

Survival Unit Overview

Introduction:

We designed this unit when the Village Council called and asked if we would like to host a fall camp. They offered to fund the camp if we would work in conjunction with local teachers and elders. We discussed the idea of teaching survival skills to the students, and the Council was agreeable. We had about one month before camp to prepare the students. I came across Outdoor Survival Training by Dolly Garza. It is full of invaluable information. Another informative book I found in my internet search was Land Safety and Survival Vol. 3. I found both freely available in pdf form on the internet and am including them as resources in this unit. Dolly Garza's teacher's manual is available for purchase from bookstores.

Teaching the Lessons: [Click Here to View the Videos:](#)

*How to Tie a Boat and
Setting up Camp.*

For the daily lessons, I (Joyce) followed the information as presented in Garzas' book, adding activities and materials from Land Safety and Survival Vol. 3. Lesson 1 presents the 7-steps to Survival. In lesson 2, we read about taking inventory. After reading, and with no forewarning, the students were taken outside to a wooded location and were told they were stranded. It was time to empty their pockets and take inventory. They were very creative in transforming earbuds (tying up signals) and ipods (reflectors) into survival equipment. Lesson 3 was challenging for all of us. Building a debris hut is no small feat. It takes a lot of effort to gather the required amount of debris. Next, we practiced making signals. That was pretty easy and straightforward. The story included in the signals activity from Land Safety and Survival drove home the importance of proper signals. Since we had done a unit in the fall on edible plants, we did not spend much time on food and water in lesson 5. We did learn how to make snares and where to set them.

As I was teaching the lessons from Garzas' book, my husband, Denis, was teaching the students how to set up a wall tent, make a survival kit, and start fires. We were going to set up our camp from scratch, which

included two wall tents with wood stoves. It was a huge undertaking for teachers and students who had never set up a wall tent!

Outdoor Skill/Survival Camp:

Camp was a cooperative effort of community members and the school. We rode in boats for an hour and a half to get to our campsite. Upon arrival at 3 pm, we immediately set to work making camp. The younger students cleared the area of thorn bushes, rocks, and wood. They also had the task of gathering spruce boughs for the tent floors. Older students cut logs and helped set up the tents. A few students were put on dinner duty and worked with an adult to make moose soup. At the end of day one, we all slept hard, thankful for the tents and woodstoves.

During the two full days of camp, there were opportunities for the students to practice their survival skills interspersed with lessons from elders who visited camp. From the elders they learned to tie up boats correctly, set and check fish nets, clean, fillet, and cook fish, roast moose and game birds on sticks over the fire, recognize rabbit game trails and use fences to herd game to snares. They accompanied community members on wood gathering trips and chopped a lot of wood.

Denis taught them shooting skills. There was a shooting contest, and then hunting for grouse. They learned two ways to clean a grouse. He also had a fire-starting contest in which each contestant received one match to start a fire. This was a popular activity among the students and adults who were visiting camp.

Together, Denis and I monitored teams for building survival shelters. The teams needed to choose a site and build a shelter in two hours. This was the least favorite activity at camp since they had already done it twice at home. We were all tired of debris hut shelters!

Conclusion:

Camp was a great experience for all of us. I highly recommend hosting a camp as the culminating activity for any survival or outdoor skills unit you teach. It was a lot of work, not only preparing the students, but gathering/ordering supplies, packing to go, and unpacking upon return.

We tried to involve the students in each aspect of the camp. Even so, there was still plenty of work for us to do.

I believe the experience was valuable for the students. They learned skills that may one day save their lives, as well as important information about the land they live in and knowledge from their elders.

If you decide to teach a similar unit, I would be happy to share information and insights with you. Feel free to email me at jgardella@iditarodsd.org