My Ancestors Are Still Dancing
Chilkat Weaving Teaching Kit

Teacher’s Resource
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Preface

Welcome! Teaching students about culture is exciting. This is especially true with Indigenous cultures. Knowing this, the My Ancestors Are Still Dancing Chilkat Weaving Teaching Kit aims to make your task easier as a teacher. This Teacher's Resource suggests activities and approaches for integrating the kit into your classroom.

We encourage you to embrace the richness of First Nations cultures by providing your students with the opportunity for depth instead of breadth. This resource focuses on Chilkat weaving and its place in the Tsimshian community, past and present, through the knowledge and experience of one specific weaver. It is important to know this information comes from Tsimshian weaver William White; these are his stories. Other weavers—even other Tsimshian weavers—may have different experiences to share.

This teaching kit is called My Ancestors Are Still Dancing because the weaving tradition is alive and thriving. Robes continue to be danced in ceremony as they have for thousands of years. It is important for students to know that Chilkat weaving is part of a living culture: Tsimshian communities are dynamic and their arts continue to be an important expression of their identities.

William White shares his story of Chilkat weaving’s origin on the Skeena River, thousands of years ago, in what is now known as British Columbia. According to White, a Tsimshian princess received a vision after sacrificing her own share of food for her starving community. Motivated by the intense strength of this vision, she wove wool into the first Chilkat dance apron. Over generations and generations, the knowledge of Chilkat weaving spread to many people and other regions on the Pacific Northwest Coast. Today, Indigenous artists from the Tsimshian, Tlingit, Haida, and Kwakwaka’wakw Nations, among others, weave Chilkat. Each of these cultures has their own story and history of Chilkat weaving.

William White has so generously shared his knowledge with us, and through his voice and this teaching kit he aims to educate future generations about his culture, history, and art. We are thankful for everything he has done for this project.

Note: All quotations in the teaching kit are drawn from the My Ancestors Are Still Dancing sourcebook, the film Gwishalyaayt: The Spirit Wraps Around You, the online videos listed on the information panels, and personal interviews.

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Chilkat weaving requires many different materials traditionally gathered from the land. Today, materials can be bought or ordered, however many weavers still use what they can from the land. MOA, 2016. Photos by Clayton Train.
How to Use this Resource

It is worth noting here that this resource does not teach students how to weave Chilkat. Chilkat can, however, teach us much about how Indigenous artists and their communities experience the world. This kit looks at the historical, political, and cultural implications of Chilkat weaving for the Tsimshian people. Interwoven with critical questions, the Teacher’s Resource focuses on such topics as colonization, assimilation, resilience, and reconciliation.

The overall “big idea” of the teaching kit is...

Big Idea

Chilkat weaving is a form of total cultural expression.

This big idea means that art, culture, history, ancestry, spirituality, and identity as they relate to Chilkat cannot be understood separately, but are all woven together. Having the privilege to learn about Chilkat weaving through the words and work of William White offers us the chance to learn more about the Tsimshian people of the Pacific Northwest Coast.

^ Members of the Nanyaayi family pose in their regalia at the Tlingit village of Wrangell, Alaska, 1885. Photo by G. T. Emmons, courtesy of the Royal British Columbia Museum, PN 11880.
To explore these ideas, this resource is organized thematically around these themes:

1. Ancestors and Family
2. The Making and Expressions of Chilkat Weaving
3. The Right to Weave
4. My Ancestors Are Still Dancing

Although these thematic areas overlap, they are ordered in a sequence that will help students first build a contextual foundation in order to then develop more complex understandings. The final theme, My Ancestors Are Still Dancing, provides the opportunity for students to reflect on previous themes and consider the importance of Chilkat weaving to Tsimshian people today.

Pedagogically, each theme includes a “big idea” for student learning, as well as multiple specific understandings that students will develop while working with the kit. The Teacher’s Resource provides discussion prompts, connections to resources within the kit, and extension activities to support each understanding. Although it is recommended that you follow the themes sequentially, feel free to structure your own program using the kit resources.
First-Person Perspectives

We encourage you to champion the message of this teaching kit’s name: *My Ancestors Are Still Dancing*. Chilkat weaving and the Tsimshian culture are still very much in existence and continue to thrive. To demonstrate these ideas, many of the sections in this teacher’s resource include quotations from contemporary weavers, as below. Use these quotations to spark discussion in your class.

*Use this quotation from weaver William White at the beginning of your activities to engage the class in discussion about Chilkat weaving.

“It’s a very intellectual art form. People need to understand how special it really is because of the connection it has to our ancestors, to our dance, and to our rights. It encompasses everything about the culture within one piece. I mean, it’s a political statement: I have the right to wear Chilkat—this is who I am!”

—William White, Tsimshian
Introduction

^ Tlingit Chilkat robe,
MOA, A9324.
Ancestors and Family
*Use these quotations from Indigenous weavers at the beginning of your activities to engage the class in discussion about Chilkat weaving.

“When it comes off the loom, it’s like a birth, like breathing life into it […] , like one of my ancestors is actually coming through that robe.”

—William White, Tsimshian

“It’s very important to me to pass the knowledge that I’ve been able to gather on to my daughter. In the old days, that’s the way it would have been done.”

—Suzi Williams, Tlingit

“It shows our history. The three faces on the top of the blanket represent my grandmothers.”

—Donna Cranmer, ’Namgis
Big Idea

Ancestors and family are integral to Chilkat weaving.

Understandings

1. Students will be introduced to the various ways Tsimshian people experience the closeness of their ancestors when weaving and dancing Chilkat.

2. Students will begin to understand that the knowledge and techniques of Chilkat weaving come from the ancestors and have been passed down from generation to generation.

3. Students will learn that Chilkat robes and blankets have special meaning for those who make and those who dance them because the weavings show family and community stories.

William White makes it clear that one of the most significant reasons Tsimshian weavers weave Chilkat is to see the ancestors dance. Collecting the materials from the land, preparing these materials for use, creating the garment’s design, weaving the materials together, and finally donning a Chilkat robe or blanket are key steps in the Chilkat weaving process. Each of these steps brings the weavers and wearers of Chilkat closer to their ancestors.

For the Tsimshian people, virtually every aspect of Chilkat weaving involves the ancestors in some way—and because Chilkat weaving touches on so many facets of Tsimshian culture, understanding the role of the ancestors is integral. The knowledge of Chilkat weaving originates with the ancestors. The blankets and robes share stories about them. The ceremonies that use Chilkat summon their presence. It is for these reasons that William White proudly proclaims that his ancestors are still dancing. The tradition of Chilkat weaves the present with the past and ensures that the ancestors live on.
Big Idea
Ancestors and family are integral to Chilkat weaving.

Understanding
Students will be introduced to the various ways Tsimshian people experience the closeness of their ancestors when weaving and dancing Chilkat.

Suggestions for Starting a Discussion
- How do you remember your ancestors?
- Do you and your family do anything special that brings you closer to your ancestors?
- Could these activities be considered traditions? What is a tradition?
- Why do people have traditions?
- How do we learn our traditions?
- Why do we pass on traditions?

Kit Resources and Activity Suggestions

Gwishalaayt: The Spirit Wraps Around You (film)
This film provides a great introduction to Chilkat weaving and offers students the opportunity to learn about the significance of Chilkat from Tsimshian and Kwakwaka’wakw weavers. Many of the weavers in the film talk about the role of the ancestors in various steps of the weaving process. Draw students’ attention to this theme and encourage them to reflect on the film in a journal or discussion format.

My Ancestors Are Still Dancing Sourcebook
“The Robes Are So Special,” pp. 27-28
Use this short excerpt as a reading activity. Have the students reflect on the reading in a journal or as part of a class discussion.

Quotations
Use the quotations as discussion starters. Ask students to reflect on the quotations in groups or as a part of stationed activities.
Photographs 2, 8, and 18

These photographs show people dancing in Chilkat regalia. Use them to start a discussion around the theme of bringing the ancestors to life through ceremony and dance.

Photograph 7

This photograph shows different members of a family dressed in Chilkat. Encourage students to think about the importance of family and identity to Chilkat weaving. Ask students to consider the role of ceremonial regalia or special clothes in their own lives.

Extension Activity

Family Wall

Ask students to bring an object or photo to class that represents their family. Students can write a short paragraph explaining the significance of their chosen item and share their stories with the class—either as a presentation or as a creative project. With permission, display students' belongings and/or photographs in the classroom. Encourage students to reflect on how they feel having their objects or photographs on display. Do they, like William White, take pride in showing their family treasures or photographs? Designate a special place for the belongings of students who choose not to display them publicly. Lead a sensitive discussion about why it is legitimate for some people to keep things about their family and/or identity private.
Big Idea
Ancestors and family are integral to Chilkat weaving.

Understanding
Students will begin to understand that the knowledge and techniques of Chilkat weaving come from the ancestors and have been passed down from generation to generation.

Suggestions for Starting a Discussion

• List of some of the things your ancestors or family have taught you.
• Why do you think your family teaches you these things?
• What is different about learning from your family and learning from your teacher?
• Do you have any skills you would like to teach others? Why do you want to share them?

Kit Resources and Activity Suggestions

*My Ancestors Are Still Dancing* Sourcebook
“The Origin Story of Chilkat Weaving,” p. 13

This excerpt tells the Tsimshian origin story of Chilkat weaving. Focus on the understanding that the technical knowledge of Chilkat began with one woman and spread because she passed the knowledge on to others, who in turn continued to pass this knowledge on.
Quotations
These quotations are effective discussion starters for the whole class or for small groups. Ask students to think about the ways ancestors, from any culture, are teachers of important, passed-down skills and knowledge.

Photograph 4
Use this photograph to discuss the importance of teaching and passing on knowledge.

Extension Activities

Family Interview
Ask students to interview a parent, guardian, or other relative at home. Have students focus on the following: any special skills this person might have, how they learned these skills, how these skills have brought them closer to others, why they learned such skills, and how these skills have shaped who they are. Encourage students to present their interview findings in diverse ways which may include a written summary, skit, photo collage, audio recording, video, etc. If possible, invite some of these family members to a special sharing session in class where they can teach students firsthand about their stories and skills.

Letter to Elders
Ask students to think about something they have learned from a grandparent or another adult. Give students the opportunity to think deeply about these shared skills or experiences by providing prompts:

• How did they teach you this skill?
• How have you used this skill?
• Why is this experience important to you?
• Will you share similar experiences with young people in the future?

Once students have had time to consider these questions, they can write a thank-you letter to their relatives documenting what they have learned and why it has been important to them. Encourage students to decorate their letters in a way that best reflects their experiences and relationships.
In this section, White discusses how Chilkat weaving is only passed on to people who have the right to weave.

Many contemporary Chilkat weavers visit museums to see the work of their ancestors. To the well-trained eye, the actual techniques of Chilkat weaving can be seen in the final designs. Students are encouraged to think about how it may be possible to recognize the weaver in the weavings.
Big Idea
Ancestors and family are integral to Chilkat weaving.

Understanding
Students will learn that Chilkat robes and blankets have special meaning for those who make and those who dance them because the weavings show family and community stories.

Suggestions for Starting a Discussion

- What is a family heirloom? Do you have any? What are they?
- Why do you think family heirlooms are so special?
- What can family heirlooms teach us about our family and our ancestors?
- How can art speak for people who have long passed away?
- What are some ways, other than engaging with art or heirlooms, that we can learn about our ancestors?
- Why do you think people like to learn about their ancestors?

Kit Resources and Activity Suggestions

*My Ancestors Are Still Dancing* Sourcebook
“We Hold Them Up In High Esteem,” pp. 25-26
This reading outlines the uniqueness of the Chilkat weaving process when compared with other textile art forms. It provides students with background information on Chilkat before they focus on the weaving process through the tactile materials provided in the kit.

*My Ancestors Are Still Dancing* Sourcebook
“Child’s Chilkat Robe Design,” pp. 36-37
Students are encouraged to analyze the various design elements of different Chilkat weavings. Draw their attention to the use of certain human and animal features on this robe. In many cases, the imagery on a Chilkat weaving is symbolic. Lead a discussion about how and why artists use symbolism. This is also a good opportunity to introduce other topics like subjectivity in art. Sometimes different people respond to the same piece of art in different ways because art is open to interpretation.
Photographs 6, 9, 10, 11, 16, 18, 20, and 21

Each of these photographs depicts Chilkat robes, blankets, or dance aprons. Ask students to find similarities and differences across the designs and hypothesize why these similarities and differences exist. Remember: Each robe has its own story that is very personal to the weaver.

Extension Activities

Designing a Visual Language

Explore the various resources in the teaching kit with students and encourage them to notice the similarities between each Chilkat design. As a class, make a list of these common features. Chilkat weaving uses a distinct visual language that is inspired by the Tsimshian people’s surroundings in their traditional territory. Discuss with students how a culture's geographical place might influence its art. For example, early painters in Canada, like the Group of Seven, developed a striking new way of painting landscapes to better capture the majesty of the land, while lines in Raven's Tail weavings are meant to mimic the zig-zags of rippling water and the straight lines of tree trunks.

Have students create their own personal visual language to correspond with their unique identities. Using this visual language, students can create a t-shirt design to represent themselves.

Ask the students to reflect on this experience in a journal or in small group discussions. Prompt a discussion about appropriation: How would they feel if someone else used their visual language? Since each student’s visual language is unique to them, it would be inappropriate for someone else to use it unless permission was given. This is important to understand as it would be inappropriate for non-Indigenous students to copy a Chilkat design. When discussing appropriation, remember to emphasize that an art form like Chilkat has been continued and finessed for thousands of years. As such, copies of Chilkat would be even more problematic than copies of children’s t-shirt designs. Chilkat has a long and meaningful history to large groups of people.

Personal Heritage Art Project

Ask students to reflect on their family history: where they come from, what they value, how they spend their time, etc. Lead an art project that allows students to represent their own heritage using mixed media.

Family Heirlooms

Students may have family heirlooms that they wish to share with the class. Facilitate this sharing and have students think about why these heirlooms are special.
Connections

*My Ancestors Are Still Dancing* Sourcebook
“We Weave To See Them Dance,” pp. 19-20

This excerpt discusses the importance of Chilkat in ceremonies and emphasizes that individual Chilkat garments have distinct meanings to different families. Have students respond to this reading in a discussion or brainstorm session—encourage them to think of items that have different meanings to different groups of people (e.g., prayer beads might mean something different to Buddhists than to people who are not religious).

*My Ancestors Are Still Dancing* Sourcebook
“The Robes Are So Special,” pp. 27-28

Here, William White notes that every Chilkat robe is unique. After reading, students can consider what it means to give something you have made a name.

NMPBS: ¡COLORES! Clarissa Rizal (video)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5nLxERNwq

Tlingit weaver Clarissa Rizal (Hudson) discusses many topics, including the importance of passing down knowledge and history from generation to generation. Ask students to reflect on how knowledge-sharing helps determine how history is remembered.
The Making and Expressions of Chilkat Weaving
“A lot of these designs came directly from the land.”
—Ann Smith, Tutchone-Tlingit

“As we enter the dance floor we believe that our ancestors are right beside us, dancing. Their spirit lives on inside us.”
—William White, Tsimshian
The Making and Expressions of Chilkat Weaving

Big Idea

Indigenous knowledge systems, spirituality, and sense of identity are integral to the making and expressing of Chilkat weaving.

Understandings

1. Students will learn that Chilkat weavers are strongly connected with the land and draw inspiration from the environment.

2. Students will be exposed to the technical process of Chilkat weaving. They will see how weavers transform natural materials into robes or blankets.

3. Students will begin to understand the significance of Chilkat being danced. Tsimshian weavers design robes and blankets to be seen in motion—to bring the ancestors to life.

Chilkat weaving originated with the ancestors and continues to be passed through the generations. To weave Chilkat, weavers must work hard to learn the technical knowledge required to transform raw materials into a beautiful robe or blanket. Chilkat weaving does not just require manual skills; it also requires a spiritual understanding of the land and the ancestors.

Weaving Chilkat is complex and draws on many aspects of Tsimshian culture and identity. Collecting materials, designing the pattern board, working with the wool, and weaving the design are more meaningful than they might appear at first glance. How these steps take shape is determined, in many ways, by what the land and the ancestors offer. The land provides materials while the ancestors provide spiritual support. William White states that the ancestors are still dancing because they continue to inform every step of the journey towards creating and using Chilkat. Weaving Chilkat is about them.
Big Idea

Indigenous knowledge systems, spirituality, and sense of identity are integral to the making and expressing of Chilkat weaving.

Understanding

Students will learn that Chilkat weavers are strongly connected with the land and draw inspiration from the environment.

Suggestions for Starting a Discussion

• How does the land affect the way you live?
• How does the land help influence how a local culture takes shape?
• Where are you from? How do you feel about the places where you or your family members are from?

Kit Resources and Activity Suggestions

*My Ancestors Are Still Dancing* Sourcebook

“I’m Tsimshian,” p. 7

William White begins the sourcebook with a declaration of where he is from. Have students use this reading to learn about and discuss why the land is important to William White. Encourage students to reflect on the importance of place in their own experiences.

“Tsimshian Territorial Map,” pp. 10-11

This map shows the traditional territory of the Tsimshian people. Encourage students to consider how this map is different from other maps with familiar borders.

Quotations

Using Ann Smith’s quote about designs coming from the land, brainstorm with students specific ways nature might inspire Chilkat.

*The Skeena River is in the traditional territory of the Tsimshian people. British Columbia, 2009. Photo by SkeenaValleyGirl.*
Materials Used in the Weaving Process

Encourage students to interact with the various materials that are used in a Chilkat weaving. Review different ways that students can make observations about the materials (sight, smell, touch, etc.). Remind students that these materials come from the land. Encourage students to think about where specifically these materials might be found.

Chilkat Weaving Materials Cards

Students can work with the activity cards to learn more about the materials and the weavers who use them. Encourage students to follow the QR-codes on the Chilkat Weaving Materials Resources panel for further learning opportunities.

Chilkat Weaving Materials Panel

This panel lists the materials used in Chilkat weaving. It is a vital supplement for any activities planned around the materials in the kit.

Extension Activities

Virtual Visit to Tsimshian Territory

On a SMART board or projector, show students images of different landscapes from traditional Tsimshian territory in what is now known as Northwestern British Columbia (see p. 11 of the Sourcebook for reference). Encourage students to consider how the land influenced Tsimshian life and culture in the past and how it continues to influence Tsimshian life today. Students can reflect on how seeing the land has heightened their understanding of the Tsimshian people. As an extension, encourage students to research current issues facing this region, such as land claims and pipeline development.

TXTile City (txtilecity.ca)

This website and smart phone/tablet app maps the history and significance of diverse textiles in Toronto. Facilitate students’ exploration of the website, highlighting how place is fundamentally important to people’s experiences and understandings of textiles. Draw students’ attention to any places on the website that you believe are particularly relevant to their interests.

Mapping Textile Stories in Your Hometown

After being exposed to TXTile City, students can consider their own experiences with textiles, fabric, and clothing in their local neighbourhoods, communities, and personal lives. Ask students to tie their experiences to specific places, sharing stories through the use of images, drawings, poetry, or prose. Display these experiences on a map.
The Making and Expressions of Chilkat Weaving

Big Idea

Indigenous knowledge systems, spirituality, and sense of identity are integral to the making and expressing of Chilkat weaving.

Understanding

Students will be exposed to the technical process of Chilkat weaving. They will see how weavers transform natural materials into robes or blankets.

Suggestions for Starting a Discussion

- Have you ever made anything that you are proud of?
- Why is this creation important to you?
- How do you, personally, learn new skills?
- What are some things you think about before working on a project? Why?
- How does your process influence the completed work?

Kit Resources and Activity Suggestions

My Ancestors Are Still Dancing Sourcebook

“Stages of Weaving a Chilkat Robe,” pp. 34-35

These pages depict the step-by-step process of weaving Chilkat. We strongly recommend you share this process with the students before or after exploring the kit’s tactile resources. This section can guide your planning as you decide how to organize stations for student exploration (see below).

Materials Used in the Weaving Process

Set the tactile resources out in stations representing the various stages of the Chilkat weaving process. Encourage students to record their observations, thoughts, and questions as their exploration unfolds. They are also encouraged to interact with the materials using the Chilkat Weaving Materials Cards as guides. Afterwards, debrief as a class to review how Chilkat weavers transform these materials into weavings.
Photograph 5

This photograph shows William White working on the loom. Students are encouraged to discuss the complexity of Chilkat and the special skills involved. Consider the time and dedication required to develop and hone special skills.

Chilkat Weaving Materials Panel

This panel lists the materials used in Chilkat weaving.

The Chilkat Weaving Process Panel

This panel outlines William White’s weaving process.

Extension Activities

Making Observations

Using any combination of the materials in the kit, ask students to make qualitative and quantitative observations. Encourage them to draw on all their senses. Which types of observations offered them the most insight?

Thigh-Spinning

Traditional Chilkat weavers turn wool into useable yarn by spinning the wool on their thighs (using the same kind of motion you might use to roll out a long piece of dough). Try it for yourself with unprepared wool or cotton!
The Making and Expressions of Chilkat Weaving

Big Idea

Indigenous knowledge systems, spirituality, and sense of identity are integral to the making and expressing of Chilkat weaving.

Understanding

Students will begin to understand the significance of Chilkat being danced. Tsimshian weavers design robes and blankets to be seen in motion—to bring the ancestors to life.

Suggestions for Starting a Discussion

- Can you think of any cultures that use special clothes or regalia in ceremonies or at special events?
- Why are ceremonial clothes made and worn?
- Can you think of any special clothes designed to accentuate movement?
- What is the difference between experiencing clothes as still objects and seeing them in motion?

Kit Resources and Activity Suggestions

My Ancestors Are Still Dancing Sourcebook
“We Weave To See Them Dance,” p. 19

This section emphasizes the fact that dancing Chilkat can be a declaration of one’s identity. In discussions or writing activities, encourage students to think about why and how people assert their identities. Why is it especially important for First Nations and other people who have been marginalized? Talk with your students about how settlers have sometimes “identified” Indigenous people (e.g., racist categories, names, and numbers, or policies that effect Indigenous people negatively).
Quotations

Use quotations about Chilkat weaving and identity to discuss the fact that many people dance Chilkat to show pride in their culture.

Photographs 2, 8, and 18

These photographs show Chilkat regalia in motion. Students are encouraged to think about the differences between a robe when it is stationary and a robe when it is being danced. As an extension, students can think about what this might mean for museum objects and cultural belongings on display.

Extension Activity

Seek Out an Indigenous Performance

Reach out to local Indigenous communities and inquire about Indigenous dance groups. We encourage you to book a performance or sharing session at your school. If possible, arrange a question-and-answer period after the performance. Students are encouraged to ask more about the role of clothing in ceremonies. Alternatively, search for videos online showing Indigenous song and dance. Make sure students research the peoples in these videos for additional context.

^ Left to right: William White, Clarissa Hudson (Rizal), and Jean Lampe at a feast in Prince Rupert, British Columbia, 2000. Photo by Barb Cranmer.
The Right to Weave
“When I teach somebody to weave, they need to have the right. I won’t teach somebody who doesn’t have the right to use Chilkat.”

—William White, Tsimshian

“I learned Chilkat weaving from a Tlingit lady named Anna Ehlers Brown. She learned it from Jennie Thlunaut, and Jennie Thlunaut learned from her aunt, and her aunt learned from her aunt, all the way back to the original Tlingit woman.”

—William White, Tsimshian

“Culture is just everyday living, until someone tries to take it away from you. Then you need to stand up and say: ‘this is who I am’ and ‘this is where I’m from!’”

—William White, Tsimshian
The Right to Weave

Big Idea

The right and privilege to weave Chilkat has connections to history, spirituality, and identity.

Understandings

1. Students will be introduced to the idea that one must have the right to weave Chilkat. They will consider what rights are, where rights come from, and what it means to have a right.

2. Students will learn that the right to weave has been passed down from the ancestors and can be traced back to the first Chilkat weaver.

3. The right to weave and wear Chilkat is a meaningful part of Tsimshian people's identity. Students will learn that Tsimshian weavers exercise this right to assert their identity.

William White tells us that Chilkat has existed for thousands of years and comes from the Tsimshian ancestors. He calls Chilkat weaving a gift. Weavers must be ready in mind and spirit to receive this gift before they can take up the art of Chilkat weaving.

Rights are integral to Chilkat weaving. The traditions of weaving involve relationships structured around respect. It is paramount that people respect the rights of Indigenous artists, like Tsimshian Chilkat weavers, to share their cultures on their own terms. Respecting the weavers’ perspectives is very important as, unfortunately, Indigenous peoples’ voices and experiences have not always been recognized or acknowledged. Throughout Canada’s history and into the present, the government has forced colonization, Indian Residential Schools, and other methods of assimilation upon Indigenous people. Indeed, colonization is still happening today. In efforts to reconcile with Indigenous communities, non-Indigenous people can begin to bridge the gap by respecting Indigenous traditions and cultural practices.
Big Idea

The right and privilege to weave Chilkat has connections to history, spirituality, and identity.

Understanding

Students will be introduced to the idea that one must have the right to weave Chilkat. They will consider what rights are, where rights come from, and what it means to have a right.

Suggestions for Starting a Discussion

- What do you think it means to have a right?
- What do you think it means to have a responsibility?
- What are some rights and responsibilities you have?
- Why do you think these rights and responsibilities are important?
- Has someone ever refused to respect your rights or uphold their responsibilities to you? How did it feel?

Kit Resources and Activity Suggestions

Quotations

Using quotations, give students the chance to consider why they think the right to weave is an important part of Chilkat weaving.

My Ancestors Are Still Dancing Sourcebook
“A True Weaver Is Chosen...” pp. 21-22

Use this reading as an introduction to the concept of the right to weave. The text can be used to start a discussion around rights and where they come from. Encourage students to also think about cultural ownership. When cultures express themselves through a distinct art form like Chilkat, that art form is theirs—they have the right to control how it is used.

Extension Activities

Charter of Rights and Freedoms

Introduce students to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Ask students to identify rights that are important to them. Students should consider how these rights affect their daily lives. As an extension, read Section 25 (which forbids any application of the Charter from constraining Indigenous rights) or the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Looking at either document, encourage students to think about whether they believe anything important has been left out. Are some provisions not being upheld? What implicit responsibilities might be in the Charter or Declaration?

Personal Expression of Rights

Encourage students to think about rights that are especially important to them. Facilitate a project that allows students to express these rights. This can take various forms: visual art, poetry, written narrative, journal entry, drama, etc. Students can consider how it feels to express these rights and why it might be important to do so.

Connection

Alaska Public Media KSKA 91.1: Weaving
http://www.alaskapublic.org/2014/07/18/ak-weaving/

With students, listen to this segment featuring Ricky Tagaban and his thoughts on the right of men to weave Chilkat. If possible, find out more about what it means to be two-spirited.
Big Idea

The right and privilege to weave Chilkat has connections to history, spirituality, and identity.

Understanding

Students will learn that the right to weave has been passed down from the ancestors and can be traced back to the first Chilkat weaver.

Suggestions for Starting a Discussion

• What is your definition of culture?
• Where do you think culture comes from?
• Consider the terms “ancestry” and “lineage.” How do they apply to culture in general? How do they apply to Chilkat weaving specifically?
• Why might someone choose to keep certain aspects of their culture secret or private?
• Consider the potential consequences when someone who is not ready or respectful (or does not have the right) reproduces sacred elements of a particular culture.

Kit Resources and Activity Suggestions

*My Ancestors Are Still Dancing* Sourcebook
“They Are The Ones That Kept Chilkat Alive,” pp. 15-16

William White states that Chilkat weaving started with the Tsimshian Nation and moved to other Northwest peoples. The right to weave moved with it. In discussions, reflections, or brainstorm sessions, encourage students to think about other ways that aspects of culture can spread.

Quotations

Discuss the quotation from William White that refers to learning Chilkat “from a Tlingit lady named Anna Ehlers Brown.” Reinforce with your students the idea that Chilkat is passed down only to those who are ready to receive it. This right comes from the first Chilkat weaver.

Photograph 4

Use this photograph to spark discussion around the ways that education helps spread culture. Students are encouraged to share their ideas in a journal entry or a group drama performance.
Extension Activity

Tracking Culture

As a class, in groups, or individually, track the origins of different cultural expressions through time and space. An example could be something as broad as the use of fireworks at festivals or as specific as the Christmas tree. Students should consider how these cultural expressions have spread and changed. Encourage students to communicate their findings on a large map or in a creative presentation.

Connection

My Ancestors Are Still Dancing Sourcebook
“The Origin Story of Chilkat Weaving,” pp. 13-14

This passage shares the origin story of Chilkat weaving, which tells that the right to weave originated with the first Chilkat weaver. Students are encouraged to discuss how ancient traditions and origin stories influence the way we think about rights and responsibilities today. Please remind students to be respectful about others’ beliefs.

< Haida artist Jim Hart, wearing Raven’s Tail regalia, performs the carver’s dance around the newly completed Respect to Bill Reid Pole. MOA, October 2000. Photo by Sheila Wigmore.
Big Idea
The right and privilege to weave Chilkat has connections to history, spirituality, and identity.

Understanding
The right to weave and wear Chilkat is a meaningful part of Tsimshian people’s identity. Students will learn that Tsimshian weavers exercise this right to assert their identity.

Suggestions for Starting a Discussion
• Why do you think people make art?
• What are some approaches artists use to communicate messages?
• How can art be a representation of a person’s beliefs, worldviews, or convictions? How do you think art and identity are linked?
• Is art political? Is it always political?

Kit Resources and Activity Suggestions

My Ancestors Are Still Dancing Sourcebook
“I’m a Weaver,” pp. 9-10
In this reading, William White discusses why he thinks it is important to teach the public about Chilkat weaving.

Quotations
Use the quotations about Chilkat weaving and standing up for your identity to discuss with students the different kinds of things that make them who they are.

Photographs 2, 8, 10, 15, and 16
These photos show Indigenous people proudly wearing Chilkat. How are these people asserting their identities?

^ Stikine Tlingit woman belonging to the Nnyaayi family poses in her Chilkat robe at Wrangell, Alaska, 1885. Photo by G.T. Emmons, courtesy of the Royal British Columbia Museum, PN 11880.
**Extension Activities**

**Cultural Brainstorm**

In groups, have students brainstorm elements of global, national, regional, and local culture. As the students share their work, ask them to consider how these cultural expressions can help form a person’s individual identity.

**Identify Yourself!**

Have students brainstorm different ways people identify themselves (names, clothing, labels, etc.). Consider how identities influence actions and why it might be important to make your identity known. Students can write and/or perform a song declaring their identity.

**Letter to the Editor**

Ask students to think about why it is important for Indigenous people to express their cultural identities. Show students the correct conventions for writing a letter and have them draft a letter to a local newspaper answering why it is important to respect and celebrate Indigenous cultures.

**Connections**

*My Ancestors Are Still Dancing Sourcebook*

“*I’m Tsimshian,*” pp. 7-8

In this reading, William White explains what it means for him to identify as Tsimshian. Encourage students to discuss why this identity is important to him.

*My Ancestors Are Still Dancing Sourcebook*

“*Our Past Is Our Future,*” pp. 29-30

Ask students to read this text and focus on how Chilkat is a marker of identity.

*My Ancestors Are Still Dancing Sourcebook*

“We Will Still Be Here,” p. 31

William White discusses why history and heritage are important to people’s identity. Students are encouraged to discuss elements of the past that have shaped who they are.
My Ancestors Are Still Dancing
*Use these quotations from Indigenous weavers at the beginning of your activities to engage the class in discussion about Chilkat weaving.

“Many of our arts were laid aside because some believed that our arts were valueless, evil, crude, and only belonged in the hands of museums [...] as mementos of a dying culture.”

—Indigenous Weavers Circle Artists’ Statement

“I’ve always gone to [...] museums to look at their collections. They’re the best teachers. [...] When I go and look at the weavings, I know I’m learning from the woman who did that.”

—William White, Tsimshian

“The goal is to make Chilkat weaving secure again within the Tsimshian Nation. This is just the beginning. I’m giving myself until I’m 50 to try and teach as many Tsimshian people as I can. [...] I’m going to explain to my next students that you need to learn this so that you can go to your people and teach them.”

—William White, Tsimshian
My Ancestors Are Still Dancing

Big Idea

Chilkat weaving continues to be an important cultural expression for Tsimshian people today.

Understandings

1. Students will reflect on the continuity and change of Chilkat weaving and its ongoing legacy.

2. Students will consider the importance of William White's role as an educator and knowledge-holder.

3. Students will start to understand how Chilkat weaving and cultural practices are statements of resistance and resilience in the face of colonialism.

This chapter’s theme and the kit title, My Ancestors Are Still Dancing, are intentional. This phrase is meant to remind us of the continuity and resilience of Indigenous cultural expressions like Chilkat weaving. Settler colonialism in Canada has taken many forms throughout this country’s history and continues to structure the state's relationships with Indigenous people today. Despite this history, Chilkat weaving persists as a vibrant part of the resilient Tsimshian culture. Chilkat weaving may have been threatened in the past, but this reality only serves to illuminate why it is so important that weavers continue to share their knowledge today. Through the continuance of Chilkat weaving, the ancestors will continue to dance for generations to come.
Big Idea

Chilkat weaving continues to be an important cultural expression for Tsimshian people today.

Understanding

Students will reflect on the continuity and change of Chilkat weaving, as well as its ongoing legacy.

Suggestions for Starting a Discussion

• Why do you think cultures change? How do they change?
• What are some internal and external forces that drive change in cultures and communities?
• Reflecting on what you have learned so far, what has changed and what has persisted in Chilkat weaving?
• Sometimes, cultural belongings (objects) are stolen from communities, sold by families, or unearthed by archaeologists. Discuss the impact of belongings moving from communities and families into museums.

Kit Resources and Activity Suggestions

*My Ancestors Are Still Dancing* Sourcebook
“*Our Past Is Our Future,*” p. 29
This reading emphasizes that Chilkat weaving continues to be a part of many Northwest Coast First Nations cultures. Ask students to read this text and focus on how Chilkat has endured for countless generations.

*My Ancestors Are Still Dancing* Sourcebook
Consider that this cultural belonging is now kept at a museum instead of in the community it came from. Why is it important to note that it is on display at a museum instead of being danced? What are the pros and cons of cultural belongings like this Chilkat apron being housed at a museum? Ask students to take on these questions in a reflection, research project, or group documentary.
Quotations

Use William White’s quotation about making Chilkat weaving “secure again within the Tsimshian Nation” to discuss the obstacles that Chilkat weaving faces today.

Photographs

Encourage students to think critically about the photographs in the kit. Have they been staged? If so, how? What can and cannot be learned by looking at photographs? Allow students to make specific observations and inferences about some of the images. Focus on what might not have been included in a given photo so that students understand the drawbacks of only relying on photographs. While useful, they are not able to share the whole story.

Extension Activity

Museum Labels

Using real examples, expose students to the information labels that usually accompany museum belongings. Draw students’ attention to commonalities across these labels. Next, choose one photo or object from the teaching kit and challenge the students, in groups, to write an information label for this item. Once finished, discuss how different perspectives can lead to different labels. Make sure students reflect on content, too: How much is enough? Where is this information coming from? What changes about how we see an object when it is in a museum?

Connection

Alaska Public Media KSKA 91.1: Weaving
http://www.alaskapublic.org/2014/07/18/ak-weaving/

Listen to this segment with students. How is Ricky Tagaban changing Chilkat?
Big Idea

Chilkat weaving continues to be an important cultural expression for Tsimshian people today.

Understanding

Students will consider the importance of William White’s role as an educator and knowledge-holder.

Suggestions for Starting a Discussion

- What does it mean to be a knowledge-holder?
- What are some reasons a person would want to hold onto the knowledge of their ancestors and prevent others from gaining it?
- From whom do we receive information? Why is it important to think about the source of our information?
- How do you learn new things? Do you think about where your knowledge comes from?
Kit Resources and Activity Suggestions

_Gwishalaayt: The Spirit Wraps Around You_ (film)

Review or rewatch the section of the film that shows the Chilkat weavers bringing out and examining old Chilkat robes at museums. What is their emotional response to seeing these textiles? How can they learn from the old Chilkat weavings?

_My Ancestors Are Still Dancing_ Sourcebook

_*It’s Like Painting With Wool,*_ pp. 17-18

William White shares the importance of teaching people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, about Chilkat weaving and why this art form is so important to Tsimshian people. Encourage students to reflect on the history and ongoing importance of cultural traditions.

_My Ancestors Are Still Dancing_ Sourcebook

_*The Old Pieces Are The Best Teachers,*_ p. 23

Many contemporary Chilkat weavers visit museums to see the work of the ancestors. The actual techniques of Chilkat weaving can be seen in the final weaving. This is one way to converse with the old knowledge-holders. Encourage students to think about how we might identify (and identify _with_) the maker of an object or artwork through their work.

Quotations

Use the quotations that discuss special knowledge, knowledge-sharing, education, and colonialism to engage the class in a discussion on where knowledge comes from, who has the right to share it, and whether or not some sources of knowledge are trustworthy. What happens when someone takes someone else’s knowledge for themselves and passes it on in an inaccurate or inappropriate way?

^ Members of the Qayqayt Nation hold a ceremony and share their knowledge with teachers in the New Westminster school district. New Westminster, 2012. Photo by the Province of British Columbia.
Extension Activities

Knowledge Sources

Brainstorm the different ways people can learn about Indigenous people and their cultures. Ask students to consider which methods are respectful and which might spread misconceptions about Indigenous people. What do the respectful methods have in common? What do the methods with negative consequences have in common?

Cultural Appropriation Observation Journal

Show students examples of cultural appropriation (sports logos, fashion designs, feather headdresses at music festivals, etc.). Discuss these examples with students, emphasizing that appropriation often hurts, insults, and demeans Indigenous people. Have students keep a lookout for cultural appropriation in their daily lives and record their findings in a journal. Cultural appropriation happens when people with privilege use the arts and culture of historically marginalized communities without permission. For more reading on cultural appropriation, check out http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/cultural-appropriation-guide-1.3600363.

Cultural Appropriation Pinterest Activity

After providing students with examples of cultural appropriation, set up a class Pinterest account. Ask the students to create individual or group “cultural appropriation” boards and have them “pin” different images of cultural appropriation from the internet on this board. Alternatively, set up a collaborative board for the whole class on which students can pin their images.
Connections

*My Ancestors Are Still Dancing* Sourcebook
“*I’m a Weaver,*” p. 9

William White asserts that it is important to share his knowledge of Chilkat. Encourage students to consider what might happen to Chilkat weaving if he did not pass on his skills or raise awareness about this art form among the public. How does his role as an educator affect his community? How does it shape his identity? Encourage students to share their thoughts in an original dramatization or group brainstorm.

*My Ancestors Are Still Dancing* Sourcebook
“*Our Past Is Our Future,*” pp. 29-30

Chilkat plays an important role in the cultures that weave it, even as they adapt and change over time. Ask students to read this text and focus on how Chilkat is a marker of identity for weavers and wearers. What is the role of education in building identity? Encourage students to brainstorm different values, morals, manners, or behaviours they have learned from their school education. Do these teachings affect the way students lead their lives outside of school?

*My Ancestors Are Still Dancing* Sourcebook
“*We Will Still Be Here,*” p. 31

William White shares his conviction that the Tsimshian people will be on the Northwest Pacific Coast for thousands of years to come. Encourage students to consider the role of education and knowledge-sharing from trustworthy knowledge-keepers in making sure that the Tsimshian culture lives on.

Materials Used in the Weaving Process

Ask students to consider who might have gathered the materials in this teaching kit and put them together for classroom use. Are these people knowledge-holders? After discussion, share with students that William White played a key role providing the information for this kit. In a journal, have students reflect on why William White wants non-Indigenous students to be exposed to Chilkat weaving.
Big Idea

Chilkat weaving continues to be an important cultural expression for Tsimshian people today.

Understanding

Students will start to understand how Chilkat weaving and other cultural practices are statements of resistance and resilience in the face of colonialism.

Suggestions for Starting a Discussion

- What is resistance?
- What is resilience?
- Have you ever demonstrated these qualities? How and why?
- Why do people sometimes need to demonstrate resistance and resilience?
- Why do you think William White stresses that his ancestors are still dancing today?
- Why is it important to consider narratives of resistance when considering the history of Canada?
- What are some ways Indigenous people are making their voices heard in Canada?
- How can non-Indigenous people support these efforts?

Kit Resources and Activity Suggestions

My Ancestors Are Still Dancing Sourcebook
“My Ancestors Are Still Dancing,” pp. 5-6; “We Will Still Be Here,” p. 31

As a wrap-up activity, encourage students to read these sections and discuss their thoughts. What do they think the title My Ancestors Are Still Dancing means? Have students consider why it is important for William White to proclaim that “we will still be here.”

Indigenous Weavers Circle Artists’ Statement (see Appendix)

Provide a copy of the artists’ statement to students (individually or in groups) and have them read it carefully. Ask them to reflect on the resistance and resilience demonstrated in this statement using poetry, prose, or art. Alternatively, have students write a personal statement of support in response to the Weavers Circle.
Photographs

Ask student groups to search through the photographs in the kit and choose one photo that they believe best showcases the resilience of Indigenous people or Chilkat weaving. Have the students prepare a short defense of their choice, either for a class presentation or in a teacher-student interview.

Extension Activity

Investigating Forced Assimilation through Photos

Discuss assimilation with students. Explain that the government of Canada took many steps to force Indigenous people to abandon their cultures. Ask students to search online for photographs of some of these assimilation programs, like Indian Residential Schools, or the forced relocation of some Inuit to the high arctic. After, share with the class some of the black and white photos in the kit that show the ancestors proudly wearing Chilkat regalia. Compare and contrast the photos that the students found with the photos from the kit. Discuss how resistance and resilience might be present in all of these photos. How might Chilkat today be a response to these assimilatory agendas?

Connection

NMPBS: ¡COLORES! Clarissa Rizal (video)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5nLxfERNwg

Discuss how the robe made by Tlingit weaver Clarissa Rizal (Hudson) (shown at the end of the video) demonstrates Chilkat’s ability to be an agent of cultural resistance and resilience.

^ Chief Joshua Tsebesa (top right) and other high-ranking community members from the Tsimshian village of Kitkatla; date unknown. Photo by C. Rushbrook, courtesy the Museum of Northern British Columbia, 973-11-91.
Final Activity: Classroom Exhibit
Chilkat weaving is a form of total cultural expression, which means that its importance transcends aesthetics and the replication of form. In other words, Chilkat weaving is about more than just how it looks or how it is made. After working with content across various themes (Ancestors and Family, The Making and Expressions of Chilkat, The Right to Weave, and My Ancestors Are Still Dancing), students should understand that these aspects of Chilkat weaving are completely interwoven.

The final activity is meant to be a culminating experience for students that will allow them to weave these elements of Chilkat together for themselves. In so doing, students will be better able to demonstrate a holistic understanding of Chilkat and comprehend what it means that this art is a form of total cultural expression.
Final Activity: Classroom Exhibit

Overview

*My Ancestors Are Still Dancing* Classroom Exhibit

Students will put together a mini museum exhibit in the classroom using the materials in the kit and outside resources. The exhibit should touch on each of the four themes. This project requires students to self-direct their learning while working towards the completion of the class exhibit. Along the way, students will determine that they need to complete a number of important steps, from brainstorming and researching to mounting displays and presenting.

Students should work in groups, each of which will be responsible for developing content around one of the four themes:

1. Ancestors and Family
2. The Making and Expressions of Chilkat Weaving
3. The Right to Weave
4. My Ancestors Are Still Dancing

The class will need to meet regularly to discuss its progress and negotiate how the resources in the kit will be divided—although students are working in groups, the goal is to bring them all together as a whole.

Components

Brainstorming and Planning

Student groups will decide which items they want to incorporate in their section of the classroom exhibit, as well as how to display them. Groups are encouraged to come up with a vision for their section and plan how they will divide the work. They can create a proposal outlining their plans.

Dividing the Resources

Have groups bring their proposals to the class and negotiate which groups will be responsible for which kit resources.

Research

Students are encouraged to conduct additional research about Chilkat weaving, as well as other social, cultural, and political aspects of Tsimshian culture. This knowledge can be presented in the exhibit in various ways.
Drafting Museum Labels

One way students can share their learning is through the creation of labels or text panels that can accompany the objects on display. These labels might explain what the item is, where it comes from, any relevant context, or how it relates to the main themes of the kit. As an extension, students are encouraged to include non-traditional components, too (such as students’ responses to the kit’s resources, personal reflections, poems, etc.). Within their groups, each student should complete at least one label.

Creative Displays

Students can mount their displays in whatever creative ways spark their imagination. They can control what their labels look like, how their exhibits are designed, and how visitors should interact with the objects and the space. Students’ methods should be grounded in what they have learned from the kit, reflect the content of the resources on display, and aid in spreading the message they wish to convey.

Exhibit Opening

Celebrate the opening of your classroom’s My Ancestors Are Still Dancing mini museum exhibit by hosting a small opening and sharing remarks. Students can make speeches about the items they worked with and tour guests through the space. Encourage students to speak to the themes reflected in their learning.
Extentions and Cross-Curricular Tie-Ins

Original Content

Although the students will draw heavily on items in the kit for their class display, they are encouraged to create original content as well. Students can write poems, create artwork, film videos, or stage a dramatic presentation to share their new knowledge in a respectful way.

Exhibit Map

To bolster students’ mapping skills, have them map the exhibition’s layout once the items are staged for display. Encourage students to map their thoughts, feelings, and new knowledge in reference to places in the classroom, too. As students have learned, place is important when thinking about knowledge and relationships.

Exhibit Promotion

Students can promote their exhibit to the whole school using radio advertisements, posters, public relations stunts, or as part of an assembly. Encourage them to work collaboratively on an information pamphlet for visitors. When planning their promotional campaign, students should be reminded about avoiding cultural appropriation and treating Indigenous knowledge with respect. If appropriate, open your exhibit to parents and family and collect donations at the door for a local organization involved with First Nations issues in your community.

Museum of Anthropology

Arrange a class field trip to MOA so students can see the Chilkat blankets that are on display at the Museum. Although the My Ancestors Are Still Dancing exhibition is no longer on view, Chilkat weavings can be seen as part of the permanent collection.
Conclusion
Conclusion

The Tsimshian people have faced many challenges in the past and continue to do so. They have demonstrated an unwavering ability to survive in the face of adversity—their traditions, like Chilkat weaving, are strong and vibrant. One of the reasons Chilkat weaving endures is because artists like William White understand and value the importance of raising awareness about the art form and sharing their knowledge of Chilkat with Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

It is impossible to know everything about any topic, and sometimes we are not meant to. When learning from Indigenous peoples, there is real value in leaving our expectations at the door and instead simply listening. Through the efforts and dedication of William White, we are able to learn and appreciate the significance of Chilkat weaving—not only to Tsimshian life, but to the land all of us on the Northwest Coast call home. It is in this spirit of respect and openness that an understanding between peoples can take shape. It is here, too, that William White and his people can rest assured that their ancestors will always continue to dance.

The Museum of Anthropology offers its heartfelt thanks to William White for his willingness to share Chilkat weaving—his art and passion—with the public. We are also grateful for his invaluable contributions to this resource over many years.
Conclusion

My Ancestors Are Still Dancing
Chilkat Weaving Teaching Kit

^ Gwishalaayt (Sala gamiliga gaax ganou), William White, Tsimshian, MOA, 2641/1.
Reference Information
Online Resources

MOACAT: MOA’s Online Collections
http://collection-online.moa.ubc.ca/collection-online/home
Check out Chilkat in the Museum of Anthropology’s collection!

ClarissaRizal.com
http://clarissarizal.com/
Search the online blog and gallery belonging to Tlingit weaver Clarissa Rizal (Hudson). She shares interesting insights on Chilkat weaving.

LilyHope.com
http://lilyhope.com/
Lily Hope is a Tlingit Chilkat weaver. Check out her website for more about her and her projects.

Alaska Public Media KSKA 91.1: Weaving Radio
http://www.alaskapublic.org/2014/07/18/ak-weaving/
Listen to a radio segment about Tlingit weaver Ricky Tagaban and men’s right to weave.

Interview with Chilkat Weaver Shelly Laws
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kyBqYh8AAOU
This YouTube video shares Tlingit weaver Shelly Laws’ story about how she learned Chilkat.

NMPBS: ¡COLORES! Clarissa Rizal
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5nLxfERNwg
This vignette shows how Chilkat can be a statement of resistance and resilience.

Northwest Coast Weavers Supply
http://nwcoastweaverssupply.com/
Learn more about the materials that go into a Chilkat weaving.
Chilkat Weaving Materials

Wolf moss
Wolf moss grows on trees or rocks. Its pigment is perfect for yellow dyes. In Chilkat, once the wool is dyed, the colour is fixed with a urine mordant.

Weft yarn
The weft is woven side to side, between the warp. The Chilkat process allows weavers to complete individual sections one at a time. Weft can be dyed many colours.

Unprepared inner cedar bark
Cedar bark is harvested from cedar trees by pulling off a strip of bark starting from the bottom of the tree trunk. The inner layer is what is used in Chilkat.

Boiled inner cedar bark
Before it can be used in Chilkat, inner cedar bark is boiled for up to three days. This removes the sap, which would make the bark too brittle to use.

Boiled and split bark
Once the bark has been boiled, it is stripped into thin strands. These strands are later used in the weaving's warp.

Raw mountain goat wool
Traditionally, Chilkat weavings used mountain goat wool. Today, mountain goat wool is very difficult to access, so most Chilkat weavers use Merino wool.

Carded sheep wool
Merino sheep wool is carded or brushed to make sure all the fibres are untangled and straightened. The wool must be free of knots before it is spun.
Spun sheep wool
Chilkat weavers spin their wool into long strands using a back-and-forth rolling motion on their thigh. Once spun, it can be further spun into warp.

Warp in process
Warp is made by combining boiled and split cedar bark with wool. Weavers spin the materials together on their thigh using a Z-twist and an S-twist.

Completed warp
Chilkat blankets require an average of one thousand yards of warp. It can take around six months or more to spin all the warp needed for a Chilkat blanket.

Forming the eye shape
Chilkat is the only type of weaving in which weavers are able to weave circles. Weavers work on small swatches of the robe at a time.

Borders and panels
There are two methods of joining different coloured sections: dovetail and drawstring joins. All of the motifs, joins, and braided outlines are done by hand.

Deer hooves
When dancing Chilkat, the rattle of deer hooves helps summon the ancestors.

Completed ancestor face
Faces can have different meanings in Chilkat. To some, they represent ancestors, while to others they symbolize an animal's human spirit.
The Chilkat Weaving Process

1. Pattern Board
   Henry Green and William White design a Chilkat pattern board. A pattern board only shows half of the final design. White will reflect the image as he weaves to make a symmetrical robe. Traditionally, women would do the weaving and a male relative would create the design.

2. Washing
   William White orders Merino sheep wool from New Zealand and Australia. Before it can be spun into warp, it needs to be cleaned.

3. Brushing
   The wool is combed to make it soft enough to spin. This is similar to the process of carding wool. The fibres must be straight and separated.

4. Spinning
   William is spinning the warp for the robe. He combines yellow cedar bark that has been boiled and split with the combed wool. He spins by rolling the wool and cedar down his thigh (Z-twist) and then back up (S-twist).
5. Warped Loom
After the warp is spun, it is placed on the loom. Although it is called a loom, it actually acts more like a frame. Looms used in other types of weaving keep the warp taut on both ends. In Chilkat, the warp is suspended from the top and hangs freely.

6. Beginning to Weave
The weaving of a Chilkat robe begins with a top row of un-dyed wool and is followed by a row of black. This is done by twining the black wool, called weft, over and under each strand of warp.

7. Weaving the Design
William is beginning to weave a design: the Raven’s head. When weaving Chilkat, one starts at the centre and works outward. Weavers can go back and forth in sections without completing a whole row, which is why some say Chilkat is like painting with wool.

8. Head of the Raven
Here, the first major section of the weaving is complete. You can see the eyes, ears, and beak of the Raven. In Chilkat, the whole blanket often has one big design (like a raven), while individual parts have designs within them.
Appendix
Indigenous Weavers Circle

Artists’ Statement

In recent times, many of our arts were laid aside because some believed that our arts were valueless, evil, crude, and only belonged in the hands of museums and collectors as mementos of a dying culture. At one time, our art defined and interpreted who we were as nations, clans, families, and individuals and set the traditional boundaries for our jurisdiction over the land. Many incorrect assumptions have been made about ourselves and our art. We pledge to uphold the wishes of our ancestors and living Elders to regain ownership of our traditional art forms and pledge to strengthen our roles as teacher, artist, and interpreter of our art forms through further gathering and expanding the circle of weavers. We encourage non-Indigenous artists who use our art forms to look to their own cultural backgrounds for strength and inspirations. This will lead to a real sharing and understanding between all peoples.

Source: Gwishalaayt: The Spirit Wraps Around You (film).