

Exploring Alaska Foliage in Russian

By Michele Whaley

Materials

- copies of pictures of leaves of Alaska trees, flowers and other plants;
- copies of scavenger hunt
- poster-making materials, including paper, glue, and markers
- contact paper
- books on different regions in Russia
- postcard sets from various regions in Russia
- Russian songs, poems, and literature sections

Objectives

- Students will learn names for the trees and plants they find in their neighborhood.
- Students will be able to identify these trees and plants on a walk.
- Students will learn which plants are also typical of a northern Russian forest.
- Students will create a poster from which they will be able to talk with Russians about Alaska plants and trees.



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Introduction

Russians are very close to their natural world. They often use trees in metaphors in speaking of other people. There are songs about trees that actually refer to love stories, references to plants in all sorts of poetry, and comparisons between main characters and characteristics of plants in all manner of Russian prose. Russians are often shocked to find that many American children don't know the names of the trees and plants that surround them. Culturally it is important to know and be able to comment on the plant world. One of the first questions Russians will ask Americans, as they get acquainted is, "What is the nature in your area like?" It is much like an American will ask a stranger what the weather is like in their part of the world.

Directions

Week 1: Teach the students plant and tree names, using silhouette pictures of tree forms and leaf shapes. Students should also learn the names of the basic parts of trees and flowers, as they may get called upon to describe a tree that is not common to a Russian.

Week 2: Take the students on a scavenger hunt, over the course of which they try to gather leaves from a broad number of different plants.

When students come back from the scavenger hunt, they create posters with the leaves they have gathered, covering them with contact paper to preserve it. They write a paragraph describing what they have gathered, and present to the class.

Do a book share with the class, looking at pictures of the foliage and forest. Guide students through comparing what they see in that area with what is typical of their home.

Pass out postcard sets of different regions in Russia. Ask small groups of students to work together to prepare a presentation of how their assigned area differs from that in which they live. They share these with the class.

Week 3: Bring in poems, songs, and short sections of literature or other prose that include references and comparisons of trees and plants. Ask students to discuss how their knowledge world adds to their comprehension of these works. Then ask them to consider American writing. What songs, poems, literature do they know that refers to plants and trees? How does the family farm figure in American literature? What do they know about the dairy and farm history of Alaska? How do we include references to food and subsistence in our lives?

Websites

Russian Folklore and Literature

<http://feb-web.ru/>

Friends and Partners: Russian Literature

<http://www.fplib.org/literature/index.html>

Russian Club Songs Page

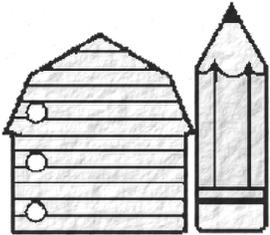
<http://www.kulichki.com/rusclub/>

- Students will compare the area they live with one in Russia by plant life.
- Students will identify references to trees and other plants in both American and Russian prose and poetry.

Suggested grade levels
intermediate and advanced Russian classes

Alaska Content Standards

World Languages: A.1, A.2, A.3, B1, B.2, B3, B4, C.2
Language Arts A4, D1, E1, E4
Geography B4, B7



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Variations

This lesson plan could be used as a cultural exchange and resource lesson for other regions for classes centered around other languages and cultures.

Additional activities/Discussion points

1. Compare usage of trees and other plants in Russian and in Alaska or other parts of the United States. What products are harvested commercially, and what is the use of these products.
2. How do available resources impact the local economy in the regions being compared? How does that affect the quality of life of people who live there?
3. What organizations are stewards of the natural resources of the regions in Russian, in Alaska, in the US at large? What agencies are in charge of wise resource use? What are the impacts of the efforts of these organizations and agencies? How do the regions balance use of resources versus preservation of resources?