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The following lessons were created by **Nancy Cotter**, a teacher participating in the National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute for Teachers entitled Touch the Past: Archaeology of the Upper Mississippi River Region.

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**"Mishipeshu, the underwater-panther:"  
A lesson in the conservation of natural resources**

**Grade Level:** Middle School

**Subjects:** Art, Social Studies, Language Arts

**Objective:**

Students will use the narrative description of Mishipeshu (Ojibwa) as a guide in the creation of their own drawing of the underwater panther. This image will be used as an icon for individual poster making which promotes environmental awareness and engages students in thoughtful evaluation of their role as the future stewards of the Earth's natural resources as conservation activists.

**Background:**

Among the Sanilac Petroglyphs in Michigan is a carving of Mishipeshu, the "underwater panther" of Native American (Ojibwa, Fox, Menomoni, Potawatomi, Chippewa) legend. This wrathful creature is described as a panther with horns and a spiked back, said to be the protector of the Great Lakes resources, punishing those who dare to exploit or fail to respect Mother Earth's gifts. Mishipeshu creates storms on the Great Lakes by thrashing his tail causing ships to capsize and sailors to drown. The story of Mishipeshu relates the Native American view that we are accountable for our actions with regard to our use of natural resources.

**Setting the Stage:**

Students will learn the difference between *petryoglyphs* and *pictographs*, recognizing these as examples of rock art created by Native American tribes seeking to live in balance with nature.

**Procedure:**

Students will read the legend noting the physical description of Michipeshu.

Students will create drawing of Michipeshu using a variety of media suitable for two-dimensional art.

Students will watch a slideshow that shows a variety of petrpglyphs including the Sanilac Michipeshu.

Students will be led in a discussion of the life cycle of a typical polystyrene water bottle from production, purchase and ultimate end in landfills or washed ashore on atolls. Impact on flora and fauna will suggest that the purchase of polystyrene leaves a footprint that will have long lasting effects on future generations.

Students will watch "Midway Atoll: A Sobering Story about Plastic Pollution," a 7 min. video demonstrating the impact of plastic on the albatross of Midway Island.

Students will be given an opportunity to use the computer lab to gather data for future use in writing declarative statements about their findings.

Students will cut their Michipeshus from the initial drawing paper for use as an iconic image representing environmental awareness of this dilemma in the same manner "Smokey the Bear" represents the concept of forest fire prevention.

Students will be encouraged to think of slogans to drive home their point of view.

**Closure:**

The student generated posters will be displayed around the school campus, specifically near vending machines offering plastic bottle products. It is anticipated student enthusiasm may lead to a recycling program for adaptation in school as well as a letter writing campaign promoting environmental activism.

**Evaluation:**

The success of this project/activity will be measured in the change in student and staff behaviors as they make critical decisions about individual responsibility in protecting the environment.

**Links:**

[www.petroglyphs.us/](http://www.petroglyphs.us/)

Midway Atoll: A Sobering Story about Plastic Pollution

<http://egyptianfish.org/content/midway-atoll-sobering-story-about-plastic-pollution>

**Other resources:**

Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center

[www.uwlax.edu/mvac](http://www.uwlax.edu/mvac)

Michigan Department of Natural Resources/The Sanilac Petroglyphs

[http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-54463\\_18595\\_18612---,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-54463_18595_18612---,00.html)

**References:**

Lankford, George D., 1987, "Native American Legends." *Water Panther*, p.94-6.  
August House, Little Rock, Arkansas.