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The following lessons were created by **Jamie Sadogierski**, a teacher participating in the National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute for Teachers entitled Touch the Past: Archaeology of the Upper Mississippi River Region.

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An Analysis of an Article

(“The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492” by William M. Denevan)

Grade Level: 11-12

Subject: Environmental Science (also incorporates Social Studies/History and English/Language Arts)

Objectives: After lesson, students will be able to:

- *Explain ways Native Americans used the natural resources available to them.
- *Summarize how those uses influenced the environment they lived in.
- *Use the information read to defend if Native Americans made a lasting impact on the land or not.

Standards Addressed: (*From the Appleton Area School District Environmental Science Curriculum*)

- *Relates historical developments contributing to increased human environmental impacts.
- *Explains the relationship between cultural/society changes and human population growth.
- *Identifies factors influencing population size.
- *Analyzes factors controlling animal population growth and contrasts them with human patterns.
- *Analyzes environmental impacts of various human societies.
- *Investigates the importance of wildlife and strategies for managing sustainability.
- *Analyzes land management issues.

Duration: 2 days (Day 1 = brainstorm and read individually as a homework assignment, Day 2 = Discuss reading in depth in class and do quick write activity)

Materials/Supplies:

1. Article (link for article in attachments)
2. Discussion questions (handout with possible questions in attachment)
3. Quick write questions (worksheet prepared-see attachments)

Vocabulary: pristine, swidden, ephemeral, sustainable, mounds, archaeology

Background: The author of this paper, Dr. Denevan, is a UW-Madison Professor Emeritus. He taught geography. After writing this article, he wrote a follow up paper called: “The ‘Pristine Myth’ Revisited”. The original paper was written in 1992, the follow up came in 2011. There was some controversy with Dr. Denevan’s original paper despite the fact that others had written similarly on this topic. (*Titles of these books/articles/etc. are referenced in the “Revisited” paper. See attachment for reference.*) His original article has been cited many times and has gained a lot of attention (positive and negative). The main purpose of Dr. Denevan’s paper is to help the reader understand that because Native Americans lived on the land, they had to have made some kind of impact to the land. Common perception is often that they left no trace on the landscape. Dr. Denevan teaches us that all people no matter when or where alter the environment (in some manner) in order to survive. Dr. Denevan along with others assert that if we believe that Native Americans make no impact on the land, it is the same as saying they have no culture or aren’t human beings. He uses archaeological evidence to support this claim.

Setting the Stage: This lesson initiates a larger unit on environmental history through time. The brainstorm portion of the procedure is essentially setting the stage for the article analysis and subsequent lessons.

Procedure:

1. Students will respond to a “brainstorm” question with a partner. They will post their response for the class to see using their Chromebooks and the website: padlet.com. The question they will respond to is: “What impact(s) do you think Native Americans had on the environment (if any)?” (*Note: In attachments you can view the sample page I set up for this question on padlet.com.*)

2. All students will view responses via the class projector as students submit responses on my page on padlet.com.

3. Students will receive the article titled “The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492” by William M. Denevan. (*See attachments for link to access the article.*) Their assignment will be to read the article for the next day’s class period. Students should annotate the text as they read. Possible examples would be:

- *Underline new words
- *Make connections to things you already know
- *Use symbols or a highlighter to signal something important
- *Note where you have a question
- *Note where you agree/disagree and why

4. On day 2, teacher will assign one discussion question to small groups of students (2-3) to talk over. (*See a list of possible discussion questions in attachments.*)

5. Students will then present their ideas/response to the question with the whole class. (*All students will be required to contribute to participate in discussion in some way. Teacher can monitor with a class roster.*)
6. After the small group shares their responses, the rest of the class can respond with why they agree or disagree, or with a relevant comment. (*All students will be required to contribute to the whole group discussion in some way. Teacher can keep track of this on a class roster.*)
7. After all questions have been discussed; students will do a quick write at the end of the lesson. (*See worksheet in attachments.*)

Closure/Pulling the Information Together: After a thorough class discussion, this lesson will be pulled together with an individual informal assessment. (*See attachment with quick write question.*) This will allow me to see what students have learned and what areas I may need to reteach the following class period when we learn about the Native Americans that lived in the Fox River Region of WI. (*See project 2 for details.*)

Evaluation:

1. Informal assessment: Participation in initial brainstorm activity using padlet.com.
2. Informal assessment: Each student must participate in class discussion. Minimum of two relevant comments shared during class period that enhance or further the discussion.
3. Informal assessment: Quick write at end of the article discussion.
4. Formal assessment: Exam at end of the environmental history unit.

Links/Extension: This lesson will be linked to my second project in which students will learn (via lecture and discussion) about the Native Americans that lived in the Fox Valley Region of WI. They will learn how those Native American tribes used the natural resources that were available at the time. This topic will enhance a larger unit on environmental history. The environmental history unit is taught in April and thus includes special events related to Earth Day. During the week that Earth Day is celebrated, I organize special guest speakers to come in each hour of each day for 3 days that week. All science students at my school are invited to join my environmental classes in a large group classroom (that fits 90 people). An extension of this specific lesson could include inviting a representative from a local Native nation to speak about their culture and/or inviting a representative from GLIFWC to talk about how they manage natural resources on tribal lands today. Another idea could be to invite an archaeologist from a local university to talk about how ancient people lived on the land.

This lesson can also be linked to social studies/history curriculum. In consideration of this, they could be invited to join the guest speaker presentation idea mentioned in the previous paragraph.

Additionally, this lesson can be linked to English Language Arts. (*Reading, writing, comprehension, and communication skills*) Lesson also incorporates technology skills.

References: “The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492” article by William M. Denevan and “The Pristine Myth Revisited” article also written by William M. Denevan

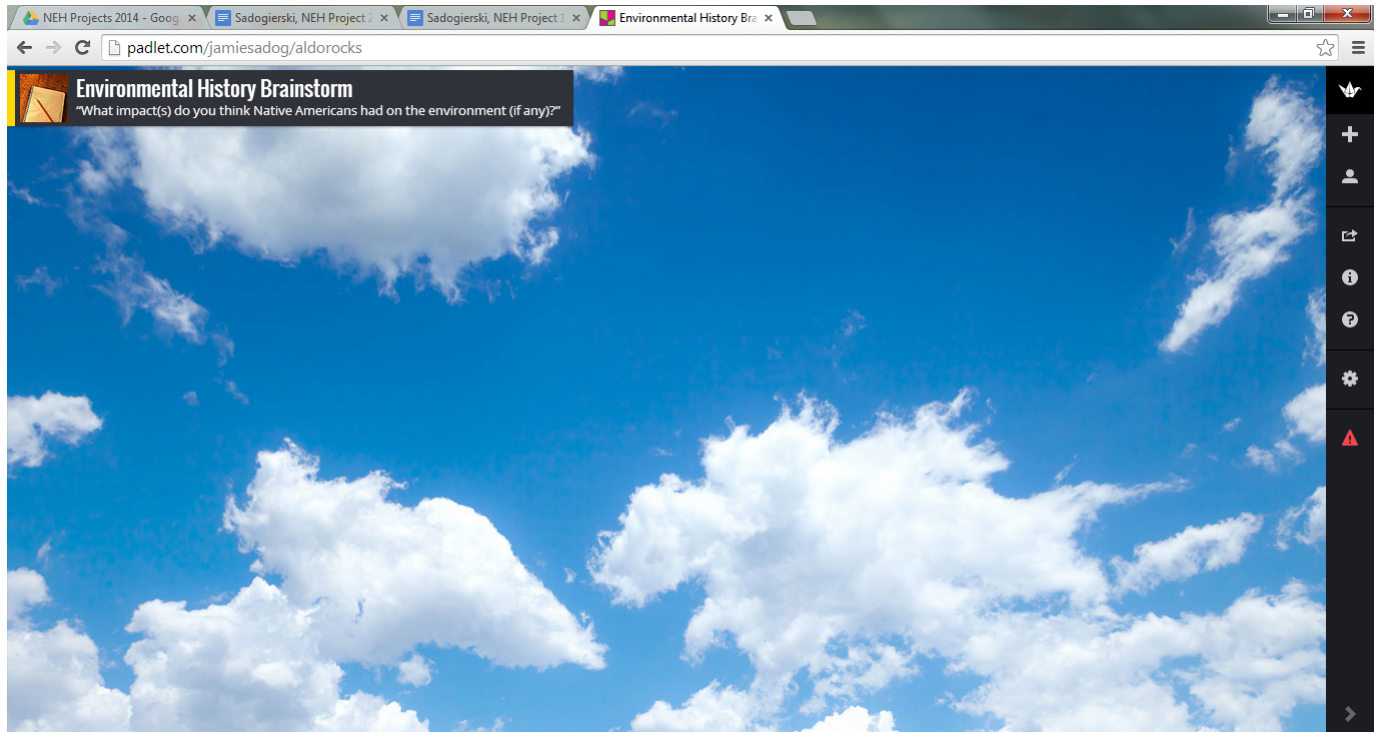
Attachments:

1. Link to Padlet.com (*with initial brainstorm question already created and site ready to use*)
2. Teacher Prepared (Example) Discussion Questions (*ready to be copied and cut*)
3. Quick write student worksheet (*ready to be copied and cut*)
4. Link to the article: “The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492” by William M. Denevan.
5. Link to the article: “The Pristine Myth Revisited” by William M. Denevan (*can be used as a resource for more background information*)

Attachment 1:

Initial brainstorm question is set up at the link below. I also included a screenshot of the page. Students will access the site and post a note on the wall to respond to the question by double clicking on the page.

<http://padlet.com/jamiesadog/aldorocks>



Attachment 2:

Examples of Discussion Questions to Accompany Article:

“The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492”

(Note: Questions are prepared so that teacher can cut out questions and then pass out one question for each small group to prepare for whole class discussion.)

What was the approximate population of Native Americans before Europeans arrived? Is this information important to answering the initial question or not? Explain.

How did Native Americans use fire? What impact did it have? Was it positive or negative or both? Explain.

What are methods used by archaeologists to determine Native Americans’ past activities? Do you think one method is better than another? Explain.

Native Americans practiced agriculture. What evidence do we have to support this statement? What does it mean when the article states that “most fields are ephemeral”?

How did the food Native Americans ate impact the land? Were these impacts positive? Negative? Or both? Explain.

Using Figure 1, describe Wisconsin’s prehistoric landscape. How does it compare with other parts of North and South America? What do you think are some reasons for any similarities and differences?

Attachment 3:

Name _____ Hr _____

Quick Write on "The Pristine Myth"

Let's revisit the initial question....What impact(s) do you think Native Americans had on the environment (if any)?

Now that you have read "The Pristine Myth" and have participated in a class discussion, do you still have the same opinion or not? Was the pristine image of 1492 more likely a myth or reality? Explain using three pieces of evidence from the article and/or class discussion to support your thoughts.

Name _____ Hr _____

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Attachment 4:

The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492

By: William M. Denevan

Can be found online at:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0004-5608%28199209%2982%3A3%3C369%3ATPMTLO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-Y>

Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Vol. 82, No. 3, The Americas before and after 1492: Current Geographical Research (Sep., 1992), pp. 369-385

Attachment 5:

The ‘Pristine Myth’ Revisited

By: William M. Denevan

Can be found online at: [http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1931-](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1931-0846.2011.00118.x/pdf)

[0846.2011.00118.x/pdf](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1931-0846.2011.00118.x/pdf) (Note: Article first published online: 20 DEC 2011)

WILLIAM M. DENEVAN. “THE ‘PRISTINE MYTH’ REVISITED.” *Geographical Review* 2011 : 576–591.