

River Rascals

Oakley Wurzweiler, Ellen Bradley, McKenna Shultz

Department of Environmental Studies, Gonzaga University

Community Partners: Dr. Gregory Gordon (gordong@gonzaga.edu),
Dominique Wiley-Camacho (dominique@salishschoolofspokane.org)



Abstract/Problem

Upon initiating the River Rascals project, we identified a clear lack of existing collaboration between the Gonzaga community and indigenous peoples of the Spokane region. We originally reached out to teachers at Wellpinit, the Spokane Tribe Reservation, in hopes to coordinate education for indigenous students. Due to lack of time, and the tumultuous history between Gonzaga and the Spokane tribe, we understandably were not able to fully develop the necessary relationships for this project. Thus, we made an effort to get into contact with the local Salish School in Spokane. We met with the elementary science curriculum and instructional specialist at the Salish School, Dominique Wiley-Camacho, and she described areas of environmental education that she would like her students to have more exposure to. After this meeting, we narrowed down topics for two lesson plans aimed at 5th-8th graders--river management and the implications, both positive and negative, of dams. From here, we crafted our two lesson plans with the intention that we would be able to go to her classroom and teach them ourselves, at the end of the semester. Under current circumstances, coronavirus, teaching the lessons ourselves was no longer possible so we have given them over to Dominique so that she can use them in future years. Additionally, these lesson plans are also going to be handed over to the Center for American Indian Studies House at Gonzaga so that this project can continue to grow and develop.

Goals

- Create a connection between Gonzaga and the Spokane Tribe--show that there is a desire from students to develop a positive relationship with the tribe.
- Show the different ways of knowledge and acknowledge the native history of Spokane
- Allow students to gain both indigenous and western knowledge and understanding about local issues
- Helped us as Gonzaga students learn about the history and current conditions between Gonzaga and the Spokane tribe
- Develop lesson plans that incorporate indigenous knowledge, science, and history in order to tackle place based issues, such as dams



The Spokane River

Salish School of Spokane

The Salish School of Spokane serves children and youth ages 1-18 through an eleven month educational immersion program in which students are taught curriculum in the Salish language. The mission of the Salish School is to dynamically revitalize the Salish language through fueling cultural renewal and building a stronger, healthier community. While the Salish School is not affiliated with a particular tribe, the Salish languages have historically been spoken throughout the Pacific Northwest. The Salish school was chosen for this project due to its incorporation of the Salish language into its curriculum. We originally wanted to work with schools in Wellpinit, but unfortunately did not have the time to fully develop the relationships needed, within the context of one academic year.



Historic and present day pictures of the Grand Coulee Dam

Lesson Plan 1 Key Points: River Management

Example Objective:

- Each student will develop their own definition of what they think “river management“ means.

Short Overview of Lesson:

- Peoples’ relationships with the Spokane River have dramatically changed throughout the course of history due to the infringement of white settlers on Indigenous lands. Students will be introduced to different ways of knowing in terms of their natural surrounds and how it corresponds to human interactions with the Spokane River.

Step One of Lesson:

- Ask students: What do you know about the ways in which the Spokane people interacted with the river? What do you know about how people interact with the river today?

Lesson Plan 2 Key Points: Dams

Example Objective:

- Students will develop an understanding of the many pros and cons of the implementation and the usage of dams.

Short Overview of Lesson:

- The development of various dams along the Columbia River has changed the structure of the Spokane River ecosystem. Students will be introduced to ecological, economic, and cultural changes that occurred as a result of the building of dams in the state of Washington.

Step One of Lesson:

- Ask students: What do you know about the history of dams in the state of Washington? How do you think dams changed the lives of indigenous peoples of Spokane?

Analysis

Throughout the course of developing this project, it has become increasingly clear to us how the perspectives, needs, and histories of indigenous peoples of the Spokane area are still underrepresented and overshadowed by the colonial narrative of this region. Going forward, we hope that this project can continue and slowly start to build a bridge between the Gonzaga community and indigenous peoples of Spokane so that the narrative of future relationships can be one of respect and collaboration, rather than continuing to overshadow the voices of those who were here long before our institution.

Historical Context

- Jesuits came to Spokane as “missionaries” towards the Indigenous people of the inland northwest
- Gonzaga was originally created as desire of Fr. Cataldo to build “a large school for Indian children, or even for white, if many should come to the country”
- “Settlers” of Spokane area asked Fr. Cataldo to build a college for white students
- Land of Gonzaga was chosen on traditional indigenous land, and the Jesuits paid \$936 to the railroad for the land, with no compensation of stolen land from the Spokane Tribe.
- Two native boys were brought to Gonzaga after it opened to be enrolled, and were turned away as Gonzaga was only for white people.
- Throughout history, educational endeavors have currently been a source of colonial narratives
- Throughout Gonzaga’s history, indigenous students were often turned away or were reminded of colonial narratives through their education
- It is only within the past few years that the University has begun to recognize that the land it sits on are the stolen traditional lands of the Spokane Tribe.
- Currently, there is a lack of place based indigenous educational resources at Gonzaga and in Washington State schools

Acknowledgements

We would like to first and foremost recognize that Gonzaga University sits on the traditional tribal land of the Spokane Tribe. We would also like to thank the Gonzaga University Environmental Studies Department, Dr. Gregory Gordon, Dominique Wiley-Camacho, Wendy Thompson, Jiana Stover, and Dr. Melinda Howard, for their assistance throughout this project. We hope this project finds a new home with the Center of American Indian Studies house, and provides Indigenous students at Gonzaga, and the Spokane area with a better historical and indigenous understanding of Spokane.