
Lesson 4.7

NORTH CAROLINA PLACE NAMES



Firing mechanism from flintlock pistol, Stokes County, North Carolina, AD 1650–1700.

Subjects: social studies, language arts.

Skills: knowledge, analysis, evaluation.

Strategies: observation, discussion, mapping, compare and contrast.

Duration: 45 minutes.

Class Size: any; groups of 4 to 5.

Objectives

This lesson contrasts and compares the names that Native Americans living in North Carolina gave to their villages and places with the names that European and other settlers gave to theirs. In a study of North Carolina place and village names, students will use a state map to:

- discover the heritage left by Native Americans and settlers in the names of places;
- differentiate the cultural values expressed in names.

Materials

For the teacher, one large state road map. For each group of students, a North Carolina road map, copies of “Native American Place Names” and “Settler Place Names,” along with stars or paper dot markers in two colors.

Background

Echoes of North Carolina’s past peoples linger today in a place’s name. Whether towns, rivers, meadows, or mountains, the names given to locations in North Carolina are derived from a variety of sources. Some come from Indian words, which usually describe the landscape or qualities of the area, such as Nantahala, meaning “land of the noonday sun,” or Cullowhee, meaning “place of the lilies.” Others are taken from commodities or natural resources that were produced by the settlers, such as Sapphire or Cranberry. Still other names are derived from the influence of the English, European, and African settlers, such as Jefferson and Jackson Springs, or from military and religious history.

A name is a word or group of words by which a person, thing, or place is known. Everything has a name which identifies it to others, and it is through names that people can communicate with and understand one another. Names help people tell stories about the past. For example, the town of Silk Hope in Chatham County was probably named before the Civil War, when there was an interest in producing home-grown silk. Sometimes, however, the original meanings of names have been lost. Some Indian place names continued to be used by European settlers, but over time people forgot what the words originally meant. For example, Chockoyotte Creek, which flows into the Roanoke River, is believed to be a Tuscarora word, but its meaning is no longer known.

Setting the Stage

Show students the names and origins of two towns. For example, Jugtown, a small community in Moore County, was named for the hand-turned pottery that has been produced in that area for several centuries. Tuckasegee—the name of a river, a lake, and a community in western North Carolina—is the Cherokee word meaning “crawling terrapin.” What differences, if any, do students notice about the names?

Procedure

1. Give each group of 4 to 5 students a state road map, dots or stars, and a copy of “Native American Place Names” and “Settler Place Names.” Show students how to find a particular place by looking up the name and coordinates on the map index. Depending upon the amount of time you wish to spend on the exercise, you may wish to assign each group only three or four names from each of the two lists.

2. Working cooperatively, students place a star or dot on the map next to each listed place they find. Native American place names should be marked with stars or dots of one color, while European settler place names should be marked with stars of another color.

3. Display a large state map, and ask each group to share two or three places they have found. As the students call out the names and their meanings, place a star on the map.

Closure

In class discussion or in quiz form, ask students to contrast and compare place names derived from Native American culture and those derived from European or other settlers.

- For what kinds of things was each place named?
- What can be learned about past cultures from place names?
- Did Native Americans and settlers tend to live in the same places? What observations support the student’s conclusion?

Evaluation

Have students turn in their maps for evaluation.

Links

Lesson 4.6: “Language Families.”

Sources

Powell, William S. 1968. *The North Carolina Gazetteer*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Smith, Shelley J., Jeanne M. Moe, Kelly A. Letts, and Danielle M. Paterson. 1993. *Intrigue of the Past: A Teacher’s Activity Guide for Fourth through Seventh Grades*. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Department of the Interior. [This lesson is adapted from “State Place Names” on pp. 127–130, courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.]

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 7.13.]

Native American Place Names

Chapanoke: a community in Perquimans County; named for an Indian village *Chepanoc*, whose name meant “Land of the Dead.”

Chinquapin: a community in Duplin County; named after an Algonquian word for a type of chestnut.

Chocowinity: a town in Beaufort County; said to be named after an Indian word meaning “fish from many waters.”

Culowhee: a community in Jackson County; originally named Kullaughee Valley, a Native American name meaning “Place of the Lilies.”

Hatteras: an Outer Banks island; apparently an English rendition of the Algonkian expression “there is less vegetation.”

Hiwassee: a lake in Cherokee County; named after the Cherokee word *awuhwá-si*, meaning “a meadow.”

Junaluska: a lake in Haywood County; named to honor Junaluska, the Cherokee chief who saved Andrew Jackson’s life at the battle of Horseshoe Bend in 1812.

Nantahala: a National Forest in western North Carolina; named for the Cherokee word *Nan-toh-ee-yah-heh-lih*, meaning “Sun in the Middle” or “Land of the Noonday Sun.”

Saxapahaw: a community in Alamance County; named for the Sissipahaw Indians who once lived in the area.

Swannanoa: a community in Buncombe County; name is derived from the Cherokee word *Suwali-Nunna*, meaning “trail of the Suwali tribe.”

Tuckasegee: a river in Western North Carolina; named for Cherokee word meaning “crawling terrapin.”

Settler Place Names

Cash Corner: a community in Pamlico County; named for a store located at the crossroads that sold goods less expensively for cash than on credit.

Cerro Gordo: a town in Columbus County; named for the Mexican battlefield where General Winfield Scott fought a battle in 1847. In Spanish the name means “big hill.”

Charlotte: a city in Mecklenburg County; named for Queen Charlotte (1744–1818), wife of King George III.

Fruitland: a community in Henderson County; named for the large amount of fruit produced there.

Marble: a community in Cherokee County; named for the deposits of marble located near there.

Micaville: a community in Yancey county; named for the mica mined in this area.

Micro: a town in Johnston County; name came from the small size of the town.

Sapphire: a town in Transylvania County; named because sapphires are found in the vicinity.

Seaboard: a town in Northampton County; named for the Seaboard Air Line Railroad.

Snead’s Ferry: a community in Onslow County; named for Robert Snead, the ferry operator in the late 18th century.

Tobaccolville: a community in Forsyth County; named for a chewing tobacco factory built there in the 1880s.