



History of Snowshoes

Lesson 1 of 2

Summary

In this lesson, students will learn about the history of snowshoes and explore the different types of traditional snowshoe styles. They will learn what early snowshoes were made of and the type of terrain each style was designed for.

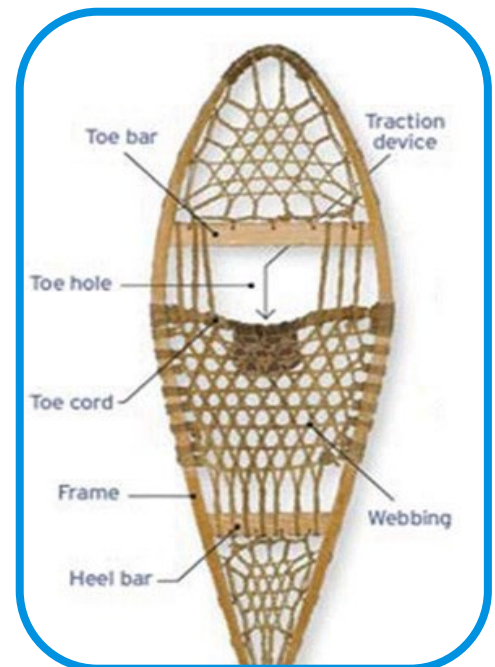
Background

Snowshoes have been apart of history for thousands of years. Snowshoes were used in snowy regions spanning across Central Asia to North America. While the origin of the snowshoe is unknown one of the first designs, before skis were invented, was the shoeski. It was a solid piece of wood with bindings of fur or animal hide. The shoeski was a mix between a snowshoe and a ski.

Snowshoes were used by the first people who crossed over the Bering Land Bridge into North America. From there snowshoes have adapted many different styles for all types of terrain. Each style was used in different regions to benefit the people traveling in that area. For example, if there were a lot of trees or rocks around then long snowshoes would hinder the people using them. Shorter snowshoes would be easier to maneuver through areas with trees.

Snowshoes were essential for hunters and gatherers in the winter.

Snowshoes were made from a wooden frame, usually willow or birch, with a web of animal hide stretched across the surface. The wide design was modeled after animal tracks like the snowshoe hare and the lynx, whose feet were designed to travel through snow with ease, distributing their weight across their whole foot and keeping them on top of the snow. Whereas a human's foot is narrow and doesn't distribute the weight as evenly, snowshoes mimic that trait.



Labeled traditional snowshoe from Patch

Grade Level:

5th

Time:

30 minutes

Season:

winter

Objectives:

Students will be able to...

- Identify different types of traditional snowshoes
- Understand advantages and disadvantages of each snowshoe type

Key Concepts:

- Traditional Snowshoes
- Climate
- Surface area

Materials:

- Journal
- Pencil
- Example photos of snowshoes
- A pair of traditional snowshoes

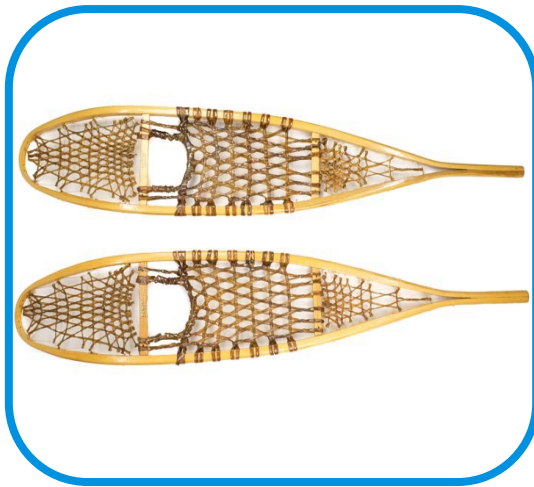


Background (continued)

Traditional Styles of Snowshoes:

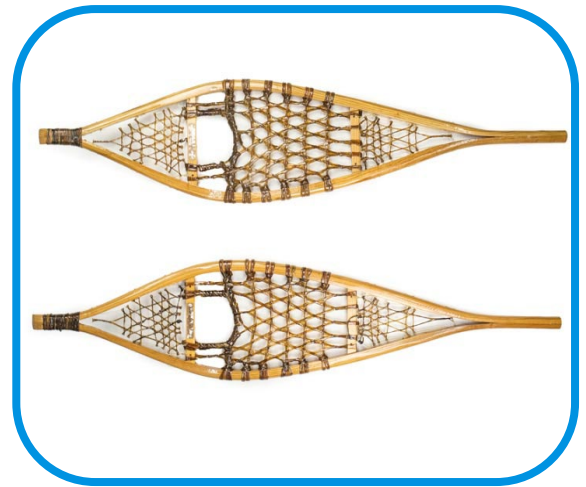
Alaskan or Pickerel:

- Toe is turned up
- Long tail – helps you travel straight
- Good for flat, open areas
- Round toe helps carry more weight
- Good in deep snow



Ojibwe:

- Pointed on both ends – prevents snow from piling up on top
- Good for flat, open areas
- Cut through drifts well
- Constructed of 2 pieces of wood rather than one



Bearpaw:

- Good in forested areas
- Difficult to move fast
- Good in fluffy snow
- Easy to turn because they have no tail
- Wider – easier to stay on top of soft snow



Michigan or Algonquin:

- Shaped like a tennis racket
- Wide so work well in fluffy snow
- Used in Great Lakes area – where terrain is varied
- Easier to turn





Background (continued)

Snowshoes have evolved from what they used to be and what their uses were. Today, most are made from aluminum and are lightweight. Their most common use now is for recreation.



Procedure

1. Ask the students if anyone has been snowshoeing before? Have they seen or used traditional snowshoes?
2. Introduce the students to the history of snowshoes.
3. In their journals, have students draw the four different traditional snowshoes styles and list what each style was used for and the benefits as you introduce and explain each style.

Vocabulary

- **Climate** – pattern of weather for an area.
- **Surface area** – total area that a surface covers.
- **Distribute** – spread or scatter something over an area.

North Dakota Social Studies Curriculum Standards

This lesson helps support the following state standards:

5.5.1 Explain the impact of climate, geography, and available resources on the daily lives of Native Americans.

Resources

- <https://www.snowshoemag.com/snowshoe-history/>
- https://intersectingart.umn.edu/?document/view_document/27
- https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5109544.pdf
- <https://www.penn.museum/sites/journal/184/>