



**Gulf of Georgia Cannery National Historic Site of Canada**  
12138 Fourth Ave. Richmond B.C. V7E 3J1

## Pre-visit Package: **Salmon People**

**Grade(s):** 4-5

**Duration:** 90 mins

### **PLO's:**

#### Grade 4

Science

-demonstrate awareness of the Aboriginal concept of respect for the environment

Social Studies

-B3 identify effects of early contact between Aboriginal societies and European explorers and settlers

-D2 describe technologies used by Aboriginal people in BC and Canada

-D5 describe economic and technological exchanges between explorers and Aboriginal people

#### Grade 5

Science

-analyze how BC's living and nonliving resources are used identify methods of extracting or harvesting and processing BC's resources

-analyze how the Aboriginal concept of interconnectedness of the environment is reflected in responsibility for and caretaking of resources

Social Studies

-A4 identify alternative perspectives on a selected event or issue

-E2 describe the location of natural resources within BC and Canada

### **Goals:**

\*Students will learn what role the Coast Salish People played in the development of our communities, especially pertaining to the fishing and canning industries.

\*Students will examine the traditional fishing techniques and tools of the Coast Salish People.

\*Students will analyze salmon preservation through time.



### **Program Summary:**

Upon arriving at the Gulf of Georgia Cannery, students will engage in the following activities under the guidance of a Cannery Interpreter:

- Artifact examination
- Canning Line Tour
- Salmon Preservation Station
- Film

### **Pre-visit Activities:**

- The First Salmon Ceremony
- Fishing Tools
- Historical Information

### **Resources:**

*A Stó:lō- Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, Kate Blomfield et al  
*From Time Immemorial: The First People of the Pacific Northwest Coast*, Diane Silvey  
*Indian Fishing: Early Methods of the Northwest Coast*, Hilary Stewart  
*Indians at Work: An Informal History of Native Indian Labour in British Columbia 1858-1930*, Rolf Knight

### **Post-visit Activity:**

We encourage teachers to divide the students into groups to reflect on what they learnt at the Cannery, specifically regarding salmon preservation. Ask your students to:

1. Try to remember all 5 types of salmon preservation methods (drying, smoking, salting, canning, freezing)
2. Draw an illustration of each method.
3. Think about what other types of food are also often preserved. Which preservation methods are still in use today?
4. Brainstorm some preserved foods that they might have in their own homes.

### **Teacher Key to Fishing Tools Activity:**

1. Weirs
2. Estuaries
3. Traps
4. Fraser
5. Trawl
6. Canoe
7. Fraser
8. Dip nets
9. Fraser



## The First Salmon Ceremony

D. Silvey's adapted version from the Coast Salish traditional First Salmon Ceremony

Long ago, a great darkness filled the land and the villagers went hungry day after day. They sat huddled in front of the bighouse, waiting anxiously for the return of the salmon.

Excitement filled the air as, at last, the mouth of the river began to fill with the silver glint of thousands of fins. As the fish made their way up river to their hereditary spawning grounds, they were greedily snatched from the water. They were cooked and devoured immediately. The bones were left unceremoniously scattered about in the dirt, unable to return to their spawning grounds.

Far away in the land of the dog salmon people, the salmon people wailed for their dead kin that would never return. The chief of the dog salmon became alarmed and called the other four great houses of salmon to a council. As the salmon people arrived, he graciously acknowledged their esteemed presence as he sat them in order of rank. When all of the five houses were gathered together, he addressed them with deep concern in his voice.

“As you are aware, our brothers and sisters are being slaughtered as they make their way up the river. Their dying voices cry out to us at the dishonor that is being heaped upon them. If their bones are not delicately reshaped and placed gently back into the waters, our ancestors can not be reborn,” the chief said mournfully.

“Our village lies almost empty,” replied the Sockeye Salmon chief.

“Our people's bones lay strewn about the camp of the villagers never to return to us,” wailed the Coho and Pink Salmon chiefs.

“I have a plan,” said the Chinook Salmon chief. The council listened intently as he began.

“Tomorrow at dawn I will leave for the village that is filled with our dead and make a pact with the villagers. I will guarantee them they will go hungry no more if they but only agree to honour and respect the five great houses of salmon.”

At dawn, the Chinook Salmon chief and his people swam to the village. The villagers were amazed at the density of salmon filling the river. They began licking their lips greedily.

“Greeting brothers and sisters,” the Chinook Salmon chief said eloquently. The frightened villagers were shocked into silence.



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“We have come to offer ourselves to you, but first...” the Chinook Salmon chief began. The people, not heeding his words, rushed forward to grab as many fish as they could. In response, the Spring Salmon chief lifted his fin and the multitude of fish disappeared as if into thin air.

“Yieeee,” the people screamed in fear.

“Before we offer ourselves to you, my brothers and sisters, you must agree to my conditions. Firstly, you must vow to teach your children and your children’s children respect for all living things. Secondly, the bones of the salmon must be carefully placed into the stream from where they came. If this pact is followed, you will go hungry no more. If not, my people will disappear, never to return,” the Chinook Salmon chief decreed.

The villagers knelt down before the Chinook Salmon chief, pledging their allegiance. A trust of honour had been forged between the two great nations and the darkness overhanging the village receded.

“Each year, our people will return to the river and you must remember to acknowledge us accordingly,” the Chinook Salmon chief said. The people agreed, welcoming their new kin. From then on, a First Salmon Ceremony was held yearly in honour of the salmon’s arrival from their underwater kingdoms. During the ceremony, the children’s clear voices could be heard rejoicing and welcoming their family from the sea. The sacred down gathered from the mighty eagle was sprinkled in honour of the salmon. The body of the salmon was prepared and shared by all. The bones were carefully replaced in the sea to be reborn. The spirits looked on and were pleased. The villagers became known as the people of the salmon.

Source: *From Time Immemorial: The First People of the Pacific Northwest Coast.* By Diane Silvey. Pacific Edge Publishing, 1999.pp. 14,15.



## Fishing Tools

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

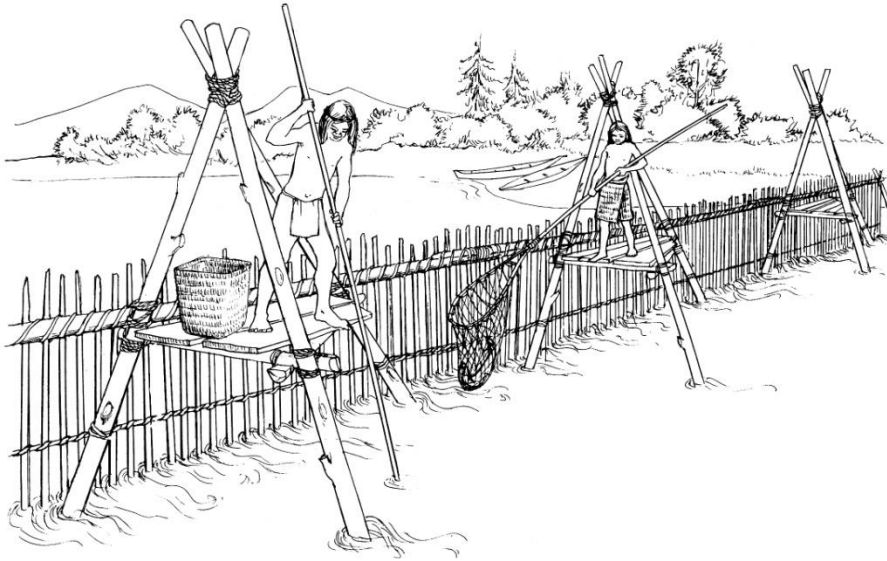
Fill in the blanks with the words listed below:

Fraser (3 times)  
weirs

trawl  
estuaries

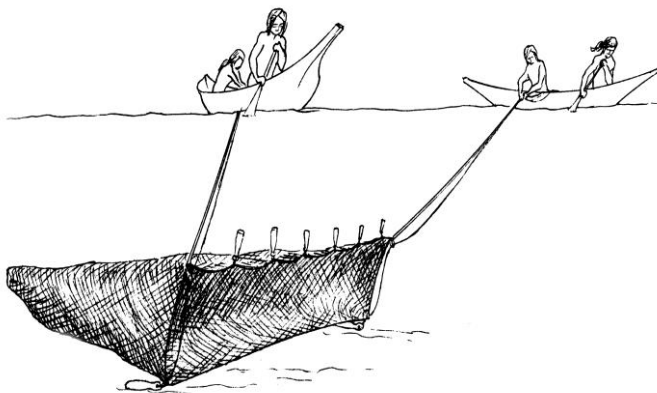
dip nets  
traps

canoe



\_\_\_\_\_ were commonly used along the Northwest coast of North America. Fish weirs were constructed in streams, rivers, and shallow \_\_\_\_\_. Weirs are fence-like structures made of a row of wooden stakes that have latticework woven between them.

Water flowed through the fences, but salmon swimming upstream to spawn could not pass. As the salmon milled around the fence, they were speared, dip netted, or guided into nearby \_\_\_\_\_.



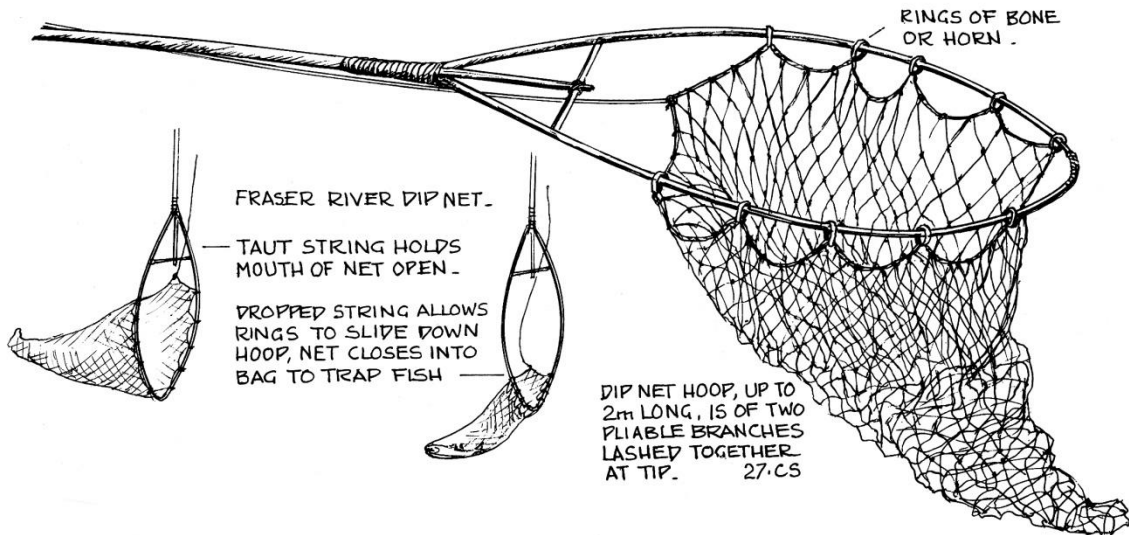
The traditional \_\_\_\_\_ River net was a large \_\_\_\_\_ net towed between two canoes.

Each \_\_\_\_\_ carried two to four men who paddled downstream at a rate faster than the current, so that the net billowed out. When the catch was made, the canoes closed in together to take up the net.

The muddy waters of the lower \_\_\_\_\_ River obscured the nets.



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Fishermen in canoes used \_\_\_\_\_ in the lower Fraser River. Dip nets were also used in the \_\_\_\_\_ Canyon to catch salmon from platforms.



## Historical Information

To this day, Steveston remains the largest commercial fishing port in Canada. The Gulf of Georgia Cannery, known as the “monster cannery” for its size, was built in 1894. Three years later, in 1897, there were over a dozen canneries in Steveston.

Sockeye, chum, coho, pink, and Chinook are the five species of salmon that spawn in the Fraser River and each played a role in the canning industry. The sockeye was most prized for its high oil content and rich red colour. Each year, the canning season usually spanned from March to mid-September, mirroring spawning patterns. The seasonal nature of cannery work meant that during the summer months, Steveston’s population of 400 would swell to over 6000 people. During the busiest times, when large quantities of salmon were being caught, cannery workers could be on the job for 20 hours each day. Fishermen were encouraged to catch as much salmon as they could, so when runs were strong, there were often excess fish that could not be processed before they spoiled and were thrown away as waste.

Canneries were mostly owned by British or American businessmen who made their fortunes by taking advantage of the limited options available to cannery workers. Canneries employed many newcomers to Canada. Among the fishermen were First Nations, Scandinavians, Greeks, Italians, and Japanese. Inside the canneries, Chinese men and Native women comprised most of the workforce, managed by a few European foremen. In later years, Japanese and European workers joined the crews. Although cannery work brought together an ethnic mix, the corporate structure modeled the racial hierarchy of the 1800s and early 1900s. People did not usually socialize outside of their ethnic group and Caucasian workers were paid more than other employees.

## First Nations

The lower Fraser Valley and southeast Vancouver Island are the traditional lands of the Coast Salish peoples who have been fishing for thousands of years. The Coast Salish, like many other Aboriginal groups, engaged in hunting and gathering in a seasonal round.

As the canning industry developed, many First Nations along the coast adjusted their seasonal round to include cannery work. Native families arrived by canoe each summer. Most of the fishermen before 1893 were First Nations men. Women worked in canneries as slimers and fillers, made nets, and sometimes helped with fishing. Children worked in the can lofts or on the canning line.

Cannery managers were keen to recruit Native families, as their canneries needed a large workforce. Managers who spoke Chinook, the Native trade jargon, were most successful in recruiting First Nations women who were skilled at making and mending nets.