



My Basket

Native California Culture & Social Emotional Skills Workbook

(Fourth Grade-Middle School)

The Unfinished Basket

❖ *Introduction*

This workbook will help you describe your strengths and identify some goals. To help you in this process, we will use the **basket** as a metaphor of your current state-of-mind. We are not literally baskets, but we sure have a lot in common with them.

Depending on the type, baskets serve a purpose. They hold hot river stones and acorn meal to cook mush. Some are decorative and generate income. They trap eels, gather sea weed and basket materials themselves. Others hold medicine and are used in ceremony.

Just like baskets, we hold different roles in life. This role may develop and change over time. Young people are unfinished baskets. You are not done yet. But your sticks, roots, the beginnings of your design came from somewhere.

Activity #1: Where do I come from?

❖ *Family Interview*

The natural fibers that make us who we are come from various ecosystems, climates and soils. Just like bear grass of the high country intertwines with spruce roots from the damp coast to create a unique pattern, our “fibers” connect us to certain places, parents and ancestors. They give us a foundation of attributes and strength. Pick a time to sit down with a member of your family that knows about your family history. Ask your family member the following questions and take notes or audio record their answers:

- Where are some of the places my parents or grandparents lived? Did they live in one place or move around?
- What kinds of jobs did they do? What were they good at?
- What important qualities do you think I inherited from them? How do I currently use those traits in my life? How could I maybe use them in the future?
- Identify at least one plant that grew from the place my ancestors lived that was useful or important to them. How did they use this plant? Do you know who cared for the place that produced the plant? If so, what did they do?

❖ *Journal Entry*

Write 1-2 paragraphs summarizing the answers to your interview questions.

Activity #2: *What kind of basket am I?*

❖ *Discussion*

Pick a partner to share the strengths you identified in Activity #1. Take turns discussing the following:

- What are my strengths?
- What different kinds of jobs could I do with these strengths?
- Who do I know who does this type of job? What are their skills? What did they have to do to get that job?

❖ *Art*

Now turn your attention to a blank page. At the bottom of the page, list 3-5 of these strengths you discussed with your partner. Above this list, draw or paint a picture of an un-finished basket that represents your current stage in life. Do not worry if your basket looks realistic or not. Your basket represents your personal traits and personality. As you draw, you might consider the following:

- Does my basket have a special shape?
- Are my sticks thick or thin? Is there variation in their thickness or are they uniform?
- Have some sticks broke and been replaced with stronger sticks?
- Are there different types of plants overlaying my roots to create a design? What does this design look like? What color is it? Is this an old pattern that has been used by others or is it new? As you create your design, perhaps think about it as representing your path in life.

❖ *Journal Entry*

Reflect on the pattern you created in your basket and write a paragraph on the following

- Does the pattern represent something? Give a name to the pattern.
- What might the purpose of this basket be? Visualize how this basket may grow in size and pattern. What would it look like as it grew?
- Can you visualize a role you would like to play in the future? What are some of the steps you would have to take to prepare for that role?

Activity #3: How does my Basket Grow?

❖ Journal Entry

Weavers create beautiful work when their mind is clear and calm. We all have big thoughts and feelings that come and go, like messengers. Sometimes these thoughts and feelings can be overwhelming. Paying attention to our body by moving it in a purposeful way can help us release the stress.

- Name 2-3 physical activities you can do (sports, dance, stretching, hiking or crafting) that help your body calm down when stressed.
- Name at least 2 people you can talk to, who will listen, when you need help.
- How we relate to the place we live and how we treat people around us is important. Identify 1 way you help to take care of the place you live. How does that make a difference? List 2-3 ways you treat other people that is useful to them. How do you know it's useful?

Activity #4: Where does my Basket Grow?

❖ Research (Conducted with library resources and class interview with park ranger at a local state park or ecological preserve)

Acknowledge the Indigenous territory in which your school resides by researching the tribe that lived and/or currently lives in your town. This is where you live and grow. As you gather information, consider the following:

- Geographical boundaries for tribal territory
- Foods
- Ecosystems that produced shelter, tools or useful plants
- The most important plants or natural materials used in their culture
- Historical events that brought immigrants to settle their area
- Did the Indigenous people stay or were they removed to another location?
- How did the landscape and ecosystems change with the new settlers? Why?
- Are there current efforts in your town to restore these ecosystems and plant life?
- What noticeable changes have occurred with ecological preservation efforts?
- How can you help these efforts?

❖ Research Summary

Produce a 1-2 page written summary of your research findings. Cite sources.

❖ *Art*

Draw a map of your county with the geographical boundaries of the tribal territory in which you reside. Label the tribal territory. On the second page, draw a detailed picture of a plant that is important in the cultural practices or productions of that tribe. Draw a picture of the type of landscape in which it grows and label important participants in that ecosystem including animals, plants and water systems.

❖ *Small Group Environmental Challenge*

Within a small group, identify a place in your county where an important Indigenous plant grows. Visit this place with your group. Who takes care of this place? What plant species are surrounding this plant? Are they Indigenous or invasive? Is this plant being used for its Indigenous purpose? Is it being misused? Brainstorm with your group ways you could care for the health of this place. If possible, consult with a community person holding cultural and/or environmental knowledge. Identify 3 action steps you can take as a group to promote the healthy propagation of this plant and stewardship of the place in which it grows. What are some potential consequences of these action steps? What action do you personally commit to? Write 3 paragraphs to summarize your group discussion, action steps and personal commitment. Present your group findings to the large group. Divide up the speaking responsibilities and include visual aids.

❖ *Creative Writing Challenge*

Fill in the blanks of the following template to create your own poem. Choose the words that represent you best. The words may contain feelings, ideas or images. This poem is the artistic culmination of all the work you have done reflecting on your attributes. Like baskets, poems are the result of a lot of learning and labor. Poems are meant to be shared, and when spoken, carry a power not present in the written word. This is why we are careful with what we say aloud. Poems have the potential to increase understanding of ourselves and others. Please share your poem aloud with a partner or a group.

My Basket

By: _____

My basket is made of _____, _____ and

_____ and

_____.

It isn't _____ nor _____.

It is _____.

My stiches are _____ and _____

making a pattern of _____

that moves like _____

and looks like _____.

My basket can _____

with _____, _____ and

_____.

I carry _____

in order to _____.

I release _____ when needed to _____,

My basket belongs

to _____.

References

This curriculum was developed by Rebecca Lowry, ASW, MSW, (Delaware Tribe of Indians) using principles of mindfulness in social work as taught by Dr. Michael Yellow Bird (Hidatsa, Arikara) at Humboldt State University (2011). Lowry also holds a CA State Teaching Credential in English. The “Unfinished Basket” art by Weshoyot Alvitre (2020) may be printed as a part of this curriculum guide but may not be used for any other purpose.

Instructional Note

This curriculum is a guide and may be adjusted to meet the developmental and educational level of participants.

Relevant California State Standards

- **English Language Arts/Literacy: Grades 6-8**
- https://www.scoe.net/castandards/Documents/parent_overview_ela_6-8.pdf
- Critical thinking and analysis; comprehending informational text; research, writing & technology; developing language skills.

- **English Language Arts/Literacy: Grades 3-5**
- https://www.scoe.net/castandards/Documents/parent_overview_ela_3-5.pdf
- Reading comprehension & writing skills; analysis of text; developing language skills; speaking & listening skills.

- **History/Social Science Framework: Grades 4-5**
- Inquiry-based standards will encourage creative & collaborative projects to build research and presentation skills. Topics include early formation of California, Indigenous cultures, geography and civics.
 - 4th Grade: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/hs/cf/documents/hssfchapter7.pdf>
 - 5th Grade: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/hs/cf/documents/hssfchapter8.pdf>

