

Florida Seminole Traditions

NATIVE AMERICAN LESSON 2

As the British colonized Georgia and the Carolinas in the early 1700s, they intruded on the lands of the Lower Creeks—the Native Americans who lived there. To flee this invasion, the Lower Creeks began to move into northern Florida to restart their lives.

Over time, the displaced Creeks lost their connections to their old identity and instead adopted the name *Seminole*, which probably comes from a combination of *cimarrón*, the Spanish term for “runaway,” and *sim-in-oli*, the Muskogee word for “wild and free.”

Although historians generally identify the formation of the Seminole tribe in the early 1700s, the Seminole people identify their origins thousands of years earlier, in continuity with their ancestors, the first peoples of North America.



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The Seminoles in Florida are known for their strength and resistance against the United States to maintain their independence and *sovereignty*, or self-rule, over their lands. Over the course of three *Seminole Wars* in the 1900s, many were forced to relocate to Oklahoma. Those who remain in Florida are very protective of their history and traditions.

In fact, observing traditions and rituals that have existed throughout their history is central to Seminole life and culture even today. For example, the Seminoles are widely known for their traditional, bright-colored patchwork clothing. While this is one of the most widely recognizable Seminole traditions, it is actually a relatively new one, dating only back to the early 1900s.



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A much longer-standing tradition, the Green Corn Dance, has roots going back to the Seminoles' Creek origins and is still observed today. At this special spiritual event, Seminoles participate in purification and manhood ceremonies, settle tribal disputes, and engage in hours of *stomp dancing*—a traditional style of Seminole dancing in which a medicine man leads a single file of chanting male dancers, followed by women dancers quietly shuffling along with shakers, similar to rattles, tied to their legs.

Rattles made of turtle shells are also used in some Seminole ceremonies. This kind of rattle has been used by many different groups of Native Americans and holds great meaning as a symbol of independence.



From the State Archives of Florida

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ACTIVITY

Make a replica turtle-shell rattle of your own as a way to honor the Seminole people and culture.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- Turtle-shell template on page 6, printed on cardstock*
- Markers, crayons, or colored pencils
- Stapler
- Tape
- Drinking straw
- Beads, dry beans or rice, or anything else that will rattle

**Don't have cardstock? Try printing the turtle-shell template on paper and pasting it to an old cereal box or other thin cardboard before cutting it out!*

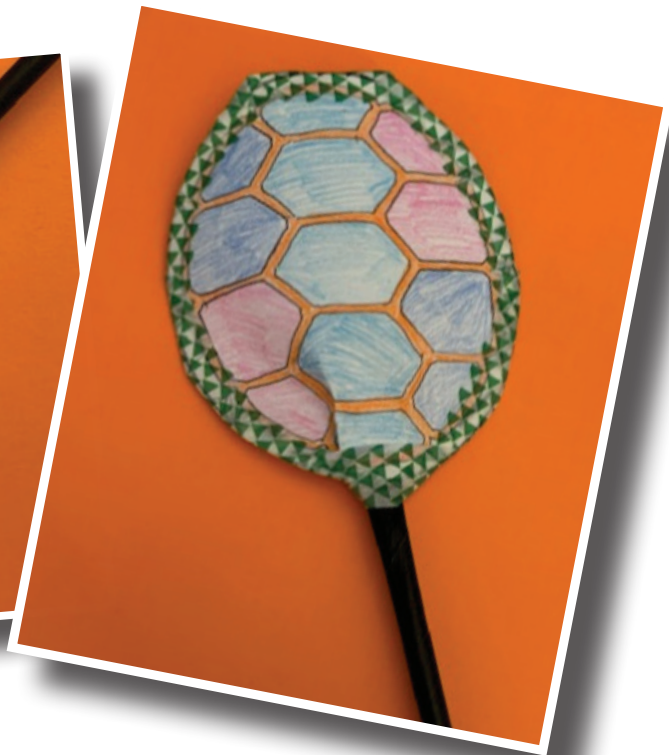
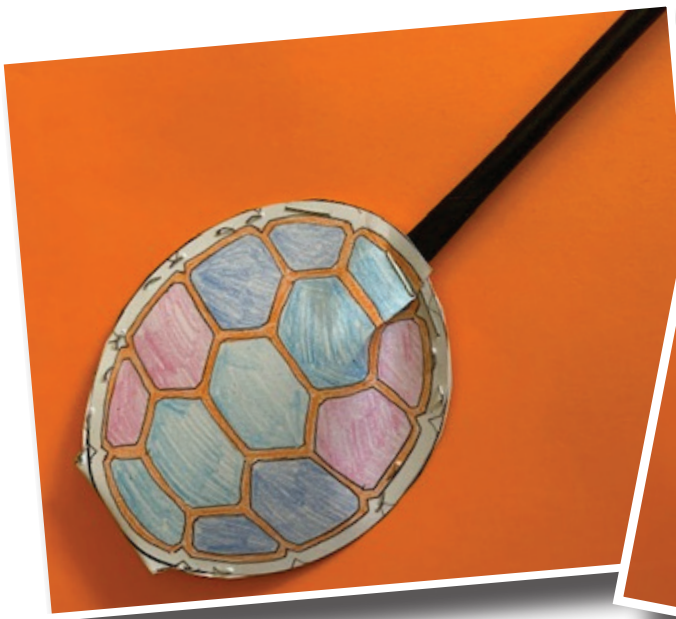


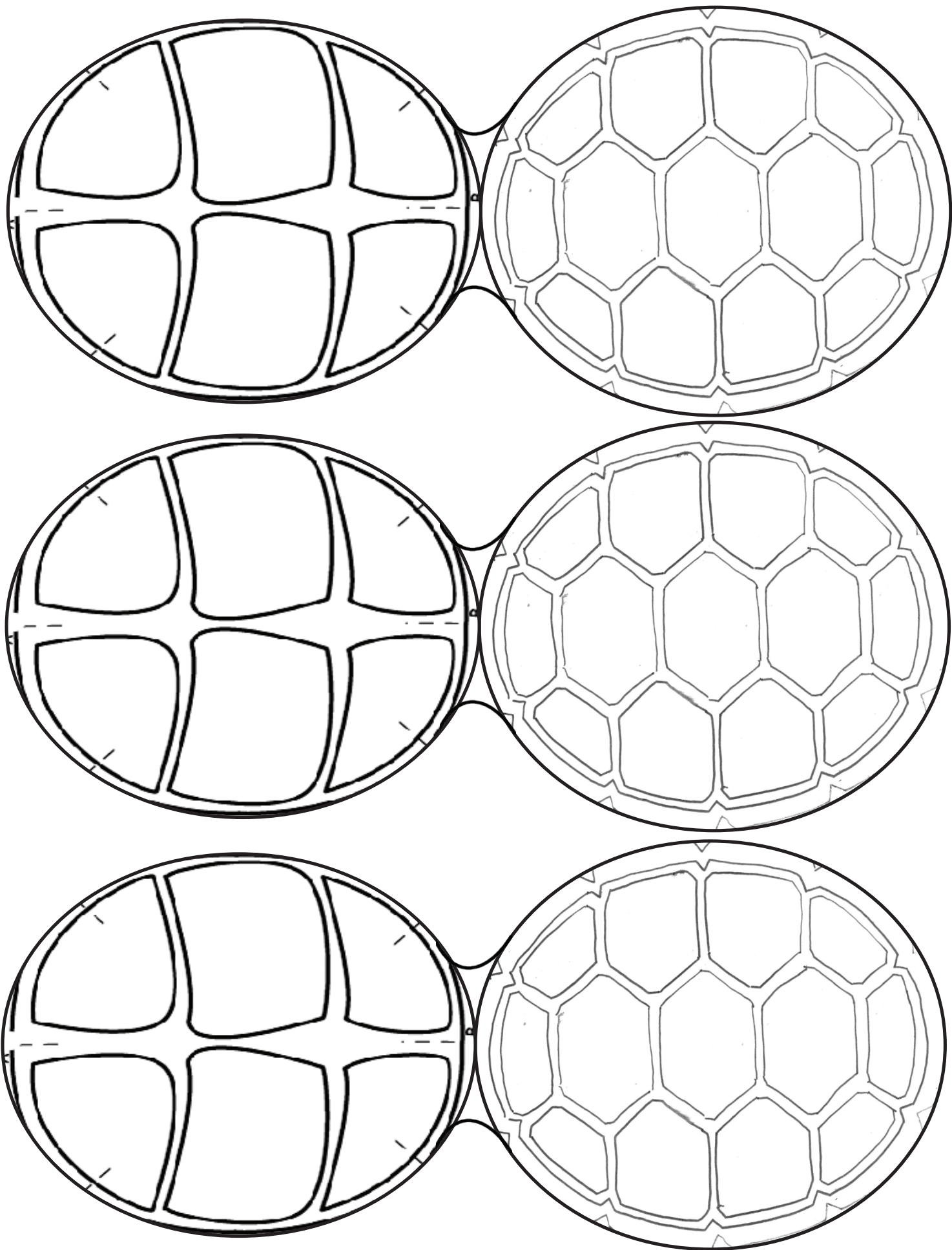
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WHAT TO DO:

- 1.) Cut out the turtle shell along the outside line.
- 2.) Decorate your turtle shell with bright colors.
- 3.) Staple both sides together, making sure to match the edges up to create some space inside. Leave the end open for now.
- 4.) Pour in some of your rattling material. (We used dry corn, but you can use anything small that will rattle around inside your shell.)
- 5.) Place the drinking straw in the opening and staple it to secure.
- 6.) Use some tape along the edges to make sure everything is well sealed. (We used colorful Washi tape to make our shell even more beautiful!)





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This lesson helps reinforce these Florida State Standards for K-5th grade:

SS.1.A.2.1 Understand that history tells the story of people and events of other times and places.

SS.1.A.2.2 Compare life now with life in the past.

SS.2.A.2.1 Recognize that Native Americans were the first inhabitants in North America.

SS.2.A.2.2 Compare the cultures of Native American tribes from various geographic regions of the United States.

SS.4.A.1.2 Synthesize information related to Florida history through print and electronic media.

SS.4.A.2.1 Compare Native American tribes in Florida.

SS.4.A.3.2 Describe causes and effects of European colonization on the Native American tribes of Florida.

SS.4.A.3.8 Explain how the Seminole tribe formed and the purpose for their migration.

SS.4.A.3.10 Identify the causes and effects of the Seminole Wars.

SS.5.A.2.3 Compare cultural aspects of Native American tribes from different geographic regions of North America including but not limited to clothing, shelter, food, major beliefs and practices, music, art, and interactions with the environment.

