

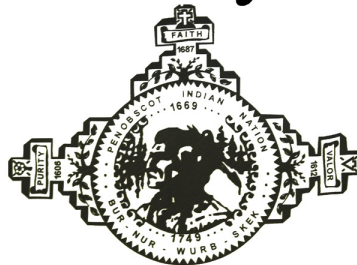


## The Economics of Basketmaking

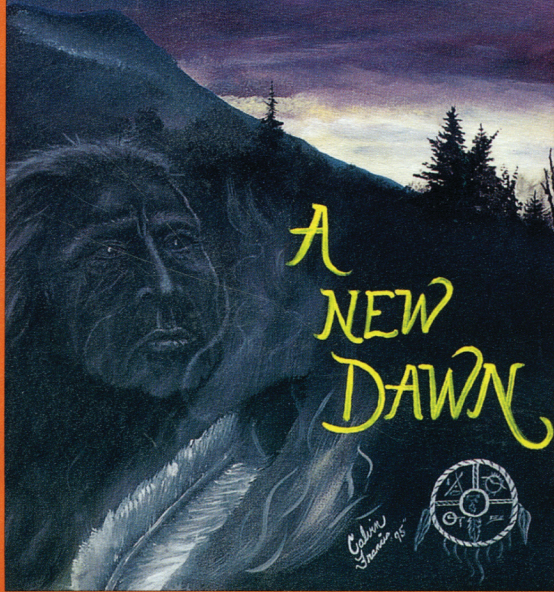
## The Story of my Basket



# The Story of My Basket



# Wabanaki



presented by the  
Maine Indian  
Tribal-State Commission

## Wabanaki A New Dawn

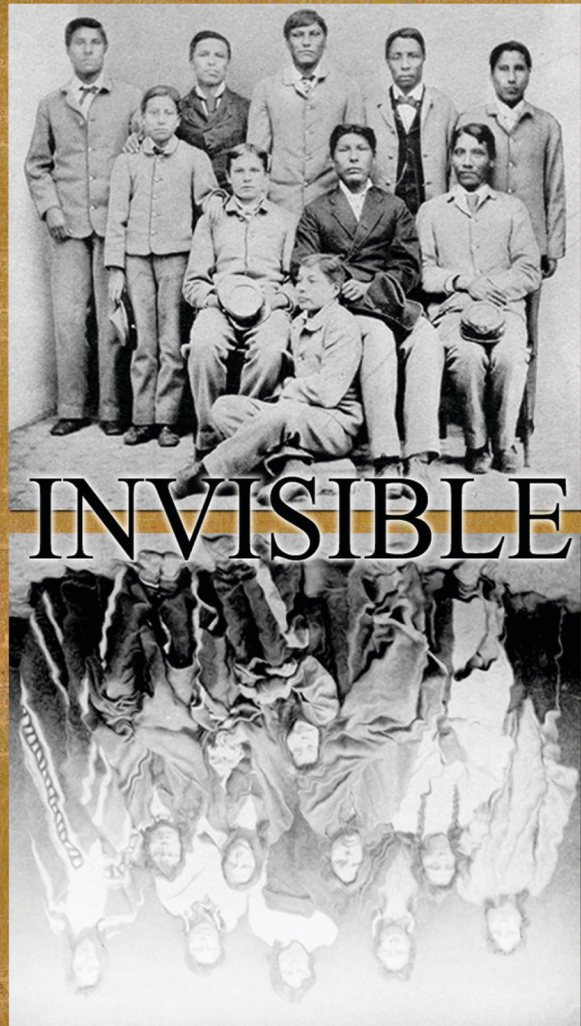
This film by the Maine Indian Tribal-State Commission was produced by Dennis Kostyk and David Westphal of Acadia FilmVideo (1995).

The film “shows the quest for cultural survival by today’s Wabanaki... the Maliseet, Micmac, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot People.”

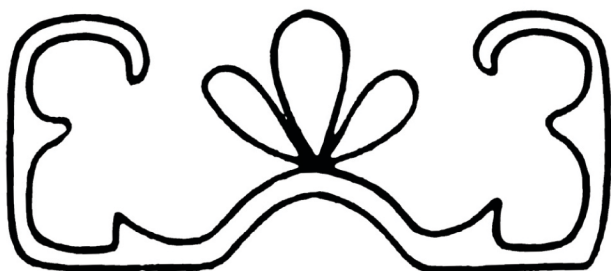
## Invisible

This film was commissioned by the Episcopal Diocese of Maine and was produced by Gunnar Hansen, David Westphal, and James Eric Francis of Acadia Film-Video (2004).

“This film examines some of the history of the relations between the white and Indian communities in Maine.”



It is strongly recommended that the teachers using the Penobscot Nation Curriculum Packet view the films “Wabanaki A New Dawn” and “Invisible.” These films are included within the curriculum packet. High School teachers may also consider the films for their students. The teacher’s guide for Invisible is also included.



## Penobscot Economics of Basket Making By Pam Cunningham

Today Penobscot Fancy Baskets are some of the most sought after collectables. This tradition has been kept alive for many generations. Why has basketry been kept alive when other forms of cultural artist expression has fallen by the way side?



Basket making was an economic cornerstone to the Penobscot community. What started out as a utilitarian object prior to the invasion of Europeans quickly became a commodity. It was through this market for these baskets that they become fancier.

By the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, many Penobscots participated in basket making to make a living. Family groups would set up in coastal tourist towns during the summers selling baskets. Places like Bar Harbor, Poland Springs, Lincolnville, Damariscotta, and Boothbay Harbor had Indian occupation during the summer months. In the town of Lincolnville today is a small family museum that highlights the Nicolar family's occupation of that town for more than 7 decades. That family bought baskets from many tribal members and sold them to tourists. The person that you buy the basket from is only one person in a long line of people who benefited from that sale.

Penobscot men would travel up and down the many tributaries of the Penobscot River and seek out the brown ash needed for making baskets. This person would be the

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first in a line of many to touch the ash. He would cut the ash down and cut it into six foot lengths.

Then someone would have to prepare the ash for pounding. Pounding is an activity that is still done today in Wabanaki Communities. The sound of pounding could be heard all over the reservation on early mornings when pounding was going on. This activity would draw a crowd and youngsters were taught the trade.

Once pounded, the ash would then need to be gauged, scraped, and often dyed.

Often, a basket would contain sweet grass. This fragrant plant, native to coastal estuaries, must be harvested, dried, and braided. My Auntie Beatrice used to braid sweet grass. Her house was filled with the smell of sweet grass. On rainy days it bordered on overwhelming. When she braided the grass sang. Her arthritic fingers moved so quickly and efficiently that as a I youngster it appeared that the braids grew directly from her fingertips. My Auntie Bea never made a basket, but her braids are found in thousands of baskets. When she died, they found close to a mile of braids bundled in her closet ready for sale or trade. She made a living out of braiding sweet grass.



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In addition to the coast, the tourists also sought out the reservations to buy baskets. In the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century many gift shops were clustered on the downtown street area of Indian Island. Many of these shops featured baskets. At the landing of the ferry was a building with a porch. It was on this porch that many basket makers would sit weaving an economy.

Until the 1950's a person would have to take a ferry to get onto the reservation. In the winter a sawdust bridge was made on the ice to preserve the ice when spring came. In the early 50's, Bruce Poolaw, a proprietor of one of the gift shops, petitioned the state to have a bridge constructed. He wanted more tourists to purchase baskets by coming to the reservation.

Today the tradition is kept alive by the Maine Indian Basket Maker's Alliance who is dedicated to preserving the traditional act of basket making in the Wabanaki communities.



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## The Story of My Basket

By Julia E. Sockbeson

### Standards

- Social Studies-Economics
  - C. Comparative Systems
    - Students will be able to explain how selected cultures (the Wabanaki) meet basic human needs. [C1 (3/4)]
  
- *Modern and Classical Languages*
  - E. Cultural Practices, Products and Perspectives
    - Students will be able to identify how tangible products of the culture such as toys, dress, housing, food, currency, and crafts reflect life in that culture. [E1 (3/4)]

### Essential Understanding

**Wabanaki baskets have evolved from functional, utilitarian objects to a commodity that is made not only to support many Native families but are also now considered valuable collectibles.**

### Essential Question #1

**What do we learn from our families?**

### Key Concepts

1. **“Generations” in your family are people that are related to you.**
2. **“Ancestors” are generations of your family that lived a long time ago.**
3. **Our families teach us what is special about our ancestors (e.g. basket making)**

### Activities

- **Each child will construct a family tree going back to maternal and paternal Great Grandparents.**
- **Family Trees are hung as “leaves” on our classroom’s Family Tree.**

### Formative Assessment

**Student will write, on a sentence strip, a full sentence that states what makes their family special.**

### Resources

- **Student’s family**
- **Sentence strips**

### Essential Question #2

***Why did the Wabanaki, our ancestors, make baskets?***

### Key Concepts

- **Utility**
- **Many years ago Wabanaki made baskets from brown ash and birch bark.**
- **Baskets were utilized for gathering, carrying large items and as fish traps.**

## Activities

- The student will bring in a household item from home and be prepared to explain what the item is used for. This is done to illustrate the concept of “utility”.
- For each household item brought in, the class will brainstorm an item or tool used for similar purposes in Native communities.
- An Archaeologist will visit with artifacts for the children to hold and examine. She will also help the children develop a timeline that focuses on the utilitarian role of baskets in Wabanaki Culture. (The Penobscot Nation Cultural and Historic Preservation Department may be able to suggest an Archaeologist who would be willing to visit the class room. If one is not available, the Abbe Museum and Hudson Museum websites may be helpful.)

## Formative Assessment

Each child will choose one artifact to draw and caption with a description (including an approximate date when used) of the tool/item and its use in Wabanaki communities. These will be bound and titled “Tools and Household Items of the Wabanaki.”

## Resources

### *Various household items*

Wabanaki artifacts

### *Archaeologist*

## Essential Question #3

*How many people does it take to make a brown ash basket?*

## Key Concepts

### *Interdependence: It takes a community to make a basket*

Community roles in making a basket

Natural materials are used to make a basket

There are two types of baskets: work baskets and fancy baskets.

Selling baskets becomes a source of income for Wabanaki families

Supply and demand: As fewer Wabanaki know how to make baskets, fewer baskets are made. Baskets are not only sold to support Wabanaki families, but are considered special and precious enough to collect (a collectible).

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## **Activities**

Create a chart with four columns that organizes the following information:

1. The materials needed to make a brown ash basket
2. Where the materials may be found
3. Person responsible for gathering/using the material gathered
4. What the basket will be used for

A master basket maker will visit the class with the materials and tools necessary for each child to make a small candy basket. (Maine Indian Basket Makers Alliance may have a list of basket makers who would be willing to visit the class. It is important to note that the materials and the time of the basket maker are valuable and they need to be compensated for time, travel, and materials.) We will place the materials at the following stations:

- ❖ Split the ash
- ❖ Gauge the ash
- ❖ Sweetgrass braiding station
- ❖ Weave the ash strips (standards and weavers) and Sweetgrass braids into baskets

(If the resources cannot be acquired to have a basket maker visit the school, you may view the film *Penobscot Basketmaker* by Barbara Daigle Francis to explore the different jobs of basket making and complete the summative assessment below.)

## **Formative Assessment:**

Weaving ash and Sweetgrass into a candy basket.

## **Resources:**

Barbara Daigle Francis video  
Ash in various stages  
Sweetgrass  
Splitter  
Various sized gauges  
Maine Indian Basket Maker

## **Summative Assessment**

Each child will write and illustrate a book entitled “The Story of My Brown Ash Basket”. Each page of the book will be dedicated to a step in the making of a brown ash basket with an accompanying illustration. Below in the teacher notes will be a card list generated during the Pilot Project for this unit. This is a nice guide outlining the steps in making a brown ash basket.

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### **Teacher Notes**

Teachers should be advised that the basket making activity requires knowledgeable supervision. Parents should be advised of the potential risks and asked to sign a permission slip.

#### Card #1

Before we can make a brown ash basket we need to find a brown ash tree that looks like it will make a strong brown ash basket.

#### Card #2

Once we find a good, strong brown ash tree, we cut it down. Then we take the tree home so we can pound the ash into strips.

#### Card #3

Now our log of brown ash is ready to be pounded. The top and bottom ends of the log are laid to rest on two stands. The log is pounded using a heavy metal mallet. As the log is pounded, strips of ash separate from the log.

#### Card #4

Now that our ash is pounded, the thick strips of brown ash needed to be made thinner. For this job we use a splitter.

#### Card #5

Gauges are hand held tools that make “weavers” and “standards”. The weavers go around and ground the basket. The standards go up and down the basket. Together they hold the shape of the basket.

#### Card #6

Now that the ash is gauged, the strips must be shaved with a small knife until they are smooth enough to weave into a brown ash basket.

#### Card #7

Our next step is to pick out a block for the shape of our basket.

#### Card #8

Now that we know the size of our basket, we can cut the right number of “standards” and weavers. We are now ready to begin weaving the bottom of the basket.

#### Card #9

Once the bottom is finished we will weave the basket a quarter of the way up the block. Then we will tie the partially made basket to the block using the string.

Card #10

We will weave the basket until it is three quarter of the way up the block. Then we remove the block from the inside of the basket. We do this by cutting the strings.

Card #11

We have decided to add some braided sweetgrass to our basket. Braiding is another type of “weaving” using more strands of sweetgrass. The braid of sweetgrass is woven into our basket.

Card #12

We continue to weave until we reach the top of the basket. Then we use a thick strip of brown ash to make rim of the basket. Our basket is now ready to be shared!

The Story of My Basket

	1 Attempted Demonstration (Does Not Meet Standard)	2 Partial Demonstration (Partially Meets Standards)	3 Proficient Demonstration (Meets Standard)	4 Sophisticated Demonstration (Exceeds Standards)
<p><u>Standard:</u> Social Studies- Economics C- Comparative Systems</p> <p><u>Indicator:</u> Students will be able to explain how selected cultures (specifically the Wabanaki) meet basic human needs.</p>	<p>Student’s work answers 1 of the 3 essential questions and does not demonstrate an understanding of how the post- contact Wabanaki met basic human needs.</p>	<p>Student’s work answers 2 of the 3 essential questions accurately and demonstrates some understanding of how the post- contact Wabanaki met basic human needs.</p>	<p>Student’s work answers the 3 essential questions accurately and demonstrates an understanding of how the post- contact Wabanaki met basic human needs.</p>	<p>Student’s work answers the 3 essential questions accurately and demonstrates a proficient understanding of how post- contact Wabanaki met basic human needs.   <span style="color: red;">Student writes a report of an interview with a contemporary Maine Indian Basket Maker (the report can be created by interviewing a basketmaker or watching the Barbara Francis video). The</span></p>

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				interview will focus on three questions: Who taught you how you how to make baskets? Why did you want to learn? What are your reasons for making baskets today?
<p><u>Standard:</u> Modern &amp; Classical Lang. E- Cultural Practices, Products and Perspectives</p> <p><u>Indicator:</u> Students will be able to identify how tangible products of the culture such as toys, dress, housing, food, currency, and crafts reflect life in that culture.</p>	Student is not able to identify how the tangible products of the culture such as toys, dress, housing, food, currency, and crafts reflect life in that culture.	Student’s work meets some of the criteria and demonstrates some ability to identify how tangible products of the culture such as toys, dress, housing, food, currency, and crafts reflect life in that culture.	Student’s work meets most of the criteria and demonstrates an ability to identify how tangible products of the culture such as toys, dress, housing, food, currency, and crafts reflect life in that culture.	Student’s work meets all of the criteria and demonstrates a proficient ability to identify how tangible products of the culture such as toys, dress, housing, food, currency, and crafts reflect life in that culture. The student researches and submits a written report about the evolution of another basket making process from an Indigenous Nation of their choice.