

The Story of the Seminole Pumpkin

For Grades 6-8: Please feel free to modify these lessons as needed to fit the needs of your students.

What do you think it means for food to be “resilient”? Why does cultural knowledge matter in agriculture today?

A Legacy Grown in the Trees

In the subtropical wetlands and hammocks of Florida, the Seminole people developed ingenious ways to grow and preserve food in harmony with the land. Among their most valued crops was a resilient, sweet-tasting squash known today as the **Seminole pumpkin**.

Unlike the large orange pumpkins, we associate with fall decorations, Seminole pumpkins are diverse in shape sometimes round, pear-shaped, or slightly ribbed—and their skin can be tan, orange, green, or striped. Their flesh is dense and sweet, similar to butternut squash, and highly nutritious.

What made these pumpkins especially important was not just their taste, but their adaptability. They thrive in hot, humid climates, resist pests and disease, and require very little maintenance once established. Seminole farmers often planted the seeds near trees or along the edges of forested areas, where the vines would climb up into the canopy. The pumpkins would then hang from the branches, protected from rot, animals, and flooding—an early example of vertical gardening.

More Than a Crop: A Survival Strategy

Seminole communities planted these pumpkins in hidden garden plots known as **hammocks** slightly elevated, forested areas above the swamps. These secret gardens were used during times of conflict or when they needed to move frequently, especially during the periods of forced removal and war in the 1800s. Because Seminole pumpkins could store for months sometimes even a year they were essential for food security during difficult times.

In addition to the pumpkin flesh, the Seminole people used the flowers and young green squash in cooking. Slices of the pumpkin were often dried to preserve food for later use. The plant wasn't just part of a meal; it was part of a system of survival, sustainability, and cultural resilience.

Why It Still Matters

Today, the Seminole pumpkin continues to be grown by gardeners, farmers, and native communities who recognize its cultural and agricultural value. It is a symbol of resilience, adaptability, and the knowledge embedded in traditional tribal agriculture. As interest grows in sustainable farming and food sovereignty, the Seminole pumpkin offers lessons in both survival and stewardship.

Lesson Activity: *The Seminole Pumpkin!*

Grade Level's: 6-8th

Vocabulary:

- Pumpkin
- Seed
- Sprout
- Vine
- Flower
- Seminole
- Wichita

Engage

- Give students 3 minutes to make a list of everything they know about pumpkins.
- Then, ask them if they knew that pumpkins were utilized by tribes for more than just food.
 - o Read/Review: The Seminole Pumpkin narrative shared via the educational guide.
 - o Watch: [How to make an American Indian Pumpkin Mat](#)
- Then, ask students to recall what each tribe mentioned uses pumpkins for.

Explore and Explain

- Activity 1:
 - o Learn about the Seminole Pumpkins from the story provided in the Educators Lesson Plan.
 - Have students draw their own Seminole pumpkin [pottery](#). Use the following attachment to create your own piece of special pottery! Using primarily greens, tans, and oranges, build a piece of pottery that is unique to your thoughts on pumpkins.
- Activity 2:
 - o Use the attached vocabulary sheet to help students learn important words about growing pumpkins. As they work through the activity, support them in exploring these words in English and in Indigenous languages either their own or a friend's.
- Activity 3:
 - o Creating a paper pumpkin mat:
 - Using the lesson information given, work with students to weave a pumpkin mat using classroom supplies.

Elaborate

- View the [Pumpkin: How Does it Grow?](#) video to learn more about how pumpkins are grown and harvested.
- Show the [America's Heartland: Uses for Pumpkins](#) 2-minute video clip.
- Show the video clip [Libby's 100% Pure Pumpkin From Farm to Can](#). This video shows the pumpkin in a farmer's field, planting, harvest, and processing.

Evaluate

- After conducting these activities, have students complete an exit slip to recap what they learned about pumpkins.

Suggested Lesson Activities:

- Native Vocabulary
- Seminole Pumpkin Pottery
- Paper Pumpkin Mats
- Exit Slips

Additional Educator Resources:

- [The Incredible Seminole Pumpkin](#)
- [What are Seminole pumpkins?](#)
- [Attack of the Seminole Pumpkins](#)
- [Seminole Pumpkin: by Cameron Lee - Seed St. Louis](#)
- [Oh my Gourd! Seminole Pumpkins and Other Uniquely Cultivated Seminole Foods - Florida Seminole Tourism](#)

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Native Languages Vocabulary Sheet (6-8)

Directions:

- In Column 1, rewrite the word in English.
- In Column 2, rewrite the word in your own native language (if available). If it's not available, you may use the native language of a neighbor, friend, or community member.
- In Column 3, choose a word in another native language of your choice this could be the language of a friend, classmate, or one you are interested in learning.

Vocabulary Word	English Rewrite	Navajo	Cherokee
		Language Rewrite	Language Rewrite
Pumpkin	Pumpkin	Naayíí tsoh	I-ya
Sprout			
Vine			
Flower			
Seminole			
Wichita			

Native Languages Vocabulary Sheet (6-8)

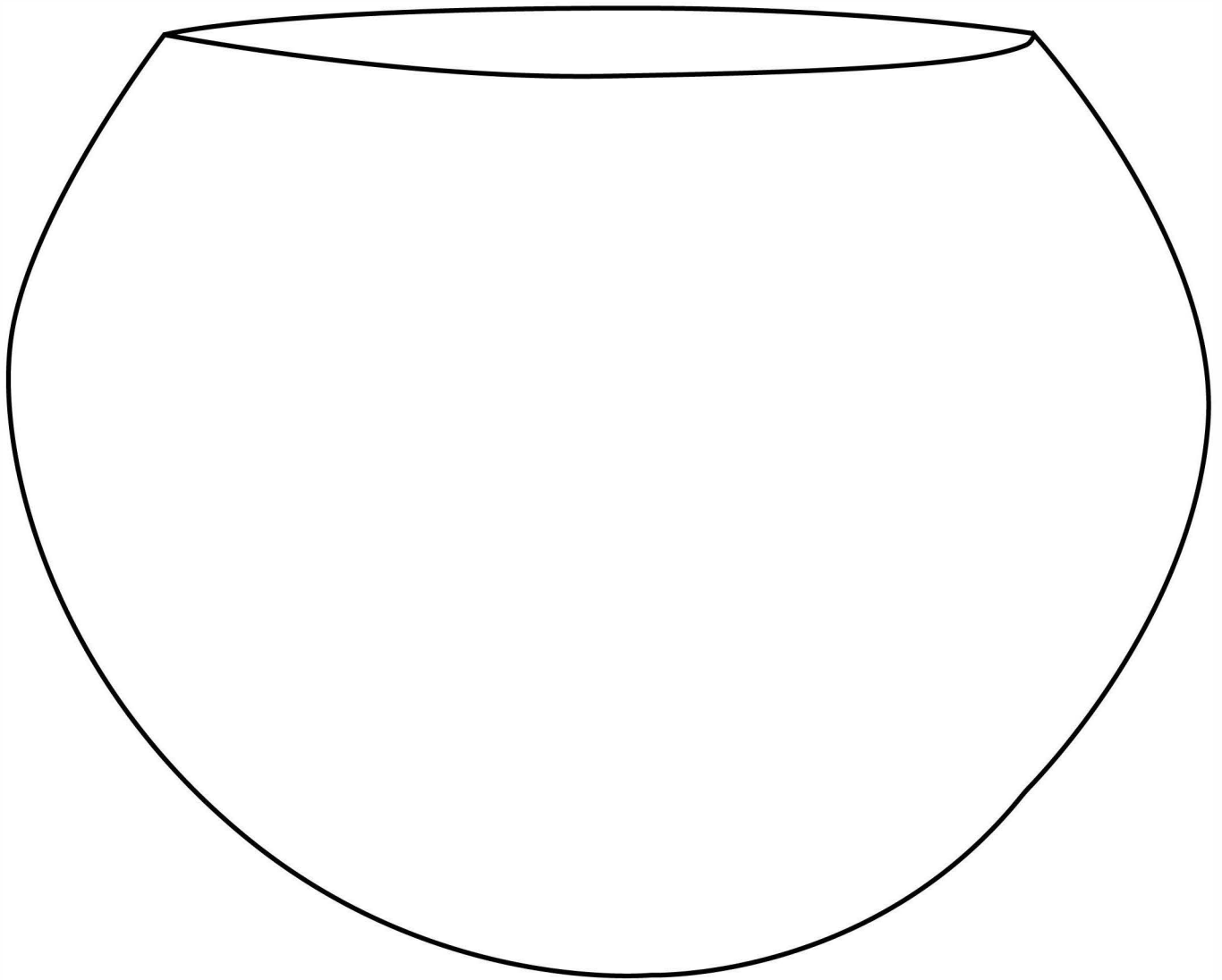
Directions:

- In Column 1, rewrite the word in English.
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Vocabulary Word	English Rewrite		
		Language Rewrite	Language Rewrite
Pumpkin			
Sprout			
Vine			
Flower			
Seminole			
Wichita			

DRAW YOUR DESIGN

Use this to create your own unique Seminole
Pumpkin pottery design.



Activity Guide: Creating a Paper Pumpkin Mat

Grade Level: 6–8

Duration: 40 Minutes

Materials Needed:

- Construction paper in fall colors (orange, brown, yellow, green)
- Rulers
- Scissors
- Glue sticks or tape
- Pencils
- Hole punch (optional)
- String or yarn (optional, for hanging)
- Printed images or video clips of traditional pumpkin mats (for reference)

Objectives:

- Understand the cultural significance of pumpkin mats used by the Wichita tribe.
- Practice basic weaving techniques using paper.
- Explore the concept of food preservation and its historical importance.
- Develop fine motor skills and spatial reasoning through hands-on crafting.

Part 1: Preparing the Paper Strips (10 minutes)

- Show students how to measure and cut construction paper into long strips (approx. 1 inch wide, 11 inches long).
- Each student will need approximately 16 strips.

Part 3: Weaving the Mat (20 minutes)

- **Base Setup:** Have students lay out 6–8 strips vertically on their desks, taping the top ends to keep them in place.
- **Weaving Technique:** Demonstrate how to weave horizontal strips over and under the vertical ones, alternating each row.
- **Finishing Touches:** Once the mat is complete, students can glue down the ends or tuck them under for a cleaner look.

Part 4: Display & Reflection (15–20 minutes)

- **Optional Hanging:** Punch holes at the top and add string to hang the mats.
- **Reflection Activity:** Ask students to write a short paragraph or share aloud:
 - What did they learn about the Wichita tribe?
 - What challenges did they face while weaving?
 - How does this activity connect to food preservation?

Assessment:

- Observe participation and craftsmanship during the activity.
- Review student reflections for understanding of cultural and historical context.

Exit Ticket

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. List 3 things you learned in today's lesson:

- _____
- _____
- _____

2. List 1 question you have about what we reviewed today:

3. List 2 things you want to learn more about:

- _____
- _____

Exit Ticket

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. List 3 things you learned in today's lesson:

- _____
- _____
- _____

2. List 1 question you have about what we reviewed today:

3. List 2 things you want to learn more about:

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- _____