Teacher Background

A Most Luxuriant Landscape

It is not known exactly when the first contact occurred between European explorers and Puget Sound Indians. The earliest sailing expeditions apparently overlooked Puget Sound entirely. In 1792, the British ship, the HMS Discovery, led by Captain James Vancouver was dispatched to explore reports of an opening in the mainland which we now know as the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Vancouver's goal, was in part to search for the legendary Northwest Passage, but he was also looking to strengthen British claims to the territory.

When Vancouver sailed the Discovery through the Strait of Juan de Fuca in April of that year, he and his men became the first white explorers to set eyes on Puget Sound. This misty, mountainous land, so rich in forests, game, and abundant marine life impressed him greatly. The following descriptions of Puget Sound and its people were recorded in the journals of the Discovery's crew:

The land:

"a most luxuriant landscape."

"a continued forest extending north as far as the eye could reach."

"The Soil appeared good and produced a quantity of Gooseberry, Raspberry and Current Berries now highly in Blossom which intermixed with Roses, exhibited a Strange Variation of Flowers. . . "

" . . .luxuriant ferns that grow overhead. . ."

fog *"so thick we could not see the boats from the tents . . ."*

Mount Rainier:

"A most charming prospect . . . appeared close to us at least 10 to 12 leagues off. The low land at the head of the Bay swelled out very gradually to form a most beautiful and Majestic Mountain of great elevation whose line of ascent appeared equally smooth & gradual on every side with a round obtuse summit covered two thirds of its height down with perpetual Snow as were also the summits of a rugged ridge of Mountains that proceed from it to the Northward."

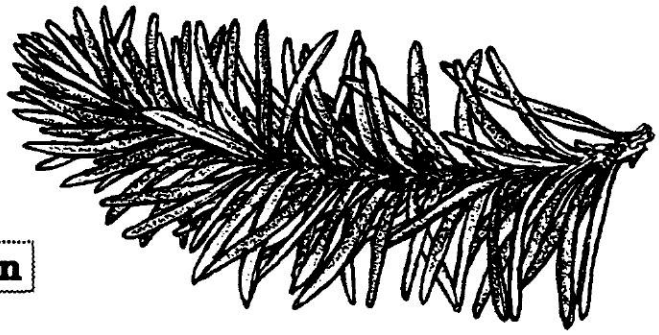
The Indians:

"We landed for a short time and were received by the inhabitants with all the Friendship and Hospitality we could have expected. . . They lived under a kind of Shed open at the Front and Sides. The women appeared employed in the Domestic Duties such as curing Clams & Fish, making baskets of various reeds,

so neatly woven that they were perfectly water tight. The occupations of the men I believe consist chiefly in Fishing, constructing Canoes and performing all the laborious work of the Village . . .

". . .their Faces were ornamented. Streaks of Red Ochre & Black Glimmer were on some, others entirely with the Former, and a few gave the Preferences to the latter. Every person had a fashion of his own, and to us who were Strangers to Indians this Sight conveyed a Stronger Force of the Savageness of the Native Inhabitants than any other Circumstance we had hitherto met with; not but their Conduct, friendly and inoffensive had already merited our warmest Approbation, but their Appearance was absolutely terrific. . . . Though we could not behold these Ornaments with the same satisfactory Eye as themselves, yet in receiving Looking Glasses, each native appeared well satisfied with his own Fashion; at least the Paint was not altered. They likewise had the Hair covered with the Down of Birds, which certainly was a good substitute for powder. Their Paint only differed in the Colour and not the Quantity used by our own Fair Countrywomen. In these two Instances we meet with some Resemblance to our Customs and I believe the above mentioned Ornaments were of a Ceremonious Nature for our Reception at the Village."

Source for the above quotations: Murray Morgan, *Puget's Sound: A Narrative of Early Tacoma and the Southern Sound.* Seattle and London: University of Washington Press.



Lesson Plan

A Most Luxuriant Landscape

Student Objectives:

The students will visualize Puget Sound as it looked when first explored by Captain George Vancouver's expedition in 1792. They will describe the first contact between Indians and white explorers from the perspectives of either a white youth or an Indian youth.

Materials:

- One copy per student, A MOST LUXURIANT LANDSCAPE

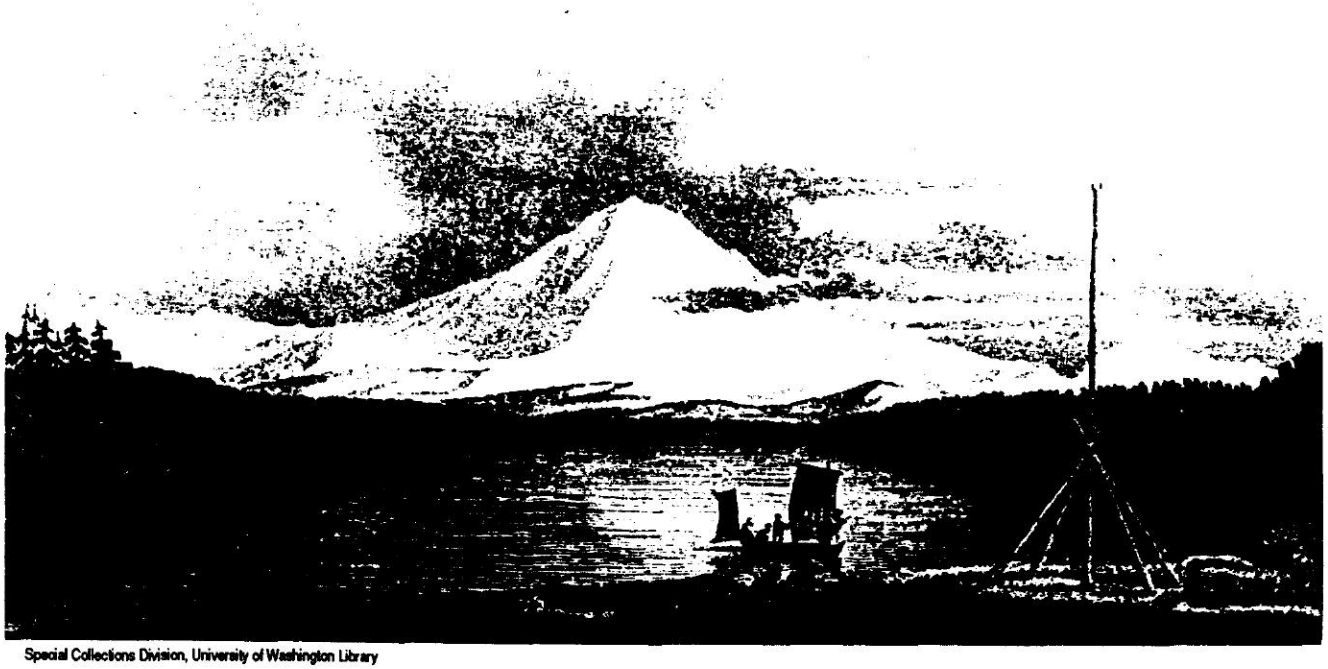
Procedure:

1. Ask your students to imagine Puget Sound as it must have looked before the arrival of European explorers. Describe the first exploratory expedition to Puget Sound, led by Captain Vancouver in 1792.
2. Read as many of the excerpts in the Teacher's Background from the voyage's journals to your students as you like, helping them with the unfamiliar language of the period. You may also want to remind them of the elaborate dress styles popular at that time in Europe: powdered wigs, floor-length gowns, furs and feathers.
3. Distribute Student Pages, "A Most Luxuriant Landscape" to your students. The activity will ask them to put themselves in the place of either a member of the Discovery's crew or a Puget Sound Indian. Using the student pages as a guide, they will write their impressions of the expedition's entrance into the Sound.

Answer Key

1. Your students should have no trouble listing many products of our civilization which would not have been present at the time of Captain Vancouver's expedition.
2. Some sights undoubtedly seen by the explorers but no longer visible locally include immense stands of virgin timber, enormous salmon runs, traditional Indian cultural practices, and of course, the ships, tools, and artifacts of the explorers themselves. Certain animals such as wolf and grizzley bear are no longer present in our area.
3. Things which haven't changed much would include the gross features of land and water, the mountains, beaches, and shorelines wherever they have been left in a natural state. Wildlife such as eagles, sea lions, and orca whales are still relatively common sights.

A Most Luxuriant Landscape



Special Collections Division, University of Washington Library

In late April, 1792, a British explorer, Captain James Vancouver, sailed his ship, the HMS Discovery through the Straits of Juan de Fuca and eastward into Puget Sound. On May 20th, 1792, it anchored near what is now called Bainbridge Island. Sixteen men in two small boats spent the next week exploring the south Sound. Its crew sketched and mapped the Sound, and identified plants and animals of the area. They also established first contact with the Salish Indians who lived here.

The following descriptions of Puget Sound were recorded in the journals of the Discovery's crew:

"a most luxuriant landscape."

"a continued forest extending north as far as the eye could reach."

"The Soil appeared good and produced a quantity of Gooseberry, Raspberry and Currant Berries now highly in Blossom which intermixed with Roses, exhibited a Strange Variation of Flowers..."

"...luxuriant ferns that grow overhead..."

fog "so thick we could not see the boat from our tents..."

"A most charming prospect ... appeared close to us at least 10 to 12 leagues off. The low land at the head of the Bay swelled out very gradually to form a most beautiful and Majestic Mountain of great elevation whose line of ascent appeared equally & gradual on every side with a round obtuse summit covered two thirds of its height down with perpetual Snow as were also the summits of a rugged ridge of Mountains that proceed from it to the Northward."

At the time of Vancouver's expedition to Puget Sound, it was extremely common for sailors to begin a career at sea at age 12 or 14. It is very likely that one or more of Vancouver's crew were no older than yourself! Imagine you were on this expedition, and were among the first Europeans to view Puget Sound as it looked at that time. Put yourself back in time. . . .

1. What are some things about Puget Sound today which you wouldn't have seen in 1792?

2. What are some things Vancouver's crew probably saw on their explorations which you are unlikely to see around the Sound today?

3. What things probably haven't changed much?

Special Collections Division, University of Washington Library

The first contact between Indians and Europeans, two very different cultures, must have been a startling experience for both. Imagine what it felt like for each of them:

a. You are a member of Captain Vancouver's expedition exploring and mapping Puget Sound. You and your party are the first Europeans ever to see sights like Deception Pass, the San Juan Islands, or even Mount Rainier! You are amazed by the size of the Douglas fir and cedar trees along the shore. You are also the first whites to meet the Indians living here.

b. You are a young Salish Indian who has never before seen a white person or a tall sailing ship. You are surprised at the appearance of these tall, bearded men with their noisy guns. You don't know what to make of the strange things they are offering you in trade for food and water. What can you imagine about their ways of life and their purposes for coming to your land?

First, make a choice to be either a young British sailor or a young Salish Indian.

a. If you have chosen to be a sailor, record your impressions of the land and its people as journal entries written over three days of travels aboard the Discovery or one of its small launches. Describe your party's first encounter with some of its Indians.

b. If you have chosen to be a Salish Indian, record your version of the encounter as though you were describing it to a family member.

Be sure to write your impressions in complete sentences. Remember, all of what you see is new to you. Have a great adventure!