

Behind the Story

This lesson includes a traditional story from the Coast Salish Community of Stz'uminus (Chemainus), located on Vancouver Island, near present-day Ladysmith, British Columbia.

We begin our preparations for this lesson by learning about the storyteller, George Squtxulenuhw Seymour, and the Nation to which he belongs.

It is our responsibility to teach about the Peoples whose narrative we are sharing and to demonstrate respect by doing our best to learn how to pronounce place names and other important vocabulary used in the story (See Master 4: Pronunciation Guide).

The Coast Salish Peoples are a linguistically and ethnically related group of First Nations whose territory is located on both sides of the US/Canada border in coastal British Columbia and Washington State. The land contains abundant natural resources, clear water, and countless coastal creatures. Coast Salish Peoples are well known for their art, weaving, traditional foods, and dance.

The story *When Seagull Stole the Sun* features Spaal (Raven). Characteristics and interpretations of Raven vary from cultural group to cultural group. Speaking broadly, Spaal (Raven) can take on the role of both the protagonist and the antagonist of a story, and often the hero. His stories commonly feature explanations of how worldly phenomenon came to be, or offer lessons on how to behave.

George Squtxulenuhw Seymour, the storyteller, is from Stz'uminus (Chemainus) First Nation, a community of approximately 1300 people today. The area is rich in hunting and fishing, with the harbour providing shelter through the seasons for thousands of years. The community continues to take care of its land through sustainable practices passed down from many generations. Stz'uminus First Nation members speak Hul'qumi'num.

George is one of the few people of his generation who were lucky enough to grow up hearing the language spoken around him. He had family members who spoke to him only in Hul'qumi'num. As a young adult, George was not interested in participating in Indigenous cultural activities, but one day, elders came to him and said he was needed because no one else knew the language well enough for the ceremonies. He knew that when you are asked by an elder to do something, you do it.

He started taking classes, first at Malaspina College and then Simon Fraser University, eventually completing a Masters of Linguistics degree. While doing this degree, he realized that there were very few fluent speakers left and that he (already a grandfather) was one of the youngest. He is currently the only fluent Hulqumi'num teacher in the Nanaimo-Ladysmith school district who learned to speak the language as a child.

We are grateful to the Coast Salish Peoples, the original stewards of the land, and to George Squtxulenuhw Seymour for sharing their wisdom with us today.

Name _____ Date _____

Patterns and Relations
Unit 2 Line Master 3b

Behind the Story (cont'd)

Sources:

[The Canadian Encyclopedia: Coast Salish](#)

[American Museum of Natural History: Coast Salish](#)

[Seattle Central College Library: Coast Salish](#)

[Stz'uminus First Nation](#)

[Ladysmith's First People](#)

[Ravens in Native American Mythology](#)

[The Canadian Encyclopedia: Raven Symbolism](#)