



## UNIT 3. NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN STORYTELLING

BENCHMARKS	
Common Core-State Standards-ELA/Literacy	CCRA.R.1 CCRA.SL.1
OR Social Sciences Academic Content	HS.60 HS.63

### INTRODUCTION:

Native American Indian tribes traditionally used storytelling as a primary means of educating young people. Not only are stories experienced directly, but they also challenge the young imagination and respect the inner wisdom each child owns. Stories not only tell of a legend or occurrence of long ago but also give reference to many other things. The stories in this unit may tell of what is happening now and have hidden meaning in the words, characters, creatures, places, numbers, or all of the above. There could be morals or lessons to be learned. They are very colorful stories that are easy to remember and may be told over and over so as to stimulate our minds.

All these stories that have been orally passed down from generation to generation, were lessons passed down with a whole rainbow of purposes and meanings. When speaking of old stories that have been handed down from the elders, we must have respect for those stories and not change their meanings or ways of being told to our own preference, but to keep telling them as they were told to us.

This unit introduces storytelling as an effective way of involving young people in the deeper ideas of ecology. It shows the student the art, sophistication and meaning of storytelling with three readings. There are then nine wonderful stories to choose from, each story, in a different way, relates how Native American Indians view the Natural World.

**OBJECTIVES:**

For students to know and understand:

- the art of storytelling and the importance of storytelling not only as it relates to Native American Indian cultures, but to all cultures.
- that for Native American Indian cultures there is no separation between humans, the animals, the natural world, and the spirit world; they are all one, all part of the sacred hoop which binds them together.
- the importance of the relationships between all living beings, such as salmon and coastal Native American Indians, and the rituals and stories surrounding them.
- that it is a traditional Native American belief that humans were put on earth to be caretakers of the land and of the animals. The belief that this is their sacred duty helps to explain why Native American Indians revere the land and adds to the reasons why the loss of their land was so devastating to them.
- that Native American Indians practiced sustainability and recognized they had a valuable food source in salmon and other animals and took measures to ensure these creatures would be available for generations in the future.

**MATERIALS:**

- STUDENT HANDOUT 3-1: Native American Indian Beliefs and Symbols as described by John Fire Lane Deer
- STUDENT HANDOUT 3-2: Native American Indian Storytelling
- STUDENT HANDOUT 3-3: Animals and Nature in Native American Indian Stories

**Introductory Stories:**

- STUDENT HANDOUT 3-4: Salmon Boy
- STUDENT HANDOUT 3-5: Salmon Story
- STUDENT HANDOUT 3-6: Coyote Stories
- STUDENT HANDOUT 3-7: Legend of the Lost Salmon

**Advanced Stories:**

- STUDENT HANDOUT 3-8: Navajo Deer Hunting Way
- STUDENT HANDOUT 3-9: Koyoda & How He Brought Salmon to the Columbia River
- STUDENT HANDOUT 3-10: It Is Important (poem)

**IMPORTANT QUESTIONS:**

- What purposes did storytelling serve in past generations of Native American Indian cultures?
- What purpose does storytelling serve in Native American Indian cultures today?
- What values are passed down in the stories?
- How do Native American Indian cultures regard the Natural World?

**PROCEDURE:**

1. *Mitakuye Oyasin* is a Lakota phrase meaning WE ARE ALL RELATED. Write this on the board to begin to get students to think about what a Native American Indian perspective might be, and/or to facilitate a brainstorm discussion. *Mitakuye Oyasin* captures an essence of the tribal perspective of the Lakota people. It reflects the understanding that Native American Indians are truly and profoundly connected to other living beings and the physical world. According to Gregory Cajete, "Tribal education is, at its essence, learning about life through participation and relationship in community, including not only people, but plants, animals, and the whole of Nature."
2. Explain to students (for all levels) that they are about to begin an exploration of Native American Indian beliefs and values as they're embodied in legends that have come down to us through many generations. Native American Indian cultures hold these same beliefs and values today. To facilitate further discussion about Native American Indian beliefs and symbols, read aloud or pass out STUDENT HANDOUT 3-1 in which these beliefs are described by John Fire Lame Deer, a holy man of the Lakota tribe.
3. Storytelling, a traditional educational form, presents an ecological paradigm of respectfulness. Through a seemingly simple story, complex ideas are brought forth. It is a way of immersing students in an experiential narrative that challenges their imagination. The following information gives you some background and methodology for facilitating storytelling.
4. Assign to students two essays, STUDENT HANDOUTS 3-2 and 3-3 (these are fairly high level reading, thus you may have to make adaptations depending on the students you are working with), either as homework or in-class silent reading. Instruct them to be prepared to discuss each essay. These essays are meant to give background information needed before getting into the art of storytelling.
5. Review the following text boxes, *Ideas for How to Facilitate Storytelling* and *Native American Teachings*, for your own background knowledge.
6. There are five introductory and three advanced stories. Read through the stories to decide which would be most appropriate for your students. Each story has questions to stimulate thought and discussion.

## APPLIED STORYTELLING

(adapted from One With the Watershed by Tom Heidlebaugh)

Teachers have a technology that is thousands of years old called Storytelling. It helps us all learn how to be a part of life. Although all teachers use Story in their work, there may be little attention paid to the disciplines, practices, and applications behind the telling. Native Americans developed this special gift of Story into a participatory process that is still used in traditional cultures. It can be a basic tool for the classroom. Story gives teachers a powerful, interdisciplinary form that brings experience into context for children. Through Story, students efficiently retain what they learn and apply it more consciously to a variety of school activities. In Whole Language activities, Story is a basic tool. After all, *We all want to be a part of the story.*

The Four Posts to the Longhouse of Story are:

- I. **WE ARE ALL STORYTELLERS** – each and every one of us. Students need to know this. In telling the stories of their own lives, they need the appreciation, the sense of respect and responsibility that comes with storytelling. The skills required to tell a story well are fundamental to learning and basic to every person's development.
- II. **STORYTELLING SUSTAINS COMMUNITY** – The exchange that takes place in the storytelling experience is an essential ingredient to social connection. The inverse is also true. When we stop telling each other our stories, community goes away.
- III. **EACH STORY IS A LIVING BEING** – A teacher's work is to recognize how each student is a story, complex and wonderful, full of risk and potential. Our job is to help that story unfold. As the student finds the thread of his or her personal tale, he or she begins to know coherence in a confusing world. Story should be no more manipulated for ideology than a student should be against their story.
- IV. **STORYTELLING IS ABOUT LISTENING** – Performing is not as important as paying attention. Traditional elders always begin by teaching young people to listen to the heartbeat of the earth, the silence of their hearts. When students learn to listen, they feel they are part of the life they want so much more to live.

From these core principles, schools can build a story process into any area of learning. Environmental studies and writing are integrated in the support that Story provides. Applied Storytelling allows the teacher to turn the classroom, the school year and the very act of teaching into pieces of the great experience of being human.

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. In UNIT 6, there is a Native American Fishing Rights Mock Treaty Negotiation Role-Play. This would be an excellent compliment to this unit.
2. A wonderful compliment to this unit is *The Chinook Trilogy* videos. They are three thirty-minute videos. All three videos are most suitable for high school level students. They are available as a set or individually. See the Bibliography section for descriptions of each video and how to obtain them.

### ***Ideas for How to Facilitate Storytelling***

(Refer to STUDENT HANDOUT 3-2 for further descriptions of storytelling methods)

- Form a story circle when reading aloud.
- Use a story stick to facilitate students telling stories of their own. Perhaps use a word or a phrase to get them going.
- Use the “storyteller’s bag” method to facilitate storytelling.
- Use the “Ho-Hey” method to involve listeners.
- Have a storytelling contest. Give the best dramatic storyteller/performer special privileges or prizes.

### ***Native American Indian Teachings***

(Based on Cedar Tree Teachings of Elders of the Pacific Northwest Tribes and the text Look to the Mountain by Dr. Gregory Cajete of Santa Clara Pueblo)

This is a brief outline of deep principles upheld by many traditional cultures that are transferable to contemporary society. The terms used by Western ecologists are also indicated.

1. SEVENTH GENERATION THINKING – Considers our responsibilities in terms of both our future and our past. We honor our ancestors back at least seven generations when we make an important decision that affects our society. This means we take their way, which worked well for so long, into account when we plan a new road or teaching process. It doesn’t mean we can’t change but that we change carefully.

We honor our descendants not only because they carry the future but also because we will be their ancestors and we are responsible for how they will live. This means we leave wetlands and regenerate deforested slopes so our great-great-great-great grandchildren thank us for our decisions. This is called “integrated equity” by ecologists.

2. LISTENING IS PARTICIPATING – Paying attention is considered the beginning of all knowledge. Traditional teachers will point out to children that the Creator gave us two ears but only one mouth, so we listen at least twice as much as we talk. We are taught to consider that everything has wisdom and that if we learn the skills of listening we can hear the voices of the animals and plants and mountains. Ecologists call this “sensory integration”.

3. WE ARE A GIFT TO EACH OTHER – In a consumer society the goal is to acquire more than is needed. In a society based on sharing, the individual is aware of their responsibility, giving in equal value to what is received. This can be as simple as keeping toxic chemicals out of local waters or as difficult as asking the basic questions of mutual interdependence.
4. WE ARE ALL ON A JOURNEY TOGETHER – We grow and change in much the same way other living beings do. This link to life both supports us and challenges us. If we learn where we are meant to go from other living beings we also learn how to behave in this interspecies adaptation.
5. WITH CAREFUL WORK WE CAN RESTORE OURSELVES TO BALANCE – Much of Native American Indian environmental activity is ceremonial. This is conscious community action that acknowledges the basic harmony of the natural world and the unique ability human beings have to get out of balance with that existence. The two steps are to recognize when we are not connected and then restore ourselves to stability.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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## UNIT 3. NATIVE AMERICAN STORYTELLING

### STUDENT HANDOUTS

3-1	<i>Native American Beliefs and Symbols</i>
3-2	<i>Native American Storytelling</i>
3-2	<i>Animals and Nature in Native American Stories</i>
3-4	<i>Salmon Boy</i>
3-5	<i>Salmon Story</i>
3-6	<i>Coyote Stories</i>
3-7	<i>Legend of the Lost Salmon</i>
3-8	<i>Navajo Deer Hunting Way</i>
3-9	<i>Koyoda &amp; How He Brought Salmon to the Columbia River</i>
3-10	<i>It Is Important (poem)</i>