



ALLIGATOR WRESTLING:

Danger. Entertainment. Tradition.

High School Curricula

2019



Introduction

“Alligator Wrestling: Danger. Entertainment. Tradition” is an exhibit at the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum on display from December 2019 through November 2020.

The exhibit explores the deep roots of the Seminole’s relationship to alligators. Traditionally Seminole ancestors hunted gators. By the early 1900s as settlers encroached on Seminole lands, they had had to change their ways. Seminoles traded them live gators and gator hides that were made into luxury goods. As more tourists came to the state, Seminoles worked in tourist villages where they demonstrated traditional life ways, sold crafts, and wrestled gators in order to support their families. Since the 1990s, many have stopped wrestling gators, but some Seminoles continue the tradition.

The exhibit features historic artifacts, gator skin and teeth to touch, oral histories from alligator wrestlers, film of gator wrestling moves, and many interactives.

This curricula was developed to enhance a Museum visit or as a stand alone lesson plan so that students can learn about the Seminole tradition of alligator wrestling.



Description

Students will learn about Seminole alligator traditions using primary and secondary sources. They will listen to an oral history, watch a music video and alligator wrestling, and see postcards, photographs, and objects. As a class they will then create a posterboard or online exhibit. They will determine the story they will tell with their display. In small groups, they will write labels about specific objects and then add them to a poster board or in a digital format to create their exhibit. Please share final exhibits with us through Facebook or Twitter.

Main Message: Seminoles have had a long and unique relationship with alligators.

Time: 60 minutes

Group Size: 20-30 students

Age Group: High School students

Supplies Needed:

- Printouts
- Pencils
- Smart/projector with audio capability
- Poster Board
- Glue
- Scissors

FL Standards:

SS.912.A.2.7: Review the Native American experience.

SS.912.A.1.2. Utilize a variety of primary and secondary sources to identify author, historical significance, audience, and authenticity to understand historical period.

LAFS.1112.RH..1.2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among key details and ideas.

LAFS.1112.W.13: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

SS.912.P.10.2: Identify how cultures change over time and vary within nations and internationally.

Activity

5 Minutes: Introduce students to alligator wrestling. Begin by asking students who Seminole people are. Explain that Seminole are Native Americans of Florida. They fought bravely during the Seminole Wars and never officially signed a peace treaty so that they could continue to maintain their traditions. Today, the Tribe has several reservation in Southern Florida. They have adapted to thrive in the western world while maintaining their culture.

The Everglades are the home of the Seminole people and they have many traditions involving alligators. Today they will learn about those traditions by seeing a variety of different sources. They will then create their own exhibit by determining the main story, picking objects, and writing labels.

15 Minutes: Have students listen and watch a series of materials and take notes (Note page provided on page 5). First have the class listen to “Legend of the Alligator and the Eagle” (which can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmJprjs2x4szoNhnBTCPOkw>). Students can also read the story while listening which can be found on page 6. Then have students watch the music video for the song “Big Alligator” by James Billie (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDa9H_JzDdM). Finally have students watch the “Alligator Wrestlers in Action” clip and provide them with a list of different moves that they can check off as they see them on page 7 and have them listen to the clip “Alligator Wrestling Traditions” (both clips can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmJprjs2x4szoNhnBTCPOkw>).

10 Minutes: As a class review the different images on pages 8-11.

10 Minutes: As a class, discuss what you have learned about alligator wrestling. What do you think is most important? What are the main ideas you would want others to know about alligator wrestling? What do you think your mini exhibit should focus on? What are the best objects, photos, or other media to tell that story? How will you include them?

10 Minutes: Have students split into smaller groups and give each an object and/or topic to write about. Have them write a short label that captures the important message they want to share. Encourage them to be creative. What would make it interesting to other people?

10 Minutes: Have them share their labels with one another. Have them place a picture of their object and text on the poster board or combine them in a digital format in the way that makes the most sense. Please share with the Museum on Facebook and/or Twitter if you would like.

Audio/Video Notes

Take notes!

The Alligator and the Eagle Legend

“Big Alligator” Music Video by James Billie

Alligator Wrestling Moves Video

Alligator Wrestling Oral History Clips

The Alligator and the Eagle Legend

(Read the legend of the **Alligator and the Eagle** as told by Billie Stuart of Brighton Reservation (1940) and narrated by Samuel Tommie)

Many legends are told about the alligator which has long been a favorite animal with the Seminoles. Nearly every Indian hut today has an alligator pen near it. The story the Indians tell about the loud "Ah-ah-ah!" the alligator makes when he is surprised is perhaps the favorite one.

When the world first began, according to legend, nothing but birds and animals lived on the earth. All of them could talk. One day the birds set a date to play ball. The birds, large and small, gathered on the day arranged. One large, strong bird threw the ball higher than anyone else had. An old alligator was lying in the sun watching the birds play. He was angry because he was not invited to play with them. When he saw the ball go high into the air, he made magic and kept it in mid air. All the birds flew about trying to bring the ball back to earth, but it could not come down.

After a long time, the alligator let the ball drop, and caught it in his mouth. The birds tried in vain to pry his mouth open. A wise cunning eagle sat on a rock and watched the weak, helpless little birds fluttering around the great reptile, begging him to return their ball. Finally he decided to help. He flew down and pinched the alligator's back with his sharp claws. The alligator was so surprised his mouth flew wide open and he hissed "Ah-ah-ah!" at the eagle. As he hissed, the ball dropped out of his mouth, the birds quickly seized it and flew away. That is the reason the alligator opens his mouth and hisses "Ah-ah-ah!" to this day when he is surprised.

Wrestling Moves

Watch and Name that move!

Watch gator wrestling to see the different moves. See how many moves you can spot and check them off.



The Florida Smile



The Face Off



Rolling the Gator on its back



Bull Dogging



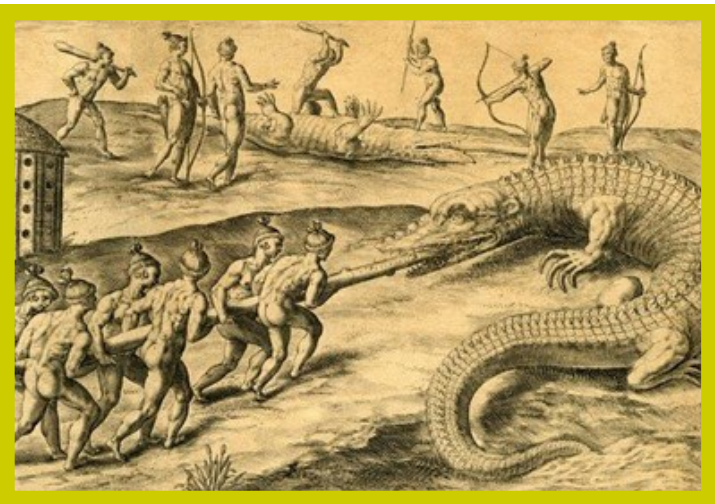
Front Catch

Discover the objects!



Carved Alligator Head

Seminole ancestors called the Calusa carved this alligator 500-1500 years ago. It was found on Key Marco Island.



Timucua Drawing

Theodor de Bry, a Dutch engraver, drew this image of the Timucua peoples (Seminole ancestors) in 1591. It shows how warriors would hunt the gator in groups using a wooden pole to force the gator onto its back in order to strike its underbelly.



Alligator Farms

By the early 1900s, settlers encroached on Seminole lands and they had to change their ways. Seminoles traded live gators and gator hides which were turned into luxury items.



Alligator Wrestling

As more tourists came to Florida, Seminoles worked in tourist camps, demonstrating traditional life, selling crafts, and wrestling gators to support their families.

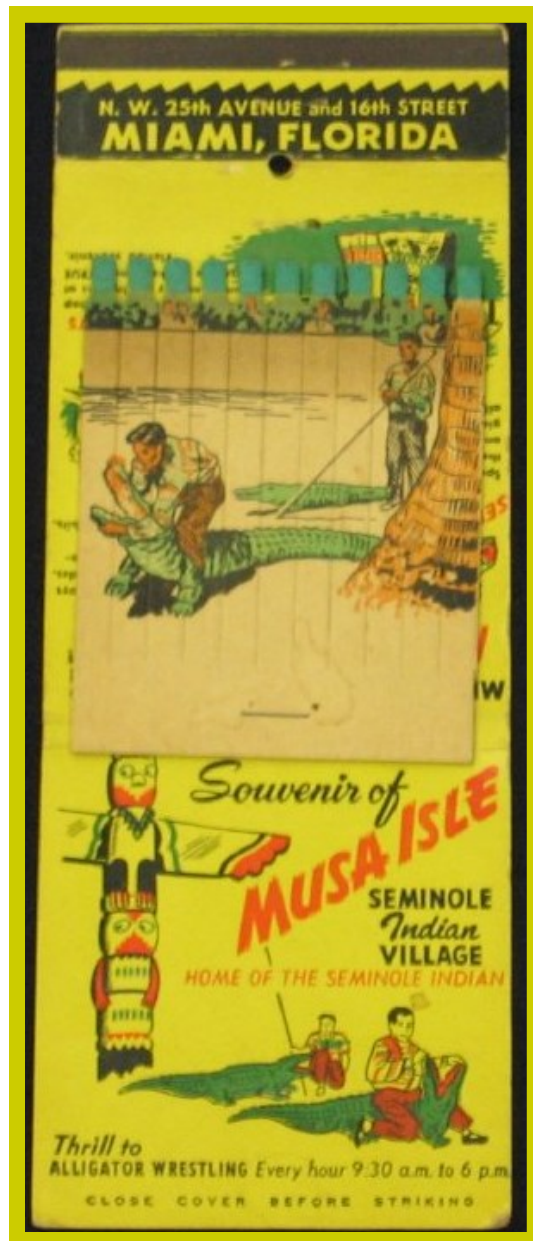


Totem Pole

Totem poles are traditionally unique to NW tribes, but tourists who visited Seminole camps in Florida thought that Seminoles made them too. So, Seminoles began carving them and today it is a tradition.

Mark Billie carved panther, bear, and otter figures on this totem pole.

ATTK:1991.10.1



Musa Isle

Matchbook

Musa Isle was one of many tourist camps where Seminoles wrestled alligators.

ATTK:2005.86.1



Alligator Sticks

Seminole wrestlers earn the alligator stick from the Bird Clan. Wrestlers can use it to tire and control the gator or distract the reptile. Some wrestlers prefer to use only their hands.

This is a postcard from 1962.

ATTK: 2005.27.674



Deep Water Alligator Wrestling

In the 1960s, Okalee Village opened on the Hollywood Reservation. Deep water alligator wrestling attracted both locals and visitors.



Gifts

In order to become an alligator wrestler, Seminoles must receive permission from the Snake Clan matriarch, a female elder or leader. It is proper to bring gifts of coffee, pumpkin, cloth, deerskin, and tobacco in a metal bucket.



Billy Walker and Thomas Storm Sr.

Those who want to be an alligator wrestler must find an experience wrestler who will guide them. Thomas Storm Sr. (right) was the first of Billy Walker's mentor.



Freestyle Alligator Wrestling Competitions

Since the 1990s, many have stopped wrestling alligators. Alligator wrestling is changing again. Seminole brothers James and Clinton Holt organized the first Freestyle Alligator Wrestling Competition (FAWC) in 2009.