Canoeing

This field activity lesson introduces students to the fundamental concepts of paddling a canoe. Although the major emphasis of this session will be on canoeing, the proper use of rowboats will also be covered. In canoeing, a variety of skills can be taught, including proper techniques for loading and unloading from a dock, carrying, as well as various paddle strokes. Students will work in pairs and practice various strokes to move a canoe in all directions. This session is intended to give students an opportunity to experience canoeing or row boating in a recreational rather than an academic setting.

OBJECTIVES:

After completing this field experience, students will:
1. Be able to identify the parts of a canoe and paddle.
2. Be able to perform canoe strokes and maneuvers.
3. Be able to work with their paddling partner to move the canoe in the desired direction.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- PFD’s (one per student)
- Canoes (one per pair)
- Paddles (one per student)
- Buoys—pairs spread out across lake Wapalanne

PROCEDURES:

On Dry Land:
1. Divide the students into pairs—each pair will share a canoe
2. Distribute personal flotation devices and paddles. If needed, demonstrate how to properly fit a PFD.
3. Demonstrate how to hold the paddle
   a. Parts of the paddle: grip, shaft, blade, tip, powerface, backface (see diagram on the right)
      i. **Powerface**: the side of the blade the presses against the water during a forward stroke
      ii. **Backface**: the side of the blade the presses against the water during a backward stroke
b. Hands should be about shoulder width apart with powerface facing the paddler. The only difference between the powerface and the backface is that the powerface has paint on it so that it can be easily recognized.

4. Demonstrate the different paddle strokes the students will be using; start with forward stroke, backstroke, and rudder.
   a. **C-P-R** – stands for the three phases of any paddle stroke.
      i. C: the **catch** phase of a stroke; that moment when the blade catches the water.
      ii. P: the **power** part of the stroke
      iii. R: the **recovery** phase; the process of returning the blade to the start for a new stroke.
   b. The **forward stroke** is the primary stroke used in canoeing. This moves the canoe forward. Hold the paddle vertically, have both hands over the water, lean forward slightly and twist your body so that your shaft hand is in front of the grip hand. From the catch, untwist and sit-up simultaneously for the power phase keeping both arms straight until the paddle is near your hips. Lift the paddle out of the water, and return to the catch. If you notice the canoe is turning then both paddlers switch sides to compensate, and repeat as needed.
   c. The **backstroke** uses the backface and is the reverse of the forward stroke. It is used for those times when you need to stop or to back-up the boat.
   d. **Rudder** or “**Sharkfin**” is a turning stroke. This stroke is only done by the rear (stern) paddler.

**On The Water:**

1. Have students enter their canoes. Boats should be trim (sitting flat on the water) when entering. The easiest way to enter the boat is to sit on the dock next to the boat, then transfer over to the seat of the boat.
2. Once all students are in their boats, demonstrate the different strokes on the water and then have the class practice them in their canoes.
3. Describe the roles of each paddler
   a. **Bow (front) paddler:** Power position; sets the paddling pace and keeps an eye on what’s ahead to avoid obstacles; controls the bow end of the canoe
   b. **Stern paddler:** Steering position; keeps pace with the bow paddler and controls the overall path of the canoe; controls the stern of the canoe
4. Allow students to practice the strokes they learned on land. If they quickly show proficiency with the basic strokes, teach them the draw stroke, the pry stroke, and the stern rudder stroke (a corrective stroke used by the stern paddler). Depending on the students’ ages and ability levels, you may not have time to teach these new strokes.
a. **Draw stroke.** Is a turning stroke if partners are paddling on opposite sides of the vessel as they should. If they are on the same side it moves the boat sideways (abeam). Holding the paddle vertically, reach both hands over the water and pull the powerface of the blade toward your hip. As the blade approaches the boat, turn the grip hand away from you and slice the paddle through the water for the recovery phase of the stroke. If you wait too long, it is easy to “trip” over your paddle and this may cause the canoe to tip over. A less elegant recovery is to lift the blade out of the water and return to the starting position for the next draw stroke.

b. The **Pry stroke** is very nearly the reverse of the draw stroke and therefore uses the backface of the blade. It is also a turning stroke. Hold the paddle vertically, hands over the water and push the paddle away from the canoe. The recovery is also a slicing motion that returns the blade back under the canoe.

c. The **Stern Rudder Stroke** is a corrective stroke that is done by the stern paddler. At the end of a forward stroke, simply shift into a **stern pry stroke** which is applied as far behind as can comfortably reach. This is accomplished by twisting the grip-hand thumb upward, and applying pressure with the backface of the blade. This stroke starts out with a forward stroke using the powerface, but switches to the backface for a pry at the end.

5. Make sure students are reviewing and practicing their strokes on both sides of the canoe.

6. Once students have demonstrated proficiency with all the strokes, have the teams return to the docks and switch paddling positions, then practice their strokes in their new roles.

**Maneuvers:**

Once students are proficient with the basic strokes, challenge them to complete the following maneuvers:

- Paddle in a straight line
- Stop in a reasonable distance
- Make a U-turn
- Spin the canoe
- Move the boat sideways without moving it forward (need draw and pry strokes first)

**EXTENSION: MORE ADVANCED STROKES**

As the instructor, don’t feel compelled to teach every stroke here. When your students have mastered the strokes mentioned above, then you may want to add those listed below.

The “**J**” stroke is a commonly used corrective stroke and is only done by the **stern paddler**. While the vessel is moving forward but veering away from the stern paddlers side, the **stern paddler begins** the stroke as if they are doing a forward stroke, but twists their thumb away from their body and pushes the paddle away with their shaft hand. The powerface is the only face that applies pressure to the water.
in this stroke. When done properly this stroke will steer the canoe back onto course.

**Sculling** is a fun stroke that partners use on the same side. This stroke moves the canoe sideways, toward their paddles, and forces paddlers to make small changes in the blade angle to the water.

Practice **sweep strokes**; forward and back. Hands low (paddle nearly parallel with the water), reach forward and far away then pull the water from the front to the back with the powerface of the blade for a forward sweep. Practice the reverse sweep applying pressure with the backface.

The American Canoe Association lists at least 17 different canoe strokes, only about half of them are described above. However, if the strokes presented here are practiced and learned, they will serve you very well for your future paddling adventures.

**REFERENCES**


Northern Tier. Parts of a Canoe /Paddle and Strokes. July, 11, 2011. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i0n4KsRrYG8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i0n4KsRrYG8)

Canoeing TV. Should you sit or kneel in a Canoe. Undated. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5lyRGXJsaGA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5lyRGXJsaGA)

Last updated May 2014 by Walt Myers
NEW JERSEY LEARNING STANDARDS

COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

2.1.8.PGD.4: Analyze the relationship between healthy behaviors and personal health.
2.1.8.SSH.3: Demonstrate communication skills that will support healthy relationships.
2.1.8.SSH.4: Compare and contrast the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships.
2.2.8.MSC.5: Predict the impact of rules, etiquette, procedures, and sportsmanship on players' behavior in small groups and large teams during physical activities and games.
2.2.8.MSC.1: Explain and demonstrate the transition of movement skills from isolated settings (e.g., skill practice) into applied settings (e.g., games, sports, dance, recreational activities).
2.2.8.MSC.7: Effectively manage emotions during physical activity (e.g., anger, frustration, excitement) in a safe manner to self and others.
2.2.8.PF.2: Recognize and involve others of all ability levels into a physical activity.
2.3.8.PS.1: Assess the degree of risk in a variety of situations, and identify strategies needed to reduce deliberate and non-deliberate injuries to self and others.

LIFE LITERACY AND KEY SKILLS

9.4.5.CT.1: Identify and gather relevant data that will aid in the problem-solving process.
9.4.5.CT.4: Apply critical thinking and problem-solving strategies to different types of problems such as personal, academic, community and global.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

All of our field lessons integrate the concepts of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills found in the New Jersey’s Core Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Competencies.