

Utah Environments Through the Eyes of the Paiute



Lesson Summary

- Learn about Utah environments through dance.
- Use a Paiute Beliefs narrative to understand relationship with the environment.
- Learn some Native American signs for animals and landforms.

Lesson Plan and Procedure



This lesson was written in partnership with Dorena Martineau, the Paiute Cultural Resource Director, and Shanandoah Martineau Anderson, a member of the Shivwits band of Paiutes. It was approved by the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah's Tribal Council. Before teaching this lesson, please explain to your students that there are many

Indigenous tribes in the United States and that this lesson specifically focuses on the five bands of the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah and does not represent other Native American groups. It is the hope of the Paiutes that other Native tribes will respect their choice to share these aspects of their culture.

Lesson Key Facts

- **Grade(s):** K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
- **Subject(s):** Dance, Science, Native American, Tribe Approved
- **Duration of lesson:** 45 minutes
- **Author(s):** Rachel Marie Kimball

Behavior Expectations

To create a safe environment for movement:

- Establish a signal for students to respond to when starting/stopping a movement experience (for example, drum, clap, call and response, and so on).
- Identify safe spatial boundaries for students to stay within throughout the lesson.

Behavior I **CAN** Statements for students:

1. I can explore movement without talking.
2. I can stay in my own space and follow my own pathways and ideas.
3. I can listen to and follow instructions.

Introduction

(5 minutes)

Based on the traditional Paiute beliefs provided by the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah (which will be read later on in the lesson), guide students through movement experiences related to land, water, plants and animals of Utah.

Teacher: *The state of Utah is made up of a wide variety of environments, each one serving as a home for different plants and animals. Today, we will be learning about these environments through the eyes of the Paiute. To help us with this lesson, let's learn some important hand signs as used and taught by the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah.*

Teach students the signs for land, water, tree (for plant), and deer (for animal), using the sign language descriptions [PDF](#) in the Equipment and Materials section of the lesson plan and the [supportive video](#). Use these signs and others throughout the lesson.

Exploration/Skill Development

(20-30 minutes)

LAND (12-15 minutes)

Play [Land of the Mesa](#) by Arvel Bird in the background during this section.

Teacher: *Southern Paiutes were created in these traditional lands, and the Creator gave them a special responsibility to protect and manage the land and all that is found upon it. They were traditionally nomadic and traveled through a wide range of terrain. Paiute traditional lands range from high mountains to deep canyons, and from forests to deserts. They call this land the "puahant," meaning "power land" or "holy land." Let's explore movement for the traditional lands of the Paiute!*



Mountain (3 minutes)

Arrange students into groups of 2-4.

Teacher: *The Paiute would traditionally spend the hot summer months in the mountains and canyon areas where the air is cooler and food resources are more easily found. As a group/partnership, take 30-60 seconds to create a connected mountain shape with your bodies using a variety of levels, angles and lines. When I call out "FREEZE!" everyone in your group must silently freeze in the mountain shape you've created.*

Wait approximately 30 seconds for students to create their group mountain shapes.

Teacher: *FREEZE! Wow, look at all of these unique mountain shapes! Staying in your frozen mountain shape, carefully move your head to see the other mountain shapes in the class.*

If time permits, repeat this same mountain activity in the same groups or different groups, challenging students to make even more dynamic mountain shapes.

Canyon (3-7 minutes)

Arrange students in two lines facing each other. (You could do this quickly by having girls in one line and boys in the other.) The two lines should be approximately 5-8 feet apart.

Teacher: *Staying in your assigned line, stand so you are facing the line across from you, and raise your hands high up to the sky. Reach as tall as you can. Notice how we are working together to create tall canyon walls. Let's take turns dancing down the center, between the canyon walls!*

Starting at one end of the canyon walls, allow each student to take a turn dancing down the canyon. This could be a free dance, or you can instruct them to move a certain way. You could also allow students to go down in groups of two or three. If time is short, ask for a few volunteers to demonstrate what it's like to dance down the canyon. Once a student reaches the end of the canyon, they should add on to one of the canyon walls. If students' arms get tired of being raised high, they can put their arms down and simply stand tall.

Forest (3 minutes)

Instruct students to dance to their own spot in the room and to make a small seed-like shape on the floor.

Teacher: *You should now be in a small shape on the floor. As I count to 8, we will slowly grow into our own unique tree shapes. By the time I reach 8, you will need to be frozen. 1... 2... 3... 4... 5... 6... 7... 8... FREEZE! Wow, look at these wonderful tree shapes. I love the variety of shapes. Some of you are balancing, some of you are reaching big, and some of you are twisted. We look like part of a grand forest!*

Repeat this one or two more times, allowing students to explore a variety of tree shapes with their bodies. Continue to compliment the fun shapes you see and side-coach students to try new shapes.

Desert (3 minutes)

Teacher: *In the winter months, the Paiute would traditionally move to the desert areas to avoid the colder environments. Deserts receive very little water, making them very dry and seem like empty spaces. Let's turn our dancing space into a desert by taking turns dancing away to the perimeter of the area. Hold your tree shape (or a cactus shape) until it's your turn to move. When I call your name (or class number), dance your way to the edge of the dance space using big, quick movements as if the floor is hot, desert sand and you don't want to touch it, and then stand tall watching the rest of the class.*

Call student names or class numbers for them to dance to the edges of the space. (A few students can move at a time.) When only a few students remain in the open space, point out how deserted the room looks, and then allow them to dance to the edges of the dance space, leaving a completely deserted space.

WATER (3-5 minutes)

Play *All My Relations* by Arvel Bird in the background during this section.



Optional: Provide each student with a scarf to help stimulate flowy movement in this section of the lesson. When they are not dancing, instruct them to place their scarves in their laps or on the floor so that their hands are free and they are focused on you.

Teacher: *For the Paiute, water is the life source for all. Let's move freely through the room like a drop of water that joins a river, using smooth, flowy movements. Each of us is a unique droplet, and no drop of water is more important than another. Demonstrate how unique your drop of water is as you move on your own pathway.*

Allow students to explore their own water movements on their own pathways for about 30-60 seconds as you side-coach them with ideas to help them move more creatively using levels, different body parts, fast versus slow movement, and so on.

Teacher: *Now that we know how to demonstrate our own drops of water, let's move as if we are part of the same river.*

Arrange the class into a single file line, and have the leader of the line (possibly the teacher, for modeling purposes) guide the class through the room like a curving, flowing river, giving life to the imaginary environment. Encourage students to continue moving like unique drops of water as they follow the leader.

Once you have finished the water movement, instruct students to spread out and to find their own space in the room. If you used scarves, help students find a place to put the scarves away for the rest of the lesson.

PLANTS (5-10 minutes)

Play *High Mountain Air* by Arvel Bird in the background during this section.

Teacher: *Depending on the environment the Paiute lived in, they would rely on different plants for their livelihood, and these plants continue to carry significance in the life of the Paiute today. In this activity we will learn about only a few of these important plants.*

Cactus (1-2 minutes)

Teacher: *A cactus can be a source of water and fruit in the desert. There are many types of cacti in the world. To represent the cactus, let's explore sharp, jagged, prickly shapes, using a variety of body parts. Each time I clap my hands, create a unique, jagged, prickly shape with your body, and then freeze. You will hold the shape for a few seconds before I clap my hands again. Here we go!*



Clap your hands approximately five different times, leaving time between each clap for students to make a cactus shape and freeze. Comment on exciting cactus shapes you see before clapping your hands again.

Willow Bush (2-3 minutes)

Teacher: *Now instead of being sharp and prickly, let's create shapes that are soft and round, like the willow bush. The willow bush is significant in the way it offers branches of dark color varieties for the baskets the Paiute weave. As I count down from 8, shape your body into a round, curved willow bush and then freeze. 8... 7... 6... 5... 4... 3... 2... 1... FREEZE! Wonderful shapes!*

Instruct students to find the same group they made the mountain shapes with earlier, and sit together on the floor.

Teacher: *With your group, work together to create a combined willow tree shape OR a woven basket shape. Your group gets to choose which shape. You have one minute to create it.*

Wait approximately one minute for students to create their willow tree or basket shape. Provide coaching for groups that need help. Comment on exciting group shapes you see.

Sumac (2-5 minutes)

Teacher: *Edible berries come from a wide variety of plants, one being sumac. There are several types of sumac plants, and they can be referred to as big shrubs or small trees. The sumac berries grow in large, beautiful clusters. When I say "Go!" we will all move through the room with round body shapes (like berries), rolling and spinning as we go. When I call out "Sumac!" travel with your round berry shape toward others in the class to make a cluster of sumac berries and freeze. Ready... Go!*

As students travel through the room, encourage them to find unique, round shapes with their bodies using their arms, backs, legs, etc. When you call out "SUMAC!" help direct students to find frozen, combined, round, cluster shapes in groups using a variety of levels. Group sizes may vary. Repeat this a few times. You may consider inviting the class to make one, big cluster of sumac berries in the middle of the room the last time.

Direct students to spread out and sit on the floor to prepare for the next section.

ANIMALS (5-9 minutes)

Play *Warrior's Lament* by Arvel Bird in the background during this section.

Teacher: *There are many animals that are significant to the Paiute for food, tools, sacred rituals, and other ways of life. Let's practice moving through the room in ways connected to animals that are important to the Paiute people in the Grand Canyon area.*

Antelope and Mule Deer (1-2 minutes)

Teacher: *Antelope and mule deer are wonderful blessings and resources for the survival of men and women. The meat can be used for food; the skins can be used for clothing; the bones can be used for tools and sacred rituals. To represent the antelope and mule deer, we will move through the room with arms up high as antlers (you can use the sign for "deer"), and narrow, quick steps.*

Coach students to move quietly through the room in ways that are connected to the antelope and mule deer for 30-60 seconds.

Rabbit and Desert Cottontail (1-2 minutes)

Teacher: *The rabbit and desert cottontail have been used for food, tools, clothing, and rituals. In the wintertime, the fur of the rabbit and desert cottontail help to provide warm clothing and footwear for the Paiute. To represent the rabbit and desert cottontail, we will explore a variety of hopping and jumping movements on a low level. Imagine you are traveling through snow, making your movements especially quiet.*

Coach students to move quietly through the room in ways that are connected to the rabbit and desert cottontail for 30-60 seconds.



Mountain Sheep (2-3 minutes)

Teacher: *Mountain sheep have carried a significant role in the lives of the Paiute. Parts of the mountain sheep can be used for food, clothing, tools, and spiritual ceremonies. The horns of the mountain sheep are particularly important for spiritual purposes. When alive, the mountain sheep use their horns as a form of protection. To represent the mountain sheep, we will work with partners, finding creative and respectful ways to push against each other, like the horns of the mountain sheep. For example, try pressing with hands, shoulders, backs, and other appropriate body parts. See what creative, balanced, pushing shapes you can make with your partner!*

Coach students on ways that they can respectfully and creatively find pushing shapes with their partners. Consider modeling a few options with a student before allowing them to work in partnerships. Invite students to explore at least three different pushing ideas. If time allows, consider having partnerships share with the class the pushing shapes they created.

Eagle (2 minutes)

Teacher: *To this day, the eagle is of great importance. Not only does the eagle carry spiritual significance, but it can also be used for clothing, medicine, tools, musical instruments, and for ceremonial purposes. To represent the eagle, we will move through the room with powerful air moments, jumping, leaping and soaring. Remember to move quietly and respectfully. When I call out "PERCH!" you will stop flying, and find a perched, resting shape like an eagle.*

Coach students on ways to move powerfully through the air, demonstrating the use of levels and creative pathways, until you call out "PERCH!"

Paiute Beliefs

Instruct students to gather and sit, then read the following statement of traditional Paiute beliefs (shared by Dorena Martineau, educational specialist for the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah). Invite students to listen for the relationship between land, water, plants, animals, and people, and any other important lessons.

Traditional Paiute Beliefs: *Southern Paiutes were created in these traditional lands, and the Creator gave us a special responsibility to protect and manage the land and all that is found upon it. Water is only one component of the traditional Southern Paiute landscape, and looking only at water offers an incomplete perspective. When the life giver arranged for the Paiute people to occupy the lands wherein we have been placed and have continued to live since time immemorial, the land, the plants, the animals, as well as the other life forms, including water, were already here. The Creator's instructions were to occupy the land and to care for the resources being provided for the Paiutes. The care was to benefit all living things, as all living things are interrelated and co-exist on the planet. The land has provided much. The plants depend on the soil and water. The animals depend on the plants and fish in the waters and other animals for their sustenance. The people always depend on all living things and remember the teachings that tell us to co-exist, communicate, and respect all life forms throughout all time.*

As life was created, the song and language that the living things spoke to each other were varied and important. One life form led to another, so always there must be respect and acceptance of each other. Water is the life source for all. The value of water to the Paiute people is immeasurable. One does not look upon a body of water or a stream or a container full of water or a single drop of water as being more important than another. All is important and all is sacred.

Create/Perform

(10-15 minutes)

Help students practice going through the movements for land, water, plants and animals without pausing. To save time, pick only a couple landforms to represent, and only a couple plants to represent. Likewise, when representing animals, do not do them all. Instead, instruct students to choose one animal from the lesson.

Perform the class dance to one of the songs from the lesson plan.

Consider getting a recording of the dance so students can watch what they created.

Option: Arrange the class into small groups, and assign each group one of the four parts (water, land, plants, or animals). Give each group the assignment to create a short movement phrase that highlights their assigned feature (beginning shape, specific movement, ending shape). Once students have had enough time to set their group movement, retell the summary of the traditional Paiute beliefs. When each group hears their part mentioned--land, water, plants, animals--have them perform their movement for the rest of the class one time.

Cool Down/Discussion

(5 minutes)

After or during a brief cool down (stretching/breathing), guide students through a discussion about what they experienced and learned during the lesson.

- In what ways are the water, land, plants, and animals connected?
- What role does water play in the environment?
- According to the traditional Paiute beliefs, what is our responsibility to the land, water, plants and animals? (We should protect and manage.)
- What else can we learn from the Paiute tribe and their beliefs from this lesson?
- What was your favorite part of this lesson to dance? Why?
- Which signs can you remember from this lesson?

Assessment

Observe how well students are able to create movement in relation to land, water, plants and animals. Visit each small group during the "Create" section of the lesson to assess group problem solving skills.

Listen to how well students are able to respond to questions throughout the lesson and during the ending discussion. Consider using Think-Pair-Share to listen in on several conversations.

Vocabulary

Art Form

Body Shaping: curved, twisted, linear, bent

Locomotor Motions: walk, jump, fly, leap, soar, hop, roll

Axial Motions: reach, bend, poke, grow, balance, push

Content Area

Environment

Southern Paiute Traditional Lands: mountains, canyons, forests, deserts

Plants: cactus, willow bush, sumac

Animals: antelope, mule deer, rabbit, desert cottontail, mountain sheep, eagle

- Model and describe interactions between the earth's systems.
- Use a variety of stimuli to explore and create movement.

Utah State Board of Education Standards

This lesson can be used to meet [standards](#) in many grades and subject areas. We will highlight one grade's standards to give an example of application.

Grade 5 Science with Engineering Education (SEEd)

- **Standard 5.1.4: Develop a model** to describe interactions between Earth's [systems](#) including the geosphere, biosphere, hydrosphere, and/or atmosphere. Emphasize interactions between only two systems at a time. Examples could include the influence of a rainstorm in a desert, waves on a shoreline, or mountains on clouds. (ESS2.A)
- **Standard 5.3.4: Evaluate design solutions** whose primary [function](#) is to conserve Earth's environments and resources. *Define the problem, identify criteria and constraints, analyze available data on proposed solutions, and determine an optimal solution.* Emphasize how humans can balance everyday needs (agriculture, industry, and energy) while conserving Earth's environments and resources. (ESS3.A, ESS3.C, ETS1.A, ETS1.B, ETS1.C)

Grade 5 Dance

- **Standard 5.D.CR.2:** Use a variety of stimuli and solve multiple movement problems to develop choreographic content.

Equipment and Materials Needed

- Music Selections (the following songs are from the Paiute tribe):
 - Arvel Bird: [All My Relations](#)
 - Arvel Bird: [Warrior's Lament](#)
 - Arvel Bird: [High Mountain Air](#)
 - Arvel Bird: [Land of the Mesa](#)
- Visuals of land, plants and animals of importance to the Paiute tribe
- Narrative of the Paiute beliefs from the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah (embedded in the lesson plan)
- Scarves (optional for water movement)
- Sign Language descriptions [PDF](#) and [supportive video](#)

Additional Resources

This lesson was created thanks to a grant from the [National Endowment for the Arts](#) and the [Utah Division of Arts & Museum](#)

- Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah website: <https://www.utahpaiutes.org>
- Sign Language Video: https://drive.google.com/open?id=1YFdfmimHQhsKJ8POd_N2apORaW60Q4gr
- NPS Resource about Southern Paiute Peoples: <http://npshistory.com/publications/para/so-paiute-cur-guide-6-9.pdf>

Image References

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