

Pattern Recognition, Prediction, and the Ojibwe Lunar Calendar— Discussion Prompts

by Russ Colson

Think about the calendar below, which lists selected terms for months used by some Minnesota Ojibwe (Anishinaabe)

Gichi-manidoo-giizis	Great Spirit Moon	January
Namebini-giizis	Sucker (fish) Moon	February
Onaabani-giizis	Crust-on-the-Snow Moon	March
Iskigamizige-giizis	Maple Sugaring Moon	April
Waabigwanii-giizis	Flower Moon	May
Ode'imini-giizis	Strawberry Moon	June
Aabita-niibino-giizis	Midsummer Moon	July
Miinike-giizis	Blueberry Gathering Moon	August
Manoominike-giizis	Ricing Gathering Moon	September
Binaakwii-giizis	Falling Leaves Moon	October
Gashkadino-giizis	Freeze Up Moon	November
Manidoo-giizisoons	Little Moon of the Spirit	December

In his essay, Steve Dahlberg, suggested that the science of the Ojibwe is not intended to be explanatory, but rather to be predictive. Can you see any way that the Ojibwe calendar might be used as a predictive tool? How?

Because the length of lunar cycle does not divide evenly into the number of days in a year, a calendar based on lunar phases has to be 'corrected' to match up with the changes in the elevation of the sun above the horizon, which controls our seasons. Can you see any way that Ojibwe people could have adjusted their calendar to keep in-sync with the seasons? What data or evidence would the adjustment be based on?

Would tribes who lived in different places have the same month names or different? Why do you think that? What if they lived farther south, how might names be different? What if they lived a different ecosystem, how might they be different?

Today, most people of the world use calendar months with the same names. There is some benefit to everyone using the same names, but can you see anything that might be lost by not using the type of calendar adopted by the Ojibwe?