

9-12th Lesson Guide: Rabbit

Vocabulary:

- Rabbit
- Respect
- Elders
- Council
- Food Pyramid
- Wild game
- Seasonal
- Processed Foods
- Protein
- Population

See the attached vocabulary sheet in *Educators Guide*.

Engage:

- Introduce the story *How the Rabbit Dance Came to Be* by asking:
 - Have you ever thought about how animals help us or what we can learn from them?
 - How do we show respect for the animals around us?
- Lead a short discussion as a class on why it's important to respect the animals we rely on for traditional foods and cultural practices.
 - Have students share cultural foods that they may eat with rabbit in them.

Explore and Explain:

- With your students, review the United States [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) with students. Show students examples of the US Food Pyramid. Then, share the Anishinaabe Food Pyramid and the Anishinaabe Seasonal Calendar images shared in the files below.
 - Then, compare and contrast the differences in each of the Food Pyramids as a class. After doing so, have students complete Activity 1.
 - Activity 1: A Year of Eating: *The Seasonal Food Calendar*
- After activity completion, have students share their projects with the class and display their Food Calendars.

Elaborate

- Explain to students that many Indigenous food systems are cyclical, meaning they follow the natural rhythms of the land, seasons, animals, and plants. Food availability changes throughout the year, and diets shift in response to those changes.
- Have students revisit their Seasonal Food Calendars and identify how foods like rabbit appear only in certain seasons. Discuss why this matters for:
 - Animal populations
 - Human health
 - Long-term sustainability

- As a class, discuss how Indigenous communities traditionally observed animal behavior, plant growth, and seasonal changes to determine when to harvest and when to wait. Emphasize that food was not taken constantly or without limits.
- Ask students to compare this cyclical system to modern food systems, which often treat food as static or available year-round regardless of season or environmental impact.

Evaluate

- Use the following to reflect with students. Answer individually via journal or as a class:
 - Rabbits and Seasonal Foods:
 - Why are rabbits considered a seasonal food in Indigenous diets?
 - How does respecting the seasons help maintain healthy populations of rabbits and other animals?
 - Nutrition and Health:
 - How do rabbits contribute to a balanced diet?
 - How does combining seasonal plants and animals support overall health?
 - Cultural Practices and Respect:
 - How do traditional practices around hunting and eating reflect sustainability and gratitude?
 - Personal Connection:
 - What is one thing from this activity you will remember about respect, health, or sustainability?

Suggested Lesson Activities:

- Indigenous Vocabulary
- Vocabulary Crossword
- A Year of Eating: *The Seasonal Food Calendar*

Additional Educator Resources:

- [American Indian Health and Diet Project](#) *History of traditional tribal foods: Overview of Indigenous diets and use of wild game such as rabbits.*
- [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) *Rabbit meat was also eaten: History of rabbit meat consumption.*
- [FoodyPage](#) *Unearthing the culinary riches: Indigenous foods of North America.*
- [Government of Northwest Territories, Canada](#) *Rabbit and hare: Traditional food fact sheet on rabbit use and nutrition.*
- [Traditional seasonal diets of Native North Americans](#): *Nutrition and sustainability.* Journal of Indigenous Food Studies, 5(2), 45–58.
- [University of Minnesota, Center for Indigenous Foods](#) *Traditional Anishinaabe foods pyramid.*

How the Rabbit Dance Came to Be

For Grades 9-12: Please feel free to modify these lessons as needed to fit the needs of your students.

I'm going to tell you the story of the Rabbit Dance and how it came to be.

A long time ago, there were two brothers who were also hunters living in a village. One day, they were looking through their food supply and noticed it was starting to get low. They knew that if something didn't change, the village would soon go hungry.

So the brothers told the people, "We have to go on a hunt. If we don't, we will starve."

The brothers set out on foot and walked for about ten miles. Eventually, they came to a thick area of trees and brush. As they looked around, they noticed tracks everywhere—rabbits, raccoons, deer, and many others.

"This looks like a good place," they said, seeing all the signs of animals.

They stayed there for a couple of days. One day, while it was quiet and just the two of them, they suddenly heard a sound.

Thump.

They looked around quickly, confused, because no one else was there.

Then they heard it again.

Thump.

This time it was louder and closer. The sound seemed to come from a bush right in front of them. One brother carefully pushed through the brush.

"Do you see anything?" the other asked.

"Yes," he said. "I see a rabbit. He's pretty chubby. I don't know what he's been eating, but he's well fed."

The rabbit was very large, with a big belly, long ears, and thick arms. As it tried to get comfortable, its belly kept touching the ground, forcing it to move and shift.

Suddenly, the rabbit began to stomp.

Thump. Thump. Thump.

The brothers looked at each other.

“This is weird,” one of them said.

Then, out of nowhere, rabbits of all shapes and sizes began appearing from every direction. There were small rabbits, big rabbits, and even a blue one. The brothers didn’t know how a blue rabbit could exist, but there it was.

The rabbits paired up male and female. Some looked like friends, some like siblings, some like parents, and some like lovers. The large rabbit began stomping again, and the rabbits took each other’s hands and danced.

The hunters watched, shocked.

“Whoa,” they said.

When the brothers suddenly moved, the large rabbit turned and whispered to another rabbit, “They’re trying to kill me. Distract them.”

At once, all the rabbits ran off in every direction. At the same time, the large rabbit jumped into the nearest tree. The tree shook so hard that leaves fell to the ground, and one branch could be seen moving back and forth.

Instead of killing the rabbit, the brothers ran straight back to the village. They told the elders everything they had seen.

The council asked the brothers to show them the dance.

“Well,” the elders said, “the rabbits gave us this dance. We need to show them more respect. No more killing rabbits for a while.”

From then on, the Rabbit Dance was performed at powwows. Some tribes call it by different names, like the Owl Dance, but it is the same dance. As it is danced, the rhythm follows the sound of stomping.

To this day, the Rabbit Dance is still performed at powwows. It is always danced by a male and a female, who may be siblings, lovers, parents, or friends.

And that is how the Rabbit Dance came to be.

Adapted from an oral narrative told by Romeo, “The Rabbit Dance,” recorded and shared via YouTube. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QsgljGqUOWo>

Rabbits: Wildlife, Food, and Respect

Rabbits are common in many parts of the world and have played an important role in human diets for thousands of years. People have hunted rabbits as a wild food source because they are widespread, reproduce quickly, and provide lean, nutritious meat. Today, rabbits are still eaten both in the wild and on farms in many regions, including Europe, Asia, and North America. Wild rabbits can be hunted, or they can be raised for meat in agricultural settings.

Historically, rabbits have been a sustainable source of protein. In some areas, raising rabbits was and still is a practical way to feed families, because they are easier to care for and reproduce faster than larger livestock.

For many Indigenous peoples of North America, wild game like rabbits was an important part of the diet. Hunting was not just about food it was also tied to cultural traditions, respect for animals, and sustainability. Rabbits, like other animals, were treated with gratitude and care. Indigenous practices often included using all parts of the animal and offering thanks, showing the deep relationship between people and the land.

Even today, rabbits continue to appear in traditional hunting cultures and in some modern culinary practices. Learning about rabbits as both wildlife and food helps us understand how humans can live in balance with nature taking only what is needed and showing respect for the animals that sustain us.

Rabbits and Seasonal Foods: Health and Tradition

Rabbits are considered a seasonal food in many Indigenous diets. They are most abundant in spring and early summer when their populations grow the fastest. Hunting rabbits during these seasons allowed communities to take only what was needed, ensuring that populations remained healthy for future use.

Eating foods seasonally was not just about availability it also shaped healthier diets. Indigenous peoples relied on a variety of plants and animals throughout the year, including:

- **Spring/Summer:** rabbits, fish, berries, greens, and nuts
- **Fall:** deer, squash, root vegetables, and harvested grains
- **Winter:** preserved meats, dried fish, stored roots, and nuts

This seasonal approach provided a balanced diet with the right mix of proteins, fats, and vitamins throughout the year. By eating what was naturally available during each season, communities maintained good nutrition, strength, and resilience.

Seasonal foods also encouraged connection to the land. Observing the cycles of animals and plants taught respect for nature and ensured that communities lived in balance with their environment.

Anishinaabe Traditional Foods Pyramid

The Anishinaabe Traditional Foods Pyramid is a visual guide that shows the types of foods traditionally eaten by Anishinaabe communities. Unlike modern food pyramids, it emphasizes whole, seasonal, and local foods that were part of Indigenous diets for generations.

- At the base of the pyramid are plants and vegetables, including berries, wild greens, and root vegetables. These provide vitamins, fiber, and energy.
- Moving up, the pyramid includes whole grains, fruits, and legumes.
- Near the top are protein sources, which include wild game like rabbits, deer, fish, and birds. Rabbits were a particularly important food because they were abundant, provided lean protein, and were hunted seasonally to ensure populations remained healthy.
- At the very top, the pyramid highlights traditional fats, often from fish or nuts, which were consumed in balance with the other foods.

By including rabbits in the protein section, the pyramid reflects how Indigenous peoples:

1. Respected animals by hunting only what was needed and using as much of the animal as possible.
2. Planned diets seasonally, eating rabbits when they were most abundant and combining them with vegetables, berries, and grains for balanced nutrition.
3. Maintained healthy eating patterns, getting protein from lean sources like rabbits instead of relying on heavily processed foods.

This pyramid connects directly to the Rabbit Dance story. Just like the hunters learned to respect rabbits in the story, the Anishinaabe Pyramid reminds us that animals are an important part of both cultural traditions and healthy diets. Eating seasonal foods like rabbits helps humans stay healthy while honoring the land and animals that provide for us.

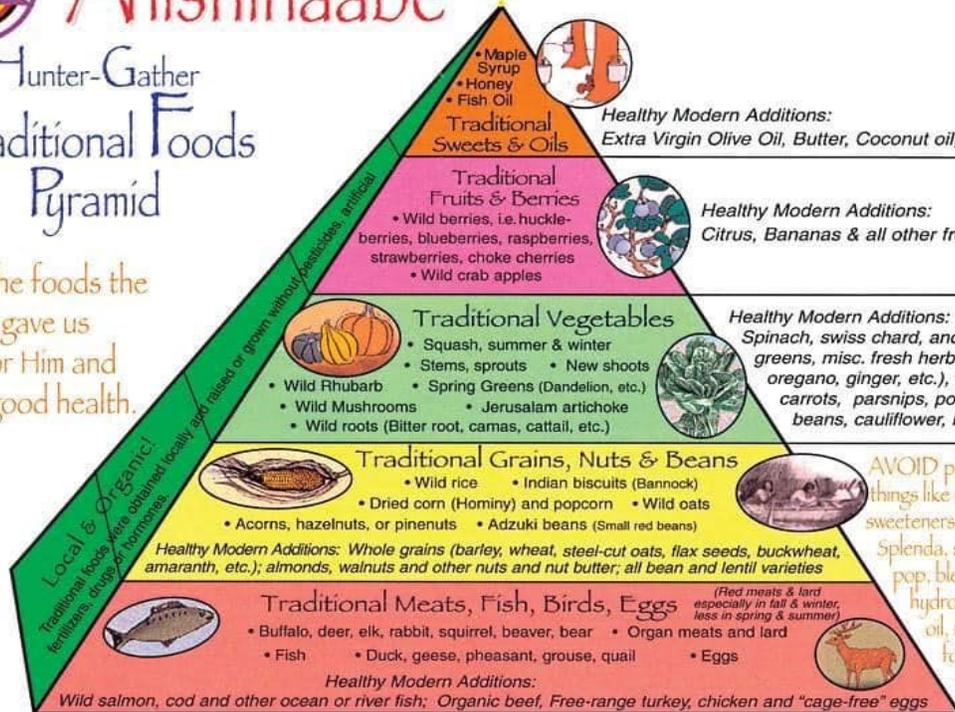


Anishinaabe Creator



Hunter-Gather Traditional Foods Pyramid

Eating the foods the
Creator gave us
will honor Him and
give us good health.



A NOTE ON DAIRY: Dairy, while included in "American" food pyramids, is **not** a traditional food for Anishinaabe Hunter-gathers.

Traditional Calcium and Mineral Sources Included:
• Breast milk for babies and children under two years
• Bone soup or broth
• Fish head soup
• Canned fish with the bones
• Vegetables and greens
Processed homogenized dairy products have been found to increase risk of Type 2 diabetes, while only **raw milk from healthy cows** is a healthy and beneficial addition to a traditional diet. Cultured dairy (yogurt, kefir, buttermilk, etc.) from raw milk is digestible for those who are otherwise lactose intolerant.

Eat According to the Seasons & the Land

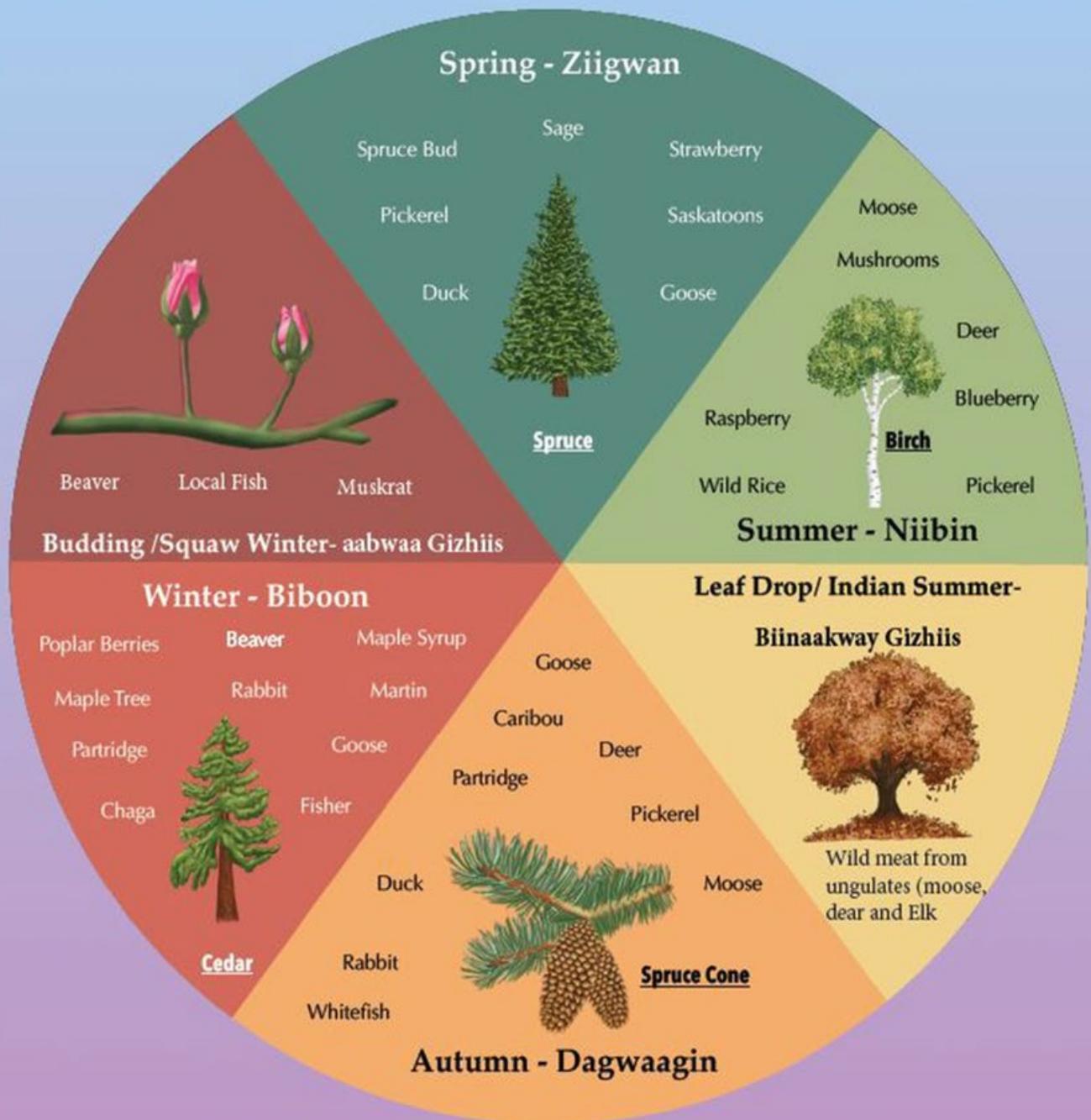


FOCUS on LOCAL

Eating the foods that are grown in the soil and climate that you live in is very important. These **STAPLE** foods provide the specific nutrients your body needs. The Creator has given us everything we need literally within walking distance from where you live (wild rice, fish, deer, corn, various greens, and the other traditional foods mentioned above.) How else could people have survived without modern transportation? ... and they did so for thousands of years.

While citrus and other tropical fruits may be a healthy treat for us, their nutrition is better geared for those who live in the regions they are grown in. If the Creator would have thought we needed bananas or pineapple or coconut he would have had them grow here, but they cannot. This does not mean we cannot ever enjoy them, they simply **should not be the STAPLES of our diet.**

Anishinaabe Seasonal Food Calendar

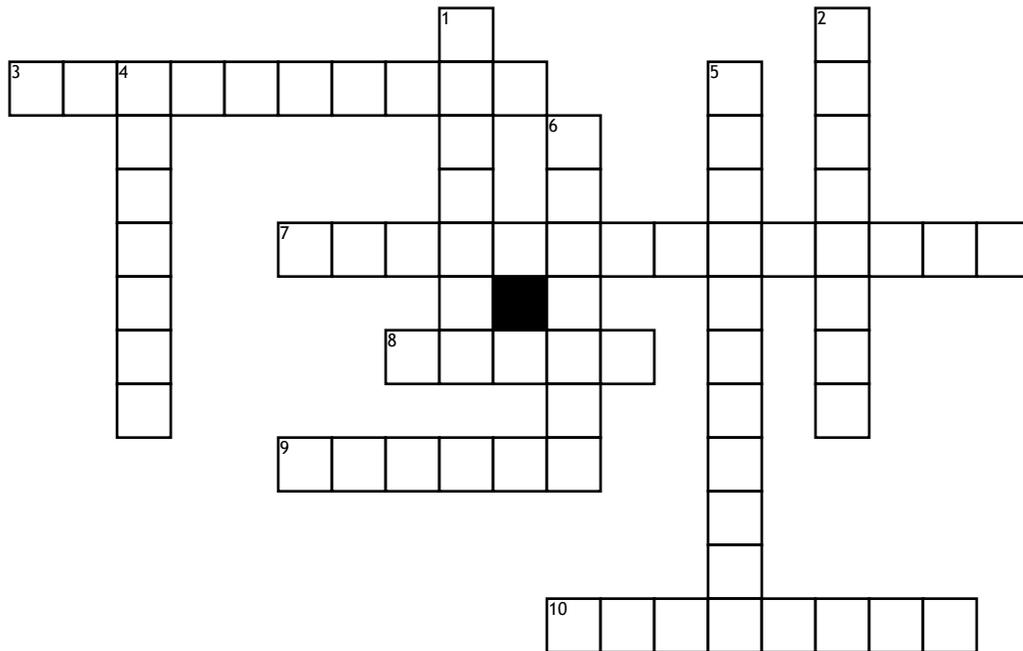


Designed by Sarah Emms, Indigenous Studies Student at University of Winnipeg,
Inputs from Elder David Daniels and community participants from BVR
gratefully acknowledged

Name: _____

Date: _____

Rabbit Vocabulary



Across

- 3. Animals of the same species living and breeding in a specific geographical area at the same time
- 7. Any food altered from its natural state.
- 8. Revered knowledge keepers, community leaders, and custodians of culture, tradition, and history. Often of greater age than oneself.
- 9. Furry mammal known for long ears, powerful hind legs for hopping, and a short fluffy tail
- 10. Wild game refers to undomesticated animals and birds hunted in their natural habitat for food, sport, or trophies (deer, squirrel, rabbit, etc.)

Down

- 1. The governing bodies, rooted in cultural consensus,, that manage tribal affairs, uphold sovereignty, and represent community interests through elected or appointed leaders.
- 2. A particular season of the year.
- 4. Food consisting largely of proteins and making up one of the main nutritional food groups.
- 5. A nutritional diagram in the shape of a pyramid, especially (in the US) the Food Guide Pyramid.
- 6. Regard for the feelings, wishes, rights, or traditions of others.

Word Bank

Population

Rabbit

Wild Game

Food Pyramid

Processed Foods

Seasonal

Elder

Protein

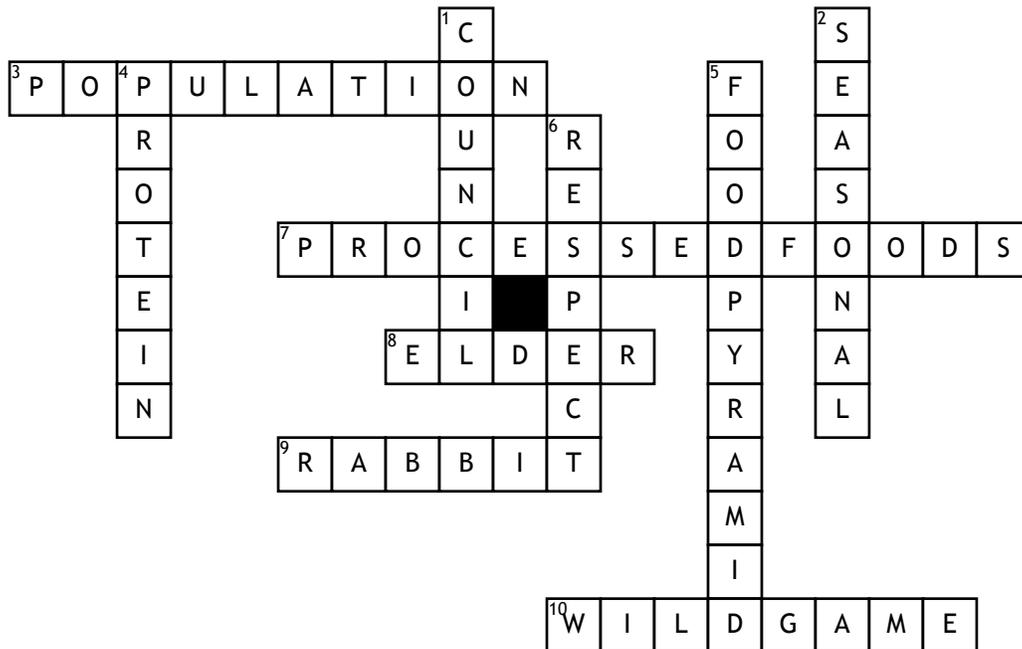
Respect

Council

Name: _____

Date: _____

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A Year of Eating: *The Seasonal Food Calendar*

Indigenous food systems are based on the natural cycles of the land. Foods were/are eaten when they're available, abundant, and healthy for both people and animals. In this activity, you will explore how seasonal eating, including foods like rabbit, supported health, sustainability, and respect for animals.

Step 1: Choose a Community or Region

Select one Indigenous region or tribe to research/focus on.

- My own community
- A community I am researching

Community/Region Name: _____

Step 2: Seasonal Food Calendar

Fill in each season with foods that would traditionally be eaten. Think about availability, weather, and animal populations.

Spring / Summer

Animal Protein (rabbit must appear here):

Plant Foods (berries, greens, roots, etc.):

Why are these foods eaten in this season?

Fall

Animal Protein:

Plant Foods:

Why are these foods eaten in this season?

Winter

Animal Protein (fresh or preserved):

Plant Foods (stored or preserved):

Why are these foods eaten in this season?

Create Your Food Calendar:

Design your food calendar using one of the following formats:

- A circular season wheel that shows how foods change throughout the year, or
- A food pyramid that organizes foods by type and importance.

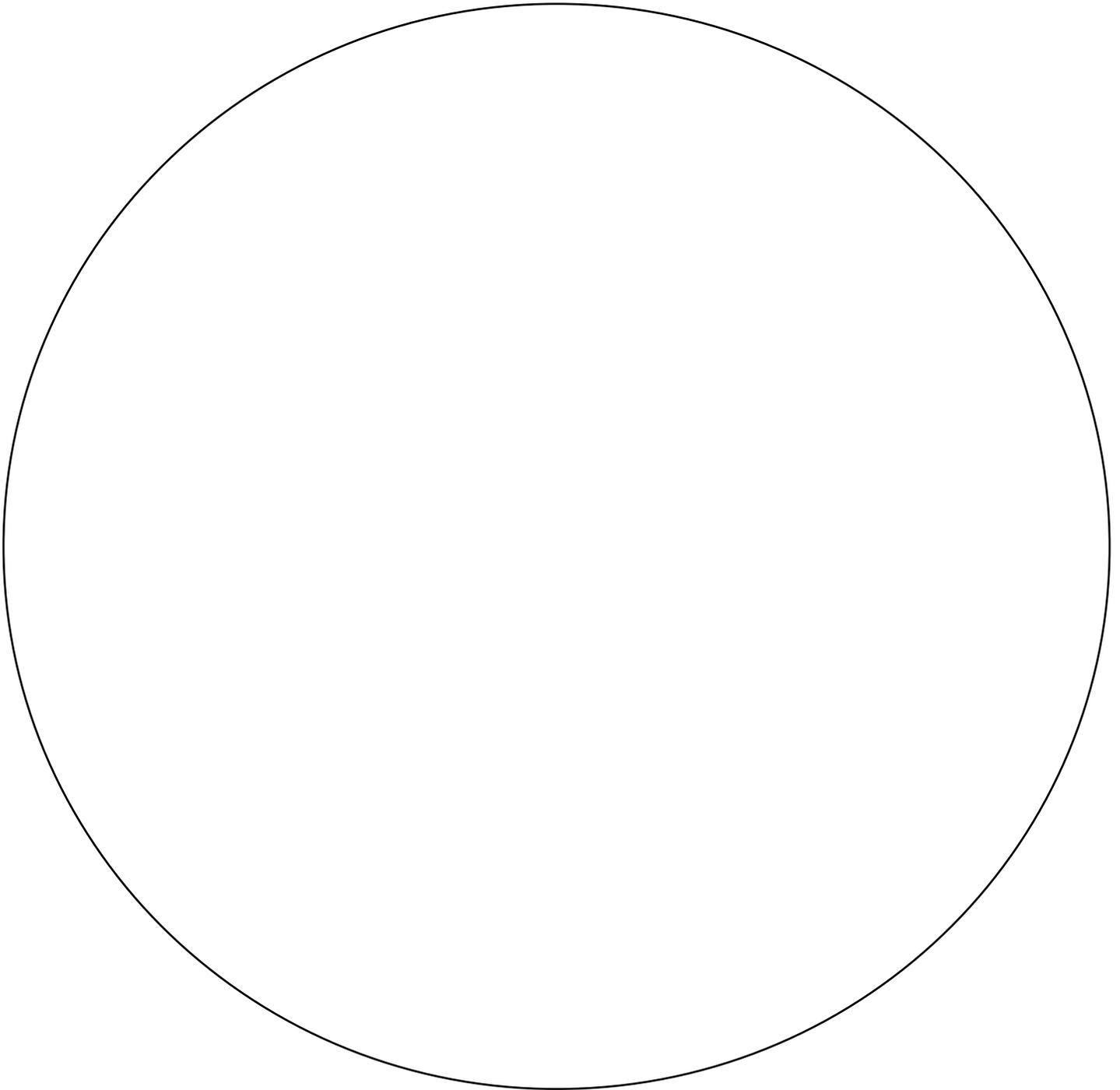
Your design must include illustrations or graphics that represent the foods in each season or level of the pyramid.

As you work, refer back to the Anishinaabe Traditional Foods Pyramid or the Seasonal Food Calendar to guide your choices. Think about how foods are eaten at different times of the year and how they connect to health, sustainability, and respect for animals.

Name: _____

Date: _____

_____ Seasonal Food Calendar



Name: _____

Date: _____

_____ Traditional Food Pyramid

