
Lesson 4.6

LANGUAGE FAMILIES



Stone pipe from Halifax County,
North Carolina, ca. AD 1000.

Subjects: social studies, mathematics, language arts.

Skills: knowledge, analysis.

Strategies: observation, discussion, mapping, classification, computation.

Duration: 45 to 60 minutes.

Class Size: any; groups of 3 to 4.

Objectives

In their study of language families, students will:

- identify and locate the three language families of contact period North Carolina;
- calculate the physical area covered by each language family.

Materials

For the teacher, a world map and colored push pins, transparencies of “Historic Native American Villages,” “Native American Village Names,” and “Selected Native American Place Names.” For each student, copies of “Historic Native American Villages” and “Native American Village Names,” and a set of markers in three colors. For each group, an “Area Estimation Work Sheet,” the “Historic Native American Villages” map, and a pair of scissors.

Vocabulary

Dialect: a regional variant of a particular language. A dialect can sometimes be so different in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation that it is not understood by speakers of another dialect of the same language.

Language: the words, their pronunciation, and ways of combining them used and understood by a broad community of people.

Language family: a group of related languages, which developed from a common ancestral language.

Scale drawing: a representation used to show something too large or too small to be drawn full size, in which the proportions (but not the size) are accurately preserved.

Background

When the first English arrived on North Carolina’s shores, they were met on the beach by a small group of Algonkian men. The Englishman in charge walked up to one of the Indian men and asked, “What is this place called?” The Algonkian looked at the English thoughtfully and then said, “Wingandacon.” The Englishman who asked the question wrote down the word the way it sounded, and he later put it on the map one of his companions was drawing to indicate where they landed.

The Algonkian man, however, had not answered the Englishman’s question. This was the first

time he saw the English and did not understand the newcomer's language. Because Indian tradition was to greet strangers politely, some response was needed. So the Algonkian simply said: "Those are nice clothes you are wearing."

While it is not surprising that Native Americans and Englishmen could not understand one another, there were also *language* differences among North Carolina Indians. There were three *language families* among the Native peoples of North Carolina at the time of European contact. A language family can be defined as a group of related languages that have descended from a common ancestral language. Language families exist all over the world. English is part of the Indo-European language family, which arose between 5,000 and 8,000 years ago. At that time, the people living in Europe or southern Asia spoke the ancestral Indo-European language. Over many years, as these people moved to other parts of Europe and Asia, the structure, pronunciation, and vocabulary of the Indo-European language began to change in each new location. Eventually, the ancestral Indo-European language was replaced by a number of separate languages. The diversity in languages within language families is often caused by geographical isolation and the development of *dialects*. For example, Americans and Britons speak different dialects of the English language; similarly, distinctive regional dialects of English exist within the United States.

The three language families among North Carolina Native Americans were Algonkian, Iroquian, and Siouan. Algonkian speakers lived in villages along the coasts and sounds north of the Cape Fear River. Algonkian tribes included the Chowan, Hatteras, Moratok, Pamlico, Secotan, and the Weapemeoc. Iroquois speakers lived in two different places: along the Coastal Plain were the Tuscarora and the Meherrin, and in the Mountains were the Cherokee. The Siouan speakers lived in the Piedmont, and their tribes included the Cape Fear, Catawba, Eno, Keyauwee, Occaneechi, Saponi, Shakori, Sissipahaw, Waccamaw, and Wateree.

Like everywhere else in the world, North Carolina's Indian peoples had considerable language differences. Verbal communication could be difficult, especially across the language families. But even tribes, such as the Cherokee and Tuscarora, who spoke dialects belonging to the same language family, had to find ways to "talk" to one another. Some scientists think many Native North Carolinians may have communicated using a simplified common language.

Setting the Stage

Non-English languages are more common than most people think within North Carolina communities. Ask students if they or anyone they know speaks a language besides English. Ask them what language that person speaks and how or where he or she learned to speak that language. Place a colored pin on the language's country of origin. How many different areas of the world are represented? How many languages besides English are spoken within the students' community?

Ask students what kinds of problems people who are still learning English can face. For example, they can be socially isolated; they don't know how to find or ask for things they need and want. Ask how these people might overcome difficulties. For example, they learn English better; they find alternative ways to communicate what they want, such as by sign language or taking an object to a merchant to show what they want. Finally, consider how English is enriched by incorporation of expressions or words from other languages. Can students think of examples?

Procedure

1. Share background information with the students.

2. Distribute to each student the “Historic Native American Villages” map, a copy of “Native American Village Names,” and markers in three different colors.

3. Assign specific marker colors for each language family. Tell students that on their copy of “Native American Village Names,” the names of towns occupied by speakers of each major language family are listed. Have students highlight the village locations on the “Historic Native American Villages” map with colors designated for each language family, so that distributions of language groups can be seen.

4. Have students describe where the different groups were living.

5. Ask the students: What does the separation of the Iroquois speaking peoples suggest about North Carolina’s history before European contact? Get students started by giving them some scenarios about what the separation possibly means. For example, history shows both the Cherokee and Tuscarora were related to the Iroquois of New York state. Archaeologists think the people who were the ancestors of the Cherokee moved into North Carolina much earlier than the Tuscarora’s ancestors did. You may want to suggest how geographic isolation, or time differences, or warfare between different Iroquois groups may have contributed to their forming distinct dialects (and cultures) as ways to get students thinking of examples. How do archaeologists and other people who study the past use place names to learn about past peoples? What can be learned from the study of language and place names?

6. Divide students into groups of 4 to 5 individuals. Hand out a pair of scissors to each group. Have each group’s members work together to draw rough boundaries around language families on the “Historic Native American Villages” map, using the locations of the villages as a guide. With the scissors, they then cut out the shape of each language family along the drawn boundaries.

7. Hand out the “Area Estimation Work Sheet.” Have each group select one language family and its cutout. Tell students that they will work together within their groups to calculate the approximate number of square miles covered by the language family they picked.

8. Following directions on the “Area Estimation Work Sheet,” have each group of students calculate the square miles (or geographic area) covered by the language family they chose.

Note: Point out to the groups figuring area for the coastal Algonkian language family that they will have to account for large bodies of water in their calculation. You may want to suggest that they cut away the Outer Banks and not count it at all.

Closure

Tell students that in North Carolina today, many Native American place names are still in use. For example, the word *Newasiwac* is the source for the name of the Neuse River, and Saxapahaw is derived from *Sissipahaw*. Project the “Selected Native American Place Names” map. Ask students to compare this map with the one showing Native American villages. Do any of the names of the villages sound similar to names that are still in use today? For example: *Roanoak* and Roanoke Island, and *Occoneechy* and Occaneechi Mountain.

Evaluation

Have students turn in their activity sheets for evaluation.

Extension

More advanced students may wish to carry the exercise one step further by calculating a rough estimate of each language family’s area in square miles. Explain to the students that the “Historic

Native American Villages” map is a scale drawing, which means that distances on the map differ from real distances by a constant factor. On this map, for example, 1 inch equals 50 miles. This means that the map is drawn so that 1 inch on the map represents 50 miles of real distance on the ground. In order to estimate area in square miles, one can proceed as follows:

- Measure the dimensions of one of the boxes on the “Area Estimation Work Sheet.” (All the boxes are the same size.)
- Convert the dimensions to miles, using the scale factor of the map. For example, if the map is scaled so that 1 inch equals 50 miles, and one side of a box measures $\frac{1}{2}$ inch, then that side equals 25 miles.
- Calculate the area of each box in miles as represented on the map. The area of the box is the length multiplied by the width. In this example, the length and the width both equal $\frac{1}{2}$ inch, or 25 miles on the map. Thus, the area of each box in map units is 25 miles times 25 miles, or 625 square miles.
- Multiply the number of boxes covered by each language family by the area of each box, in this case 625 square miles. For example, an area covered by 5 boxes would be equivalent to 3,125 square miles.

Links

Lesson 4.7: “North Carolina Place Names.”

Sources

- Boyce, Douglas W. 1973. *Tuscarora Political Organization, Ethnic Identity, and Sociohistorical Demography*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.
- Perdue, Theda. 1985. *Native Carolinians: The Indians of North Carolina*. Raleigh: North Carolina Division of Archives and History.
- Stick, David. “Indian Words and Place Names in Coastal North Carolina 400 Years Ago.” Pamphlet. Raleigh: America’s Four Hundreth Anniversary Committee, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources.
- Ward, H. Trawick, and R. P. Stephen Davis, Jr. 1999. *Time Before History: The Archaeology of North Carolina*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. [The image in this lesson’s main heading is taken from Figure 4.6.]
- Wetmore, Ruth Y. 1975. *First on the Land: The North Carolina Indians*. Winston-Salem, N.C.: John F. Blair.

Native American Village Names (from Early Colonial Times)

Algonkian

Neusiok
Secotan
Pomeioc

Chepanoc
Croatan
Moratoc

Roanoke
Pasquenoc
Ramushonoq

Siouan

Otari
Guaquiri
Keyauwee

Occaneechi
Upper Saratown
Lower Saratown

Sissipahaw

Iroquoian (Cherokee)

Tuckasegee
Kituhwa
Nuquassee

Nununyi
Joara
Tocae

Cauchi

Iroquoian (Tuscarora)

Catechna
Haruta
Kenta

Narhunta
Nayharuka
Tosneoc

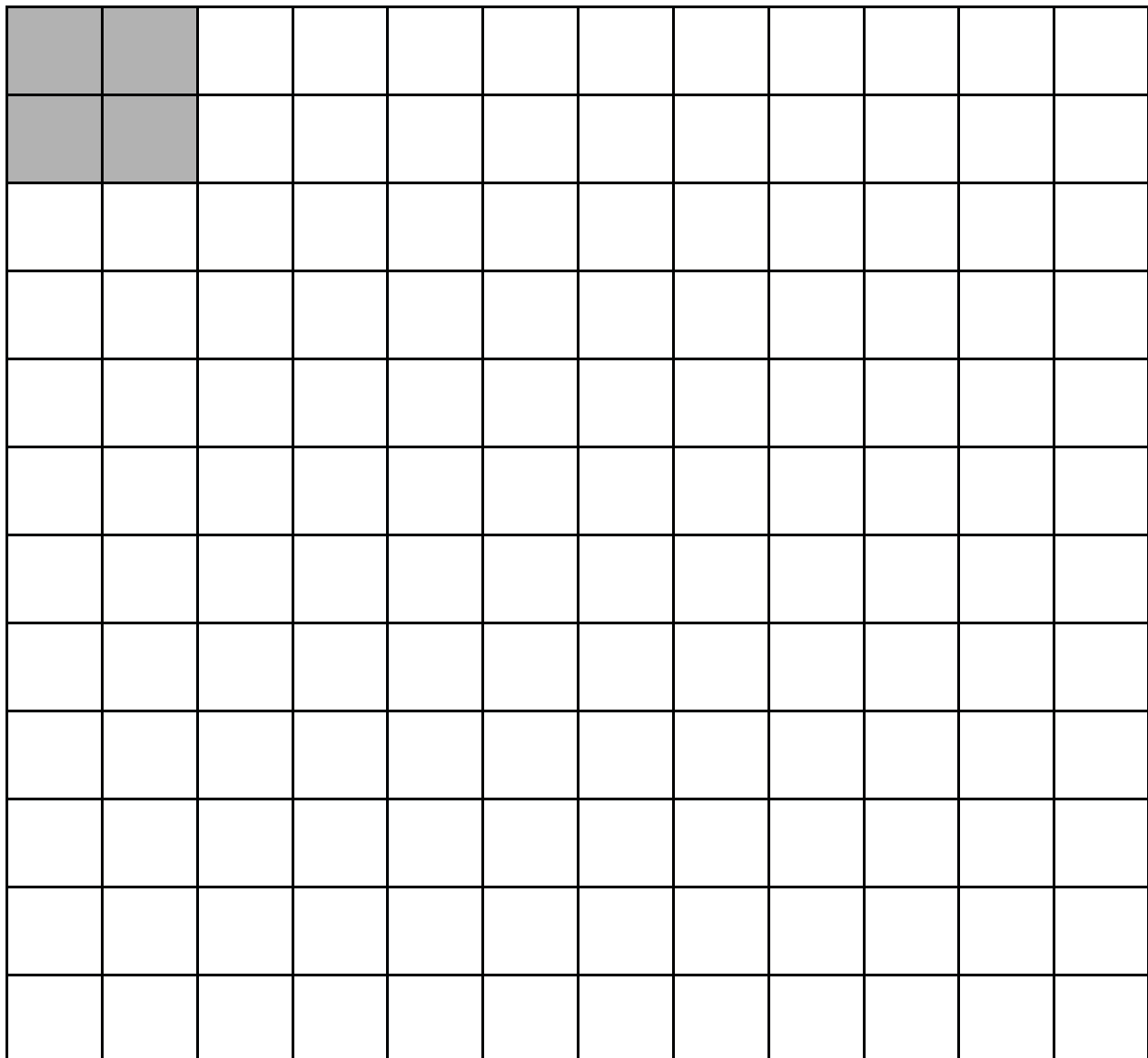
Tonarooka
Ucouhnerunt

Note: You may wonder why the southeastern part of the state is bare of towns. The Waccamaw lived in this part of North Carolina, but no maps have been found that document the locations of their villages.

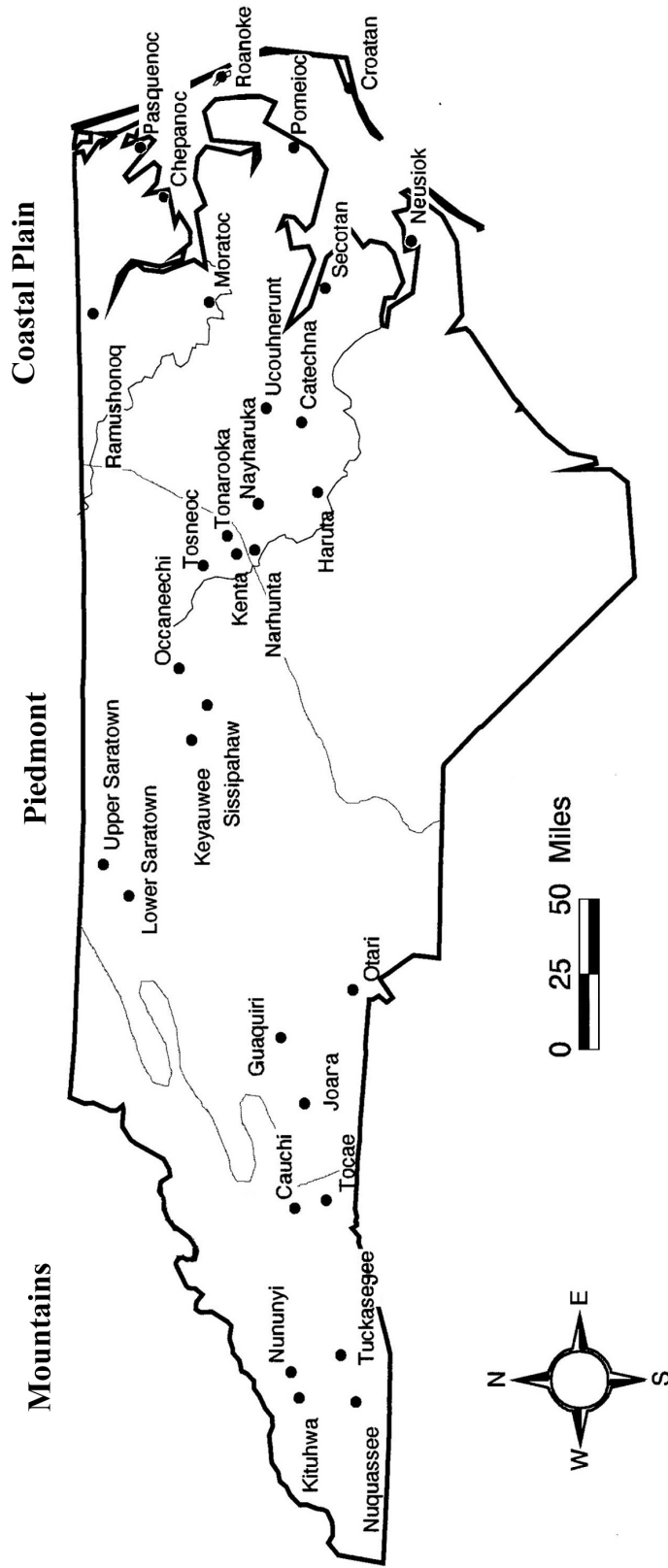
Area Estimation Work Sheet

Use this sheet to help estimate the area covered by the language families of native North Carolinians. Area is defined as the number of square units needed to cover a surface.

Directions: Cut out language family areas using drawn boundaries. Each square box on the grid below is a square unit. Trace the language family area onto the grid and then count the number of squares covered to estimate area (Since the land covered by each language family is not square in shape, not all of each square below will be covered. Therefore it is not possible to measure area accurately, but only to estimate the area covered by each language family. Squares that are less than half covered should not be counted). For example, the area of the shaded blocks below is 4 square units.



Historic Native American Villages



Selected Native American Place Names

