

American Indian Storytelling Among the Ojibwe

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Grades: 6th - 8th Grade

Lesson: 1

Unit: 4: Building a positive future in Indian communities

Subject: English Language Arts

Additional Subject(s): Cultural Arts; History/Social Studies

Achievement Goal: Students will understand the concept of oral tradition and that values, humor, truth and history are transmitted through traditional stories. Students will exhibit listening and retelling skills applied to American Indian traditional stories.

Time: One class period

Lesson Description:

Students learn about the contexts of storytelling among Ojibwe people and then learn and retell a version of an Ojibwe story.

Teacher Background:

It is largely through oral traditions that American Indian cultures have been preserved and shared through the generations. These stories express values and beliefs, what it means to be human, our need to know why things are the way they are, and how to conduct ourselves to live in a good way.

These beliefs and traditions connect people to the land, plant life, and all living creatures, and the mysteries of birth, life, death and the spirit world.

Like many events in American Indian culture there is a proper time and place for all activities. Traditional storytelling is reserved for the winter months for many tribes. This was a practical choice given the fact that during the other season's people were busy growing, gathering and hunting food. It was in the winter, with the long dark evenings, the snow and wind blowing outside, that telling stories was a way to entertain and teach the children. Another reason is that many traditional stories contain animal characters. To be respectful, people waited until the winter when animals hibernate or become less active so they cannot hear themselves being talked about.

To have a storyteller tell you a story is like receiving a gift. To be respectful, a gift of tobacco is offered to the storyteller before the story begins. The storyteller will often take the tobacco outside and place it on the earth as an offering to the spirits of the story.

Many Ojibwe stories are about a person with both human and mystical characteristics; his name is Way-na-boo-zhoo. Some people refer to him as half man and half spirit. He has many human like characteristics but could also change into different things like a tree or an animal. He makes mistakes at times, but learns from those mistakes so he can accomplish things and become better at living in harmony with the Earth. Way-na-boo-zhoo has been looked upon as a hero by the Ojibwe and his stories have been told for many generations.

American Indian oral traditions include personal and family stories, creation stories, tribal history, and stories of explanation. In recent years, some of the stories have been put into written form. Rendered into English, the stories sometimes lose some of the original humor and meaning.

American Indian stories should not be trivialized by referring to them as myths, tall tales or fables. These categories prevent students from fully understanding the vital role played by oral tradition in American Indian tribal cultures.

Standards:

This lesson aligns with Common Core Standards SL1, SL4.

6th Grade

SL1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led)

with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

A. Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.

B. Follow rules for collegial discussions, set specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.

C. Pose and respond to specific questions with elaboration and detail by making comments that contribute to the topic, text, or issue under discussion.

D. Review the key ideas expressed and demonstrate understanding of multiple perspectives through reflection and paraphrasing.

SL4 Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

7th Grade

SL1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

A. Come to discussions prepared, having read or researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.

B. Follow rules for collegial discussions, track progress toward specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.

C. Pose questions that elicit elaboration and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant observations and ideas that bring the discussion back on topic as needed.

D. Acknowledge new information expressed by others and, when warranted, modify their own views.

SL4 Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with pertinent descriptions, facts, details, and examples; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

8th Grade

SL1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

A. Come to discussions prepared, having read or researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.

B. Follow rules for collegial discussions and decision-making, track progress toward specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.

C. Pose questions that connect the ideas of several speakers and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant evidence, observations, and ideas.

D. Acknowledge new information expressed by others, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views in light of the evidence presented.

SL4 Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning, and well-chosen details; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

Teacher Preparation Resources:

- Review the Traditional Storytelling Resource Packet listed in the Lesson Resources section.
- Prepare copies of the Traditional Storytelling Resource Packet for the students.
- Arrange internet access for replay of Interactive Ojibwe Wigwam Storytelling online (optional).

Student Activity:

1. Share information from the Teacher Background section with students.
2. Pass out copies of the “Story Organization sheets” from the Resource Packet.
3. Select a traditional story from the Resource Packet, learn the elements of the story and tell the story to your students. (Have the students turn their papers over so they are not looking at them during the story.)
4. As an option, play one of the stories from the Interactive Ojibwe Wigwam Storytelling site listed in the Lesson Resources section.
5. Discuss the key points of this story with the class.
6. Have students fill out their story organizer to help them remember the key points of the traditional story.
7. Divide the class into small groups of 4-5 students.
8. Assign the role of “cuer” and “reteller” to two students in each group.
 - The cuer asks the reteller to tell everything he or she can remember from the story.
 - As the reteller mentions the parts of the story the cuer helps keep the story in sequence.
9. After the allotted time, each group can present their version of the traditional story to the class.

Evaluation:

Evaluate whether students are able to:

1. Understand the proper time for storytelling in American Indian Culture.
2. Discuss why a gift of tobacco is offered to the storyteller.
3. List at least three reasons why traditional stories are told.
4. Know the role elders play in transmitting information.
5. Demonstrate listening skills and retelling skills in repeating a story they have heard.

Lesson Resources:

- [Traditional Storytelling Resource Packet](#)
- Interactive [Ojibwe Wigwam Storytelling](#)

Source URL: <http://www.lessonsofourland.org/lessons/american-indian-storytelling-among-ojibwe>

Links:

- [1] http://www.lessonsofourland.org/sites/default/files/02%20Traditional%20Storytelling_Resource%20Attachments.pdf
- [2] http://www.ojibwe.org/home/wigwam_story_main.html
- [3] <http://www.lessonsofourland.org/grade-level/6th-8th-grade>
- [4] http://www.lessonsofourland.org/flag/flag/lessons/450?destination=printpdf/450&token=Lo2DhLIHyl_pUzl6WP3XiD2oD7dJqC__8ewzOnkOcz8
- [5] http://www.lessonsofourland.org/flag/unflag/recently_viewed/450?destination=printpdf/450&token=Lo2DhLIHyl_pUzl6WP3XiD2oD7dJqC__8ewzOnkOcz8
- [6] <http://www.lessonsofourland.org/subjects/english-language-arts>
- [7] <http://www.lessonsofourland.org/subjects/cultural-arts>
- [8] <http://www.lessonsofourland.org/subjects/historysocial-studies>
- [9] <http://www.lessonsofourland.org/states/ojibwe>
- [10] <http://www.lessonsofourland.org/units/4-building-positive-future-indian-communities>

