

EDUCATION NEWS

Kunoopeam, Welcome Readers!

Its the Moon for maple sugar! And you're in for a sweet treat. Traditionally, this season would mark the New Year! Sequan/Spring is almost here and soon new life will be hatching, budding, and being born all around us. Mother Earth will reawaken and the grounds will begin to thaw. It is preparation time. Traditionally, Sequan is the time for gathering bark, plants, and other materials to mend and make new baskets, nets and summer dwellings. Imagine, if you will, Native women and children foraging for foods and medicines. Still, for many Indigenous peoples some of these practices are being continued, many in contemporary ways. One of these practices is making maple syrup and sugar!



Maple Syrup ready for sale! Feb. 2023

FROM TOMAQUAG'S EDUCATION DEPARTMENT...



Weekapáheek means sweet water in Mashantucket Language.

Maple Sugar Thanksgiving, a time to thank Creator for this sweet gift, has been celebrated by Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island for centuries! Traditionally, baskets of birch would be made to collect the sap mainly of the maple tree, however, other trees were tapped as well. Birch bark has powerful antiviral and antibacterial qualities which protect the finished product for storage in the cool refrigeration of the ground. A smaller tree limb such as elderberry would be used as the "spout" and this would be tapped into the tree using a stone awl and hammer and the birch basket placed below on the ground. The clear liquid sap (wekonineep = sweetwater) flows from the tree during the day as long as the temperature warms up to above freezing (32 degrees). Each night as

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the temperature falls below freezing the sap stops running. It takes about 40 gallons of sap boiled down to make just 1 gallon of syrup! Such a precious sweet gift!

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Firewood stacked outside the Sugar Shack is at the ready for when the cooking process begins.



Jeremy Whipple gives Tomaquag staff a tour of the Sugar Shack. Feb. 2023

Jeremy Whipple, Mashantucket Pequot and director of their Sugar Shack continues the practice of collecting sap from maple trees using modern methods which saves time and produces the volumes needed to convert and sell as maple syrup, sugar, cream, hard and cream candy and even cotton candy. Jeremy and his team tap over 8000 maple trees of all varieties but shares that the sugar maples are the best runners. They retrieve over 30,000 gallons of sap each year which is then boiled using a wood-fired furnace. With that much sap they yield about 300 gallons of syrup.

Recently they obtained an “evaporator” to cut the boiling time down from 8 hours to produce 10 gallons to 2 hours! At the Sugar Shack, they turn the syrup

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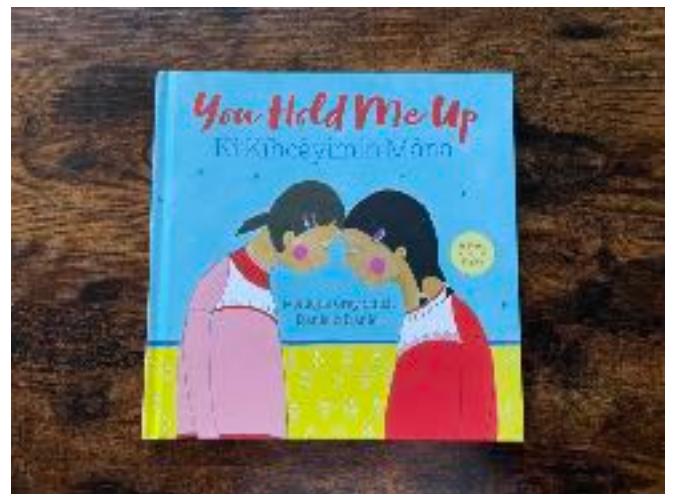
into sugar, cream and soft and hard candies and maple cotton candy. Sweet! I recently visited Jeremy and was given a behind the scenes tour of his entire process. I sampled one of the maple cream candies which was much like the consistency of fudge, and it was delicious! When asked why he continues this practice, Jeremy responded, "I've been doing this basically my whole life. I learned from my Uncle Skip in the 1980s-90s and have been doing it ever since. It's like my baby." From plastic bags as pictured above to what it is today! A wonderful transformation which allows for more economic development and sustainability.

For many years, Tomaquag Museum celebrated Maple Thanksgiving. People from all over would come to learn about this tradition and see the demonstrations. Read more about Maple Thanksgiving at Tomaquag Museum in our blog, [click here](#).

~ *Chrystal Mars Baker for March 2023*

FOR THE CHILDREN:

It's important to be there for our friends, family, and community. Sometimes big, great change starts from ourselves. When we can be nice, kind, and thoughtful to the people around us we can make their day nicer and remind them that they are important. Monique Gray Smith is Cree, Lakota, and Scottish. She is from Victoria, British Columbia in Canada. She is an author of children's and young adult books, a mom, and a friend to all. *You Hold Me Up* is about building relationships, fostering empathy and encouraging respect between peers, starting with our littlest citizens. Everyone can be a friend to each other! Showing love and kindness for the people around us helps our world be a good place.





For this month's craft we are going to make portable hugs!

Supplies: card stock or heavy paper in any color you like, scissors, ribbon (24" any color or pattern you like), glue stick, or tape, crayons, markers, or other items to decorate!

Directions:

Trace your hands on the card stock; cut them out; decorate your hands; glue or tape the ribbon to the back of each hand and your done! Now make more and send them to your loved ones.

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 purchase your own copy visit this link: <https://birchbarkbooks.com/products/you-hold-me-up>

To hear the book read by the author herself click on this [video link](#).

Other books about the gift of the Maple:

Ininatig's Gift of Sugar, Traditional Native Sugarmaking by Laura Waterman Wittstock

Mashantucket's Sugar Shack (purchase at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum Store)