



# Canoeing

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**Program Purpose:** The purpose of this program is to teach students techniques of how to properly and safely paddle a canoe.

**Length of Program:** 1 hour minimum

**Age:** Grades 4<sup>th</sup> - adult

**Maximum Number of Participants:**  
28 (requires 4 adults); 3 people/canoe maximum, 2 minimum

**Objectives:** After completing this activity students should be able to:

- Demonstrate how to properly hold a canoe paddle
- Safely enter and exit a canoe
- Understand different techniques of steering a canoe

**Background Information:**

Canoes were developed over the course of thousands of years by the native peoples of North America. The word 'canoe' originated from the word 'kenu' - meaning dugout. These seagoing boats were used by the Carib Indians of the Caribbean islands, and were made of large tree trunks which were shaped and hollowed, and were strong enough to travel between the islands.

North American Indians are responsible for creating the more well-known version of the canoe - a frame of wooden ribs covered with the lightweight bark of birch trees, and sometimes elm or cedar trees. These boats, which have remained virtually unchanged in design for thousands of years, proved to be ideal for traveling the numerous streams, rivers and lakes of North America.

**Preparation:**

- Unlock the canoes and boathouse
- Make sure there are enough PFD's and paddles for everyone in the group

**Materials:**

- Canoes
- Paddles
- PFD
- Radio for lead canoe
- Wool blanket
- Lifeguard tube
- Whistle

**Lesson Outline:**

- I. Introduction
- II. Pass out Equipment
- III. Paddling Instructions
- IV. Paddling
- V. Clean Up

**Introduction:**

Introduce yourself and explain that today they are going to learn an important skill that can help to see and explore many more places on earth (after all, about 70% of the earth is covered by water)...how to paddle a canoe!

**Pass out Equipment:**

Have students meet you up at the boathouse. Pass out PFD's and explain paddle sizing. The paddle should come to about chest height. The third person that sits in the middle (the duffer) will not need a paddle.

Don't forget to grab a lifeguard tube, whistle, and wool blanket (if there is a possibility for hypothermia) for the lifeguard canoe.

Next, have the students walk down to where the canoes are at. Have the students stand in their teams of 2 or 3. Count how many canoes you will need and proceed to unload the canoes off the canoe racks and line them up along the waters edge. No one should be in the canoes while on land.

**Paddling Instructions:**

Have the students line up along the shore while you demonstrate the following techniques in a canoe:

How to Hold a Paddle:

Demonstrate how to properly hold a paddle with the top hand over the handle and the lower hand with the palm in towards the body.

Canoe Parts:

Point out the different parts of the canoe including the bow (front), stern (back), gunwales (sides - pronounced "gunnels"), thwarts (metal/wood pieces that connect the two sides of the canoe)

Paddler Duties:

Person in front is the engine or power for the canoe and the person in the back steers. The paddler in the back needs to communicate with the person in front as to

which side they should be paddling on. They both need to work together!

Exiting and Entering the Canoe:

Explain that when most people fall into the water is when they are entering and exiting the canoe. First, the canoe should be more than two-thirds in the water. Next, have one paddler steady the canoe by sitting on the end of it with both legs straddling the boat while the next paddler enters the boat. While walking into the canoe you should keep your center of gravity low and hang onto the gunwales as they walk towards the back seat. This technique should also be used as they exit the boat. The first person to shore should drag the end of the boat out of water and then sit on the end of the boat while the other paddlers exit the canoe. Stress the point that no one should ever be standing up in the canoe while out on the water!

Steering the Canoe:

There are a couple of ways to steer the canoe. The front and back paddlers can both paddle on the same side to move the boat gradually in one direction. Another way is for the back paddle to use a rudder. Demonstrate that if they stick their paddle on the right side of the boat it will go to the right, if they stick their paddle in on the left side it will go to the left. This will only work, though, if they have a little speed going. There will also be times they will need to stop the canoe. Demonstrate back paddling and putting the paddle straight down in the water and holding still.

**Paddling:**

Explain to the students that there will be a lead canoe. Make sure there is an adult in this canoe and is in a red or blue canoe. The students should never be in front of this canoe. Give the adult in this boat a radio. It is important to tell this adult that they should be able to see the lifeguard canoe at all times...they forget this often!! The lifeguard boat will be the last canoe.

Things to remember while on the river:

- Watch out for other boat traffic
- Canoes should never bump into each other
- Do not pass the lead canoe
- Do not stand up in the canoes
- Person in middle should be sitting on the floor of the canoe
- If there is an emergency, the lifeguard will blow the whistle, students will need to listen for instructions

Make sure that when you send the first canoes out into the water, to instruct them to stay in the immediate area until the last canoe (lifeguard canoe) is launched. They can then proceed up the river and around Beaver Island. If going swimming on Beaver or North Shore beach, youth need to wear PFD's and the lifeguard needs to set boundaries of where they can swim.

**Clean Up:**

Upon returning, make sure that all the canoes are locked back up, paddles are stored correctly and arranged by color, PFD's are buckled and hung up in the boathouse.

**Resources:**

Canoe Network: All About Canoes: May 2006  
[www.canoe.ca/AllAboutCanoes/](http://www.canoe.ca/AllAboutCanoes/)