

School on the Move Lesson Plan

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Objective

Help students learn about different societies and their territories, in this case the Evenks, a nomadic people living in Siberia. The Evenks hope a mobile (or peripatetic) school will protect their culture and way of life.

Target audience

Students aged 10 to 15

Connections

Languages
Social sciences
Arts and culture

Film needed for lesson plan

School on the Move (50 min)

Summary

This lesson plan will help students learn about different societies and their territories. They will get acquainted with the Evenks, a nomadic people of Siberia and understand the crucial role played by the mobile school in the transmission of the culture and way of life of this people. *School on the Move* will bring alive to students the Evenk way of life, beliefs and rituals. It will show why the Evenks chose to maintain a nomadic way of life and provide an insight into their daily existence. Students will discuss other cultures with their classmates and broaden their overall awareness. (See note 1.) They will also find out that director Michel Debats made this 2006 film because he was moved by the commitment of ethnologist Alexandra Lavrillier on behalf of the Evenk people. For over ten years, this Frenchwoman has been documenting the life of these reindeer hunters and herders and is dedicated to raising public awareness of the struggle to preserve their culture. This film is a vibrant and moving testimony to that struggle.

Start and preparatory activity: Children of nature

Approximate duration: 45 minutes

Begin by explaining that your students are going to meet the Evenks, a Siberian nomadic people. Put up a world map and ask students to locate Siberia on it and say what they know about this region.

Step 1: Before playing the film ask students to say what the title *School on the Move* means to them. Then ask them what they know about the nomadic way of life.

Step 2: Play the first few minutes of the film, up to the moment when teacher Klara Abramava explains what she is teaching the Evenk children (from the beginning to 7 min 53 s). Gather your students' first impressions by asking the following questions:

- How does the film begin?
- What do the first images in this film teach you about the Evenk people?
- Based on these images and the film's narration, what relationship do the people seem to have with nature? How does the expression "children of nature" seem an apt description of them? Give examples.
- Which images made the greatest impression on you? Why?
- What are your first impressions of this school?
- How does anthropologist Alexandra Lavrillier describe this people?

Step 3: Ask students to form small teams for in-depth discussion, using the following questions as a guide (*see note 2*):

- At this stage, can you name some of the challenges facing the Evenk people as to their housing, food, transport, schooling and survival in the harsh climate?
- What are the similarities or differences between these challenges and those you face in your environment?

Bring the activity to a close by asking students to do an Internet search on the Evenk people during the week, to find out more about them. Hand out the worksheet in Appendix I and tell them to note their observations on this worksheet while watching the film.

ACTIVITY 1: The Evenks in their own words

Approximate duration: 75 minutes

In this activity, students will discover more about Evenks' culture and their efforts to survive.

Step 1: Briefly review the research done by the students during the week.

Step 2: Ask students to discuss this Evenk saying: "When you carry knowledge, you have the duty to pass it on." Use the following questions as a guide:

- What does this saying mean to the Evenk people? What does it mean to you?
- How does this saying make you feel?
- Why does the spoken language appear to be so important to this people?

Step 3: In random order, give each student one of the statements made by an Evenk man or woman in the film. These statements can be found in Appendix II. They just need to be cut into sections. Ensure that all are distributed and that each student reads the statement in hand. Then, ask students to form teams of four to discuss the different statements. Use the following questions as a guide:

- What do these statements tell you about the culture of the Evenk people?
- Which specific aspects are mentioned in each statement?

Step 4: Continue playing the film (from 7 min 53 s to 31 min 21 s) and ask students to pay particular attention to the statements they discussed earlier in their teams. To help them, hand out the observation checklist supplied with Appendix II, and ask them to fill it in. Once that is completed, ask them to regroup into their teams and guide a discussion using the following questions:

- What new things have you been able to learn about the Evenk culture from these images?
- How do the images of the Siberian landscape make you feel? How do the images in the tent make you feel? How do the film's contrasting colours make you feel?
- Why, do you think, did the director choose these images?
- What does the narrator's voice add to the film? What do the other voices heard in the film add to it? What more do they teach you about this nomadic people?
- Why, do you think, did the director choose to have these people speak?
- What is the children's place in this film and how do the adults seem to see them? What is the position of the elders and how do they seem to be regarded by their community?

ACTIVITY 2: A culture to be defended

Approximate duration: 75 minutes

In this activity, students will continue their discovery of the Evenk nomadic people. They will see how the mobile school helps them protect their way of life and in so doing, their culture. Each student will thus develop an appreciation of and openness to cultural diversity.

Step 1: Begin this activity by reviewing the exchanges of the different teams in the preceding activity.

Step 2: Continue playing the film (from 31 min 23 s to the end) and use the following questions to lead a discussion:

- How has this film helped you to gain a deeper understanding of the culture of the Evenk people?
- Did your perception of the challenges facing this people in terms of their survival and the protection of their culture change in any way? If yes, how? If not, why? What images best illustrate the scope of these challenges?
- What role do songs play in this film? Who are the singers?
- What role do the animals seem to play in the life of the Evenks?

Step 3: Ask students to regroup into their teams and, using the following questions, discuss the mobile school:

- What role does the school play in protecting Evenk culture? How does it tell the students about the outside world? Give examples.
- What is the teachers' role? How is it similar to and different from that of non-peripatetic teachers?
- Which images and sounds in this part of the film best illustrate how children and youth are educated?
- What else do children and young people learn from their nomadic way of life?

Step 4: Conclude the discussion by asking students the following questions:

- What is the film director's point of view? Why, do you think, does he take this point of view?
- How does this film enable you to appreciate other cultures?

Conclude the activity by asking students to summarize what they have learned.

Recap

Suggested duration: 60 minutes.

Ask students to compare the way of life of the Evenk nomadic people with that of one of Canada's Native peoples.

Objective sharing

After completing the activities of this lesson plan, students ought to be able to:

- Describe the way of life of the nomadic Evenk people and several of their cultural characteristics illustrated in the film;
- Identify the challenges the Evenk people must overcome to protect their nomadic way of life and their culture.

Notes:

1. This lesson plan has been devised for use with a wide variety of groups and levels. You can adapt it according to the level of your student group and the time available to you.
2. You can write these questions on the blackboard or hand them out to each team.

Web sites

- Definition and history of the Evenks:
<http://www.eki.ee/books/redbook/evenks.shtml>
- Survival is the only international organization supporting tribal peoples worldwide. While this site is geared towards children between 7 and 12 years old, it contains pertinent information accompanied by illustrations that will appeal to an older audience. Alexandra Lavrillier collaborated on the Evenks' file.
<http://www.survival-international.org/tribes/siberian>
- Portfolio: A series of pictures taken of the Evenk tribe and their nomadic school:
<http://www.kairn.com/article.html?id=1344>
- Article written by Alexandra Lavrillier, including map identifying Autochthonous populations of Siberia:
http://www.necep.net/society.php?B1=Mongolia&id_soc=4

Appendix I Observation checklist – Evenks

The Evenk people: Fill in the table below using the information you gathered during your research.

Population	
Characteristics of the territory	
Official language	
Economic activities	
Natural resources	
Climate	

Way of life of a nomadic people: Fill in the table below using the information you gathered while watching *School on the Move*.

Approximate number of inhabitants	
Clothing	
Beliefs and rituals	
Food	
Type of housing	
Languages spoken	
Means of transportation	
Main economic activity	
Type of education	
Games	

Appendix II The Evenks in their own Words

<p>The Evenk are people of the taiga. We're the human beings of the taiga. There are Russian and Tajik human beings. There are Armenian human beings...French human beings... They're all human beings. The Evenk are humans too. We are hunters who raise reindeer so that we can live a nomadic life. If there were no Taiga, there would be no reindeer. And if there were no reindeer, there would be no Evenk.</p>
<p>I teach the children their mother tongue and culture. I worked for a long time in the village boarding school. I felt sorry for the children because they missed their parents and they missed the taiga and the nomadic lifestyle.</p>
<p>Last autumn, we took Andrej to the boarding school in the village. As we were leaving the village, he ran away and caught up with us at the river. He was sobbing his eyes out as he ran up to us. We took him back to the school and went to see the principal. We told the principal that Andrej didn't want to stay, that he wanted to come with us into the taiga, and that they wouldn't be able to hold onto him. The principal is a good man and he let Andrej come with us. But he said we'd have to teach him until November, when a teacher of the nomad school would join us in the taiga.</p>
<p>We are making jam for the children. Everyone eats these berries from the forest. The sable eats them, the grouse eats them. All the wild animals eat them. Bears eat them too. They fatten up quickly on a diet of berries.</p>
<p>When I left the taiga to go to school, I was a little girl and I didn't speak a word of Russian. Neither did my brothers. That was the Soviet era. They'd fetch us by helicopter. When the helicopter arrived. So, of course, the nomad school in the taiga is a very good thing. We can teach the children about the forest, and check their work.</p>
<p>Of course it's important for them to study hard. They could go on to higher education and then come back and live in the taiga. That would be best. There's nothing good in towns. Nothing good.</p>
<p>What will they do when they grow up? They should decide for themselves where they want to live. They'll find the place that suits them best. Maybe the town, maybe the taiga. But wherever you live, you have to be educated.</p>
<p>Nowadays a lot of people return to live in the taiga because there are no jobs for us in the village. Then there are all the temptations that ruin the lives of the Evenk. Alcohol and suchlike. Life is peaceful here. You work, you hunt. You're your own boss. In the village you have to buy water, wood...so many problems. Everything costs money. Here, you've got all the wood and water you need. You just have to go out and get it. You don't have to pay here. It's Bugha, the spirit of nature, who provides you with meat, fish and berries.</p>
<p>To be sure of the spirit's good will, you have to keep the fire going and tie ribbons in the right places in the camps.</p>
<p>We hunt to feed ourselves. You shouldn't kill too much, but just enough to survive, just enough to keep you alive. If our parents had wanted to be rich, we wouldn't be here. They'd have killed all the game and the taiga would be empty now.</p>
<p>We leave the skin and intestines for the sables to eat. But it's not very likely because the crows get to everything first. A herd of wild reindeer came by this way yesterday.</p>
<p>Everything nature gives you should be shared. What more can I say? Wild reindeer, elks, bears... We share everything as best we can with our neighbours ...</p>
<p>Our forbears established these rules and we respect them. My children and their children will do the same. The people of the Taiga know that killing too much is robbing nature.</p>
<p>In winter the men hunt sables. With the money we can buy rice, flour, salt, tea. In summer we cut the young antlers, sell them and buy food. In autumn we have nothing to exchange.</p>

Sometimes we get credit on the sables we'll hunt later. We hunt until the new year.
They always leave wood at a camp, for other travellers who might come. Life is fragile, the taiga is harsh and this means to make a fire is very important. It's a mark of respect to others.
You live according to the work you do. If you move around, you'll have food to eat. If you don't, you won't have anything.
You need to know all the jobs to survive. The children watch me, then they imitate what I do. They follow me everywhere: hunting, fishing...
We live our lives according to the ancient ways, so that the spirits don't bother our children. We've never betrayed this way of life. It's something we must pass on.
We'll show you the rituals so you remember them, so the reindeer stay healthy. Your mother will show you how. We give a fire offering so that we have good luck hunting, so that we'll catch sables and wild reindeer. Watch how your elders do things, and don't forget them in your nomadic life.
You should always take care of your prey. Make a funeral platform for it using young larch branches. We've always done this for the bear. The bear is the god of the Evenk. I hunt the bear the same way as the ancients did.
When you live in nature, animals know when man is coming. The wild animals know every human being, what you've done, good or bad. The animals know. They can sniff out every human. Wild animals are beings too.
It's not so cold nowadays. The reindeer have become sickly, especially in summer. For five years, the reindeer have been having problems with painful hooves and we find parasites in their brains.
If someone comes to the taiga, I'll teach him to be a part of the natural world. Teach him everything... that the trees too are living beings. You have to talk to the trees, listen to the birds singing, listen to what they're telling you as they sing. You have to listen to everything... The river too speaks as it sings. Listen and you'll understand. Like a baby, and babies know everything. When you don't know the taiga, you cannot know. This is what we teach our children.

Appendix III Observation checklist– statements

Fill in the table below by answering the questions.

Evenks in their own words: (Write the first statement you received here)	
Who is speaking? (Man, woman, teacher, elder, etc.)	
Which aspect of Evenk culture is this person describing?	
What images accompany this statement?	
What sounds accompany this statement?	
What does this statement tell you about Evenk culture?	
How do these images and sounds make you feel?	