provided them with skins and fur for clothes, bones and antlers for tools, and sinews to use as thread.



Pranik Saiyasith – Iowa Archaeology  
Month, 2000 Poster Contest