
EDUCATION NEWS

Where History is Shared and Stories Continue

Kunoopeam Netompaûog, Welcome Friends!

This year, the education department at Tomaquag Museum will be focusing on traditional moons and thanksgivings of which there are 13 according to the Indigenous calendar. Did you know that the 13 squares on a turtles back represent the 13 moons, and the 28 smaller squares around the edges are the days leading to the next moon? This is how some Indigenous peoples kept time.

FROM TOMAQUAG'S EDUCATION DEPARTMENT...

Wuttáhimneash nanepaûshat (heart berry or strawberry moon) has at last arrived, and it's time for wuttáhimneash (heart berries)! The weather is warming as this first berry gifted by Creator begins to grow, turns red and sweet and is ready to be shared as a gift of friendship. This is the time to forgive wrongs and renew relationships by sharing this heart berry with someone. Strawberry Thanksgiving has been celebrated at Tomaquag Museum since its opening in 1959. Red Wing renewed this celebration in an educational and social manner and invited the public to attend the gathering. Like our ancestors, it began with ceremony, reminding all to be thankful to Creator who sends this gift. Then there was the sound of the drum followed by traditional dancing, food and fun for all ages.



Princess Red Wing at Strawberry Thanksgiving ca. 1970s
(Photo Courtesy of Tomaquag Museum Archives)

Click here to [Contact](#) the education department with any questions.

Native strawberries are much smaller and sweeter than what is being cultivated and available in the markets today. So the simplest and best way to eat a native strawberry is fresh picked right off the vine. For generations we have been mixing these berries with our corn meal to make strawberry “bread”. The berries were also dried and stored for the winter months use. Fresh berries are mashed and made into “tea”. Strawberries are packed with vitamin C - something my ancestors did not know but benefited from just the same! You can also eat the fresh green leaves and stem for extra nutrients so don’t throw them away. Instead, throw them into your salad! The strawberry plant branches off to spread all over, and these branches are its daughters. Also, If you look closely at these berries you will see its seeds which grow on the outside. Today, modern science has found a way to cultivate huge berries and produce them all year round. But chemicals are often used to make them grow bigger and faster leaving them flavorless and less juicy. Although we live in a time when instant gratification is rampant, natural is always better and requires waiting until the next year. Through this we learn patience and gain appreciation for this gift.



The branches of the strawberry plant are called “daughters” (photo courtesy of Chrystal Mars Baker)



Seeds and stem of the strawberry (Photo courtesy of Tomaquag Archives)

There is a traditional story that has been shared orally for many generations throughout many different Native communities. Red Wing shared it annually at Tomaquag’s Strawberry Thanksgiving, and it continues to be shared today. It has also been written in a book created by Paulla Dove Jennings, Narragansett elder and illustrated by Ramona Peters, Mashpee Wampanoag elder. If you choose to share the story as it is recorded here, please remember to give honor to its cultural origins.

Click here to [Contact](#) the education department with any questions.

READER ---- THE FESTIVAL OF THE MOON OF STRAWBERRIES

The Story

Many moons ago there lived a little boy, and his sister, with their grandmother, because they had no father and no mother. So they loved each other very dearly. Many things their grandmother taught them, of the world in which they lived. Taught them of the plants and animals, of the stars and storms, and of the Great Spirit who created all these things to maintain mankind. But she also taught them that evil deeds displeased the Good Spirit, and brought evil luck to the doer, and much sadness.

So many moons they lived happily, and learned many things. But the day came when they quarreled and the Great Spirit spoke to them thru "Mother Nature", and their paths separated. The little girl went east, toward the rising sun. The little boy went west. On and on they traveled. The little girl stumbled and bruised herself because the sun was so bright in her eyes. She cried and had no brother to comfort her. Oh how she missed him. But it was not until she repented and was sorry for fighting with him, that the Great Spirit turned her path backwards towards her brother.

It was the same with the little boy. He traveled away from the sun, and shadows lay in his path, so that he tripped and fell many times. He moaned for his sister, and his eyes were so filled with tears that he could not see the path and became lost. He was very sorry that he fought with his sister and wished to tell her so. He called to the Great Spirit to hear him, and asked for help to find his way back to her. So the Great Spirit turned him around and started him on his trip back to her, with a light heart, filled with renewed love.

The little girl was so happy as she traveled back to see her brother that she asked the Great Spirit for a gift, to take him, as a peace offering. Then she looked down, and saw at her feet, among the grasses and straws, some bright red berries. She stooped and gathered them. They were sweet and pleasant to eat. She filled her basket and carried them to her brother. He was so happy at finding his sister again, and pleased with her gift, that he took her hand and they danced together the rest of the way home.

The rest of the village saw them, and knew some good thing had happened. So they all, ever after, in the Moon of Strawberries, did the Strawberry Dance, and held a Strawberry Ceremony of renewed friendship and brotherly love.

Document Recording the Story of The Strawberry (Photo Courtesy of Tomaquag Museum Archives)

To Learn More About The History of Strawberry Thanksgivings held at Tomaquag click [here](#).

~ Chrystal Mars Baker for June, 2023

Click here to [Contact](#) the education department with any questions.



A Retelling of the Strawberry Story by Tomaquag Museum Educator, Lynsea Montanari

FOR THE CHILDREN:

This wonderful book is about the seasons and their gifts of food from each. The illustrations are wonderful as you see side by side illustrations of Indigenous peoples harvesting these gifts in the past and in contemporary times reminding all that we, as Indigenous people, are still here just as the foods we ate are too!

Here's a coloring page created by Narragansett Indigenous artist Lynsea Montanari. Click [here](#) to print it out and have fun coloring!



RESOURCES:

At Tomaquag we are continuously doing the work of educating new generations of children as well as the general public about the lives, traditions and life changes of the Indigenous peoples of Rhode Island and neighboring communities. Follow us on our website at tomaquagmuseum.org, [Youtube](#) and [Facebook](#). Check out these resources!

To support Indigenous authors and purchase your own copy visit this [link](#):

To hear the book read aloud visit this [link](#):

For a review of this book, visit this [link](#):

Come Celebrate Strawberry Thanksgiving with Tomaquag on June 10. Click [here](#) for information!

Click here to [Contact](#) the education department with any questions.