



Sheena
Azak
of
Canada

From the
Children of Other Lands
Series

Teacher's Guide
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Produced by
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Children of Other Lands: SHEENA AZAK of CANADA

Time: 14:34

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

As the video opens, Sheena Azak and her family are seen on their twice-a-month trip to Terrace, Canada, to grocery shop. The Azaks live about an hour and a half away, in Canyon City, better known as *Gitwinksilhlkw* in the language of the Nisga'a Indians. The Azaks are members of the Nisga'a tribe, and their lives reflect both the ancient ways of the Nisga'a, and the more modern ways of Canadian life today. Sheena and her family shop in a modern supermarket, but they also get much of their food from the Nass River that flows by their village. The Azaks are seen fishing for salmon in the river, and then preserving the fish in a smoke house. Sheena, 8 years old, also is seen preparing her first salmon, a major

event for Nisga'a girls. In addition, she is seen helping her grandparents mend fishing nets. On Sunday, Sheena and her family attend church services conducted by Salvation Army workers. The service is in both English and Nisga'a, and Nisga'a drums are played as members of the congregation sing hymns. Later in the day, the family picnics with relatives at a scenic lakeside area, and the narrator mentions the deep respect of nature held by the Nisga'a. When the family returns home, the children watch a little television, then do their homework. In the morning, they take a bus to school. Sheena and her younger sister are in a shared second and third grade classroom. The teacher tells the class a Nisga'a story, then the students have an art activity. Later in the day, the students study with a Nisga'a language teacher. After school, Sheena attends native dancing classes, and in the evening the tribe practices their dancing in full regalia.

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

After viewing this video and participating in the suggested activities, students should be able to do the following:

- (1) Locate Canada and the province of British Columbia on a map.
- (2) Briefly review the living patterns of a modern Nisga'a child, including food gathering, schooling, leisure activities and eating habits.
- (3) Compare and contrast their lives with the life of Sheena Azak.
- (4) Describe the physical surroundings of *Gitwinksihlkw*, Canada, and tell how that environment affects the life of Sheena Azak and her family.

SUGGESTED LESSON PLAN

Introduction

“Sheena Azak of Canada” affords a unique opportunity for students to see how a North American native population lives in today’s world. Sheena and her family appear to combine the best aspects of both their traditional culture and Anglo society. They respect nature and use it to their benefit, but they are not opposed to incorporate the conveniences of modern life into their everyday living patterns.

Pre-Viewing Activities

Locate Canada on your classroom map or globe. Ask your students if anyone knows anything about the country. Does anyone know a person who lives in Canada? Has anyone in the class ever visited Canada? If so, have class members discuss what they know about that country. Then ask your class if they’ve ever known a child who has lived in Canada. What do they suppose it would be like to live there? Would living there be different than living here? Would a person live in a different kind of house? Eat different foods? Go to a different kind of school? See different things on the street? Would it make a difference if a person lived in a large Canadian city or a small village? Tell the class they will now see a video entitled “Sheena Azak of Canada.” Explain that the program will tell not only about Sheena and her family, but also about the village where she lives. Ask the class to pay close attention to how the village and countryside look, and to the different activities of Sheena and her family.

How do the rivers and mountains affect the life of the Azak family and the other people who live in their village? Explain that after everyone sees the program, you’ll want to compare how Sheena lives with how they live.

Post-Viewing Activities

Discuss how the Nass River affects the life of Sheena and her family. Ask the class if they think the lives of the Azaks would be different if they did not live so close to a large river. In what ways? On the chalkboard, write three categories, “My Life,” “Sheena’s Life,” and “Similar or Different?” Discuss schooling, recreation, nutrition, religious beliefs, region, home, and neighborhood. As the class discusses each of these aspects of Sheena’s and their own lives, write their comments on the chalkboard. If any members of your class or their parents have lived in Canada, you might invite them to talk about their experiences in that country. Has anyone vacationed in Canada? Can they bring in momentos of the trip as a show-and-tell activity?

Your class may be interested to know that all Nisga’a people are members of one of four clans, or family groups -- killer whales, ravens, wolves and eagles. Sheena and her sister and brothers are ravens because that’s Mrs. Azak’s clan (descent is matrilineal). Mr. Azak, a manager who helps take care of Nisga’a tribal business and the president of the Canadian Firefighter’s Association, is an eagle. Mrs. Azak is a dental technician. Your students may also find it interesting that the Azaks forage for berries during the summer, and, in addition to fishing for salmon, catch oolichan, a member of the smelt family. Oolichan have a high fat content, and are used in cooking.

TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

Friday evening in Terrace, Canada, and the Azak family has come to town -- as they do twice a month -- to do their grocery shopping.

They’ve been on the road for an hour and a half and everyone’s hungry, so they decide on a pizza dinner before heading to the supermarket.

There are seven Azaks -- Mr. Azak, on the left; eight-year-old Sheena, sitting next to him; her big brothers Clifford Jr., in the yellow shirt and baseball cap; Adam, sitting at the right; and Medrick. Sheena also has a sister, seven-year-old Naquitta. Mrs. Azak, the seventh family member, is feeding little cousin Drae who's come along for the ride.

The dinner conversation centers on the family's weekend plans, which will include many activities -- among them, something special for Sheena.

She's going to cut and prepare her first salmon, a major event for young girls of the Nisga'a Indian tribe, to which Sheena and her family belong.

Nisga'a lands are found in western Canada, in the province of British Columbia, one of ten provinces and two territories in that country.

Most of Canada's 27 million people live in large cities located to the south.

For the most part, Canadian city dwellers live much like city dwellers elsewhere in the world, particularly those who make their homes in the United States or in western Europe.

Canadians who live in cities have jobs similar to those in the U.S., and similar ways of relaxing, playing, learning and shopping.

Of course, Canadians like the Azaks, those who live in smaller communities, also do many things city dwellers do. For example, they shop in a modern supermarket.

But in other ways, the life of Sheena Azak and her family is quite different.

Their village, Canyon City, is home to only 180 people, all of whom are Nisga'a.

The village, called *Gitwinksihlkw* in the Nisga'a language, lies in the shadow of Canada's coastal mountains.

And unless you're a strong swimmer, there's only one way to get to it -- a foot bridge that spans the Nass River.

The Nass is important to the Azaks and everyone else in their village. It

provides much of the family's food -- as it has for the Nisga'a people for thousands of years.

On weekends, during fishing season, the Azaks lay nets to trap salmon. It's called "drifting," named for the long drift nets that are spread through the water.

In time, the fish swim into the nets, are trapped and then pulled aboard. Of course, big ones do get away from time to time!

In the Azak family, it's the job of the oldest boys -- Medrick and Clifford, Jr. -- to pull in the nets and let them out.

It's the job of the children's grandparents -- Grandmother Phoebe and Grandfather Edward -- to untangle and repair them. Sheena often helps.

Her grandfather usually sharpens several knives for the job because the parts of the net that can't be untangled must be cut and then restrung.

Learning to take care of fish nets is an important part of Sheena's education as member of the Nisga'a tribe.

GRANDMA PHOEBE: Hold them in one hand as I go along so I can tie them together when I'm ready to hang them.

NARRATOR: Something else that's important -- as we've already mentioned -- is learning how to prepare salmon.

MRS. AZAK: Okay, you cut right down the bone. Remember, you watched Mommy? Down on the bone, there. Drag your knife down. Be careful.

NARRATOR: Sheena's aunt also has been teaching her how to prepare salmon. Nisga'a girls usually learn such things from their aunts.

Both her mother and aunt have taught Sheena to use the knife safely. She isn't allowed to use a one unless an adult is present.

The villagers in *Gitwinksihlkw* will soon learn about Sheena's first-time preparation of salmon, for the Azaks will share this fish, and others, to celebrate the event.

Once the salmon has been cut outside the smoke house, it's time to preserve them inside.

After the fish are hung, Medrick and Clifford start a fire and smoke begins to fill the room.

The fish will be smoked for about 24 hours, then cut into strips, and then smoked again.

This age-old method of preserving fish was very useful long ago, when there were no refrigerators or freezers. Today, however, it serves as a way to keep Nisga'a traditions alive -- and a way to make the fish taste delicious!

Sunday morning, and time for church in *Gitwinksihlkw*.

In many ways, the village church service could be in almost any other place where Christianity is practiced. Hymns are sung, prayers are recited, and a sermon is given. Announcements are made, too.

But there are some differences. Part of the service is in the Nisga'a language and a traditional Nisga'a drum accompanies many songs.

What's more, the church is run by people in the Salvation Army, an organization that preaches Christian beliefs to people in many foreign lands.

Later in the day, the Azaks join some relatives for a picnic at a lake located a few miles away.

While the food is being prepared, some of the older boys go swimming in a nearby pond.

Sheena, Naquitta and some of their cousins prefer to just splash around!

A Sunday afternoon by the lake also gives Mr. Azak an opportunity to spend some quality time with Adam, teaching him how to fly cast.

Sometimes, Sheena likes to heads off on her own to hunt tadpoles.

MR. AZAK: The first thing that's going to happen is that it's going to get little legs in the back, there. You're not allowed to play with them too much.

NARRATOR: So Sheena puts the tadpoles back into the water. The Nisga'a people have a deep respect for nature. To them, all living things -- and the earth -- are sacred.

Later, when the food is ready, everyone digs in!

All too soon, however, the picnic ends and it's time to head home to prepare for the upcoming week.

After watching a little TV, everyone settles down to do some homework. Sheena has enlisted Clifford to help her with tomorrow's spelling pretest.

Monday morning, and another busy school and work week is about to begin.

There's barely enough time to eat breakfast, make sandwiches for lunch, get the lunch bag assembly line going, and tie up all those loose ends before it's time to leave.

Every morning, all the children in the village cross the foot bridge to get to the bus stop on the other side of the river.

Sheena usually sits with her cousin Christine, one of her best friends, on the way to school.

Usually, the students at the Nisga'a Elementary and Secondary School have a few minutes to play outside before the bell rings.

There are nineteen second and third graders in Sheena's class.

Today, Mrs. Santa, her teacher, has started the class by telling a Nisga'a story about how some nearby lava beds -- a large area of rocks that flowed into the area when a volcano erupted -- came to be.

As the tale goes, some mischievous children placed hot, glowing rocks inside the backs of salmon. But when the tribal elders came by...

MRS. SANTA: ... they saw the lights, the fire. And they told the children, "This is our food. This is the salmon! The Nisga'a always treat the salmon with great respect because this is our food! Stop doing that! You're hurting these fish!"

So some of the children stopped. Some of the children didn't.

And the elders were very disappointed. "Don't you have any respect for the salmon? This is our food! The Creator is going to get very angry!"

And He did! There was a big mountain close by. And all of a sudden,

there's a rumble and a roar, and it blows up! The volcano erupts!

NARRATOR: Next, Sheena and her classmates draw pictures of the story during art class.

Then, it's on to the spelling pretest.

The final class before lunch is a Nisga'a language lesson, taught by Mrs. Gosnell.

As you can see, the children learn Nisga'a words by looking at flash cards, and then repeating the Nisga'a word for the object that's shown.

By the end of class, everyone's ready for lunch period which, at Sheena's school, is often more than simply a time to eat.

Afterwards, there's time to play outside.

During the afternoon, the children in Sheena's class will study science, reading and social studies. On other days, they'll have lessons in penmanship, music and physical education.

Then, after school, at a nearby community center, Sheena and Naquitta join some other children who live in the area to practice traditional Nisga'a dances.

The class helps the children prepare for a full-dress rehearsal of all the tribal dancers held later in the evening.

In a few months, the group will present a program at an international sporting event.

So everyone works very hard under the watchful eye of the chief of the Nisga'a tribe to make the dances energetic and exciting.

Sheena Azak's life is one of contrasts. On one hand, it's a life of traditional Nisga'a customs and beliefs.

But it is also a life of modern Canada.

Sheena Azak, a child of another land -- a child of Canada.