

Native American Myths: Why seasons change

Students understand that seasons change and that nature and storytelling play a large role in Native American culture. They have the opportunity to listen to and create myths about why the seasons change.

Grade Level: 2nd

Phenomena:

Can we learn from stories passed down from generation to generation?

Objectives:

- Students will explain the uses of myths in traditional cultures.
- Students will create an illustration and myth
- Students will present myths and illustrations to others

Materials:

- Examples of myths about why seasons change
- Paper
- Markers or crayons
- Myth drawing example
- Various leaves, grasses and other natural materials from outside

Appendixes:

- *The Boy Who Cried Wolf:* Page 4
- *Why the Trees Lose Their Leaves:* Page 5
- *Why the Leaves Have Many Colors in Autumn:* Page 6
- *Blue Corn Maiden and the Coming of Winter:* Page 7

Time Considerations:

Preparations: 5 minutes

Lesson Time: 55 minutes

Introduction: 10 minutes

Activity 1: 5 minutes

Activity 2: 20 minutes

Activity 3: 15 minutes

Conclusion: 5 minutes

Related Lesson Plans:



Next Generation Science Standards

2-LS2-1. Plan and conduct an investigation to determine if plants need sunlight and water to grow.

Science and Engineering Practices (SEP):

Planning and carrying out investigations.

Disciplinary Core Ideas:

Interdependent relationships in ecosystems.

Crosscutting Concepts:

Cause and Effect.

Excellence in Environmental Education Guidelines

Strand 2.3—Humans and Their Societies

A) Learners understand that people act as individuals and as group members and that groups can influence individual actions.

B) Learners understand that experiences and places may be interpreted differently by people with different cultural backgrounds, at different times, or with other frames of reference.

Strand 2.4—Environment and Society

A) Learners understand that people depend on, change and are affected by the environment.

This lesson has been adapted from American Forest Foundation's *Tale of the Sun:*

American Forest Foundation. (2008). *Tale of the Sun.* In *Project Learning Tree: Pre K-8 Environmental Education Activity Guide* (pp.86-87).

Background

Native Americans of North America do not share a single, unified body of mythology. There are many different tribal groups and each tribe has developed their own set of stories - myths, about the creation of the world, the appearance of the first people, and the role of humans in the universe.

However, despite the immense variety of Native American mythologies; certain mythic themes, characters and stories

can still be found in many of the cultures. Underlying all the myths is the idea that spiritual forces can be sensed through the natural world—including clouds, winds, plants and animals—that they shape and sustain. Many stories explain how the actions of gods, heroes and ancestors gave the earth its present form. This lesson helps students to understand the role of mythology in culture, and how nature can shape peoples' views and beliefs.

Preparation

Gather all of the supplies needed to do the myth activity and lesson. Create an example myth to tell the students, draw a picture to represent the myth and include one sentence to explain the myth on the picture.

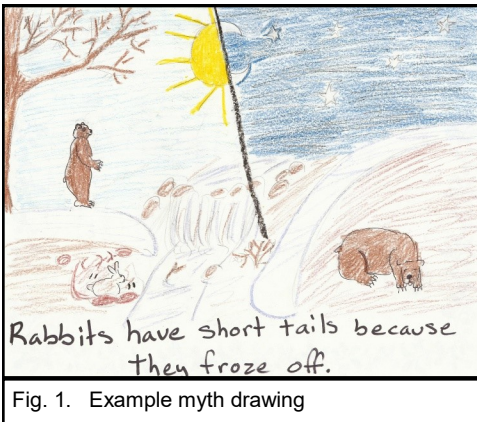


Fig. 1. Example myth drawing

Doing the Activity

Introduction: Season Review

Begin by sharing with students that today's lesson will explore different thoughts as to why Earth has different seasons. But first, what is a season?

Quickly brainstorm this thought, then state that a season is a time during the year where we feel a change in temperature and weather.

Have students brainstorm and describe the four seasons. Write their thoughts on the board.

Have the class take a moment and think, why do the seasons change? Ask a few students to share their ideas with the class.

Reassure students that many adults don't know the reason for why Earth has seasons. But through many studies scientists have discovered that Earth has different seasons because of the position of Earth as it travels around the sun.

Next ask the class if people from the past knew this scientific reason? (no)

But, groups of people, such as the Native Americans, did notice a change in the seasons. How did they explain the seasons changing?

Explain that Native Americans used stories called myths to explain why the seasons changed along with other major events that occurred.

Myths are stories passed down from generation to generation that were used to explain events and teach valuable lessons.

Activity 2: Crying Wolf

Ask the class if they have ever heard a myth before?

Tell students that you are going to share a myth with them, and everyone should try to learn the lesson that is being taught.

Encourage students to use their imaginations and visualize the myth and the characters.

Share with the class the myth, *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*.

After you have read the story,

ask the students to describe the lesson being taught and discuss its meaning.

Activity 3: Myths

Move outside if possible and encourage students to think of how the seasons change.

Sit the class comfortably in a circle, in a way they can still stay focused on the myth.

Prior to reading, remind students what a myth is and what they should be looking for - why the seasons change and lessons learned.

Read two myths aloud; after each myth is read, discuss what was being explained and any lessons taught.

Any myth can be used that focuses on the seasons and whose message is clear to this age group.

Activity 4: Myth Drawings

Move indoors, once back in the classroom explain that each person is going to create their own myth about the seasons.

Have students think of what season they want to write a myth about.

Review with the class what a myth is and what messages were learned from the myths read outside.

Using the myth that you created prior to the lesson, describe to students how they need to create their myths.

Students' myths should include a picture depicting their story and one or two sentences describing it.

It's a good idea to have students think of and write their sentences before drawing the myth. This helps the student focus on the activity instead of drawing their favorite cartoon character, or whatever non-myth drawing they may think of.

Suggesting that students create a myth about seasons or a certain season also helps students to focus ideas when creating their own myths. When students are finished, have them share their myth with their neighbor.

Conclusion

Wrap up the lesson by asking the students why myths are important and what is the scientific reason why Earth has seasons.

Assessment

Assess students' knowledge of myths by their ability to create their own myth that contains an aspect about changing seasons and teaches a lesson or explains a natural phenomena.

Extensions

Read another myth, there are many myths that deal with a variety of lessons and natural phenomena. Pick your favorite and share it with the class.

Act it out, for the students who wish to act out their myths, give them five minutes of rehearsal time. During this time, other students can read their myths out loud to each other and practice finding the meanings to their myths. Start the performances and encourage the audience to pick out the meaning in the myths.

Vocabulary

Culture: a group of people's way of life, ideas, customs and traditions

Earth: soil, the planet we live on

History: the study of past events

Myth: A special story about imaginary people meant to answer difficult questions such as, "where did the seasons first come from." Myths are passed generation to generation in order to teach a lesson about a people's customs or virtues.

Mythology: collection of myths from a certain culture, or the study of myths

Native American: the first people to live in North, Central or South America (mention/ask if students know tribe names Hopi, Acoma, Pueblo, Navajo, Paiute...)

Nature: the natural world

Seasons: Traditional division of the year based on distinctive weather conditions. In temperate regions, there are four seasons, spring, summer, fall and winter, while in tropical countries there are often only two, a dry season and a rainy season.

Sources

- American Forest Foundation. (2008). Tale of the Sun. In *Project Learning Tree: Pre K-8 Environmental Education Activity Guide* (pp.86-87).
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- First People. *Why the Trees Lose Their Leaves*. Retrieved Nov. 8, 2011, from <http://www.firstpeople.us/FP-HTML-Legends/WhyTheTreesLoseTheirLeaves-Cherokee.html>
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- Story Arts. (2000.) *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*. Retrieved Nov. 8, 2011, from <http://www.storyarts.org/library/aesops/stories/boy.html>

Images:

Fig. 1. Lyn. C. (2007-2009). *Blue Corn Maiden*. Retrieved Nov. 8, 2011, from Sedona Giclée Studios: <http://www.sedonagicleestudios.com/mysticartmedicine.html>

The Boy Who Cried Wolf

There once was a shepherd boy who was bored as he sat on the hillside watching the village sheep. To amuse himself he took a great breath and sang out, "Wolf! Wolf! The Wolf is chasing the sheep!"

The villagers came running up the hill to help the boy drive the wolf away. But when they arrived at the top of the hill, they found no wolf. The boy laughed at the sight of their angry faces.

"Don't cry 'wolf', shepherd boy," said the villagers, "when there's no wolf!" They went grumbling back down the hill.

Later, the boy sang out again, "Wolf! Wolf! The wolf is chasing the sheep!" To his naughty delight, he watched the villagers run up the hill to help him drive the wolf away.

When the villagers saw no wolf they sternly said, "Save your frightened song for when there is really something wrong! Don't cry 'wolf' when there is NO wolf!"

But the boy just grinned and watched them go grumbling down the hill once more.

Later, he saw a REAL wolf prowling about his flock. Alarmed, he leaped to his feet and sang out as loudly as he could, "Wolf! Wolf!"

But the villagers thought he was trying to fool them again, and so they didn't come.

At sunset, everyone wondered why the shepherd boy hadn't returned to the village with their sheep. They went up the hill to find the boy. They found him weeping.

"There really was a wolf here! The flock has scattered! I cried out, "Wolf!" Why didn't you come?"

An old man tried to comfort the boy as they walked back to the village.

"We'll help you look for the lost sheep in the morning," he said, putting his arm around the youth, "Nobody believes a liar...even when he is telling the truth."

Why the Trees Lose Their Leaves

A Cherokee Legend

In the early times, the trees and animals were always able to talk to one another. They lived close to each other and shared many things; but every year, the cold time came and the birds would fly south to where it remained warm and would return with their families in the spring, when the warm season returned.

One year, as the cold season approached Sparrow was injured. He would not be strong enough to fly to the warm lands with his family by himself, so he made his family fly south to the warm lands without him.

Injured, he knew he would not survive the cold season. So he sought the help the trees. He approached Oak. "Oh, Oak, I am injured, and cannot fly, the cold season approaches, and if I do not find shelter before then, surely I shall die. Please, Oak, let me shelter among your leaves and branches during the cold times, that I may heal and greet my family on their return in the spring."

But Oak was a crusty old tree, and did not relish the idea of having a guest in the cold time, so he told sparrow: "Sparrow, go find somewhere else to spend the cold time. I do not wish you to spend the cold time with me."

And poor Sparrow was hurt in his spirit to be turned away.

So Sparrow went to Maple and asked her. "Maple, I am hurt and not able to fly to the warm lands with my family for the cold season. Please let me shelter among your leaves and branches during the cold time, or surely I will perish. And Maple, though a very sweet tree, did not enjoy the thought of a guest for the cold time and she too, turned Sparrow away. "you,....., you go ask someone else to shelter you, Sparrow. I do not wish you to spend the cold time with me."

And again, hurt in spirit, Sparrow was turned away.

Sparrow went in turn to each of the trees and asked each for shelter in the cold time; and each, and every time, Sparrow was turned away..... until there was no tree left to ask, except Pine. With no hope left..., but not willing to accept death....., Sparrow approached Pine.

"Pine, I am injured, and not able to fly south to the warm lands with my family. If I do not find shelter before the cold time, I will surely perish. Please....., let me shelter among your leaves and branches during the cold time..."

Pine thought to himself, ("I am the least of the trees, what can I do?")but his heart heard Sparrow's plight. "Sparrow... My leaves are tiny... more like needles...my branches are not as many as other trees... but what I have you are welcome to share."

And so, Sparrow spent the cold time with Pine. And when the warm times returned in the spring, Sparrow's family returned also. And Sparrow had healed over the cold time and flew to greet their return.

Creator had seen and heard all that had happened between Sparrow and the Trees. And Creator called a great council of the Trees and spoke to them..., "You, who were given so much....., who had so much, would not share the least of what you had with Sparrow in his need. Because of this.., from this day forward, when the cold time is upon the land, your leaves shall wither and die and blow away."

Creator then spoke to Pine. "Pine, you, who had the least of all the trees, gave so much, have touched my Spirit. When the cold times come, You of all the trees shall keep your leaves they shall remain green through all the seasons for the gift you have given me, through Sparrow."

And that is why, to this day, that when the cold time comes to the land, all the leaves wither, and die, and blow away.... Except for Pine.

Why The Leaves Have Many Colors In Autumn

From the Wyandotte Nation of Oklahoma

The Bear was selfish and proud. He often made trouble among the Animals of the Great Council. When he heard that the Deer had walked over the Rainbow Bridge into the skyland, he was angry. "I will punish the Deer," he said.

The Bear went to the Rainbow Bridge. He leaped along its beautiful way of glowing colors. He came into the skyland. There he found the Deer and said to him, "This skyland is the home of the Little Turtle. Why did you come into this land? Why did you not come to meet us in the Great Council? Why did you not wait until all the Animals could come to live here?"

Then the Deer was angry. Only the Wolf might ask him such questions. The Bear had no right to speak like that to the Deer.

The Deer said to the Bear, "You have gone about making trouble among the Animals long enough. You shall never do it again."

The Deer said he would kill the Bear. He arched his neck. He tossed his head to show his long sharp horns. The hair along his back stood up. His eyes blazed as if a fire burned in them. He thought to slay the Bear with a single stroke of his terrible horns.

The Bear was not afraid. His claws were very strong. He stood erect for the mighty conflict. His deep growls shook the sky like rolling thunder. The struggle was terrific and long. The Bear was torn by the cruel horns of the Deer.

When the remaining Animals of the Great Council heard the awful noise, the Wolf went up into the sky to stop the dreadful battle.

All the Animals had to obey the Wolf. So the Deer turned and ran away. And the Bear fled along the paths of the sky. As the Deer ran, the blood of the Bear dropped from his horns. It fell down to the Lower World and made the leaves of the trees many colors. Some were red. Some were yellow. Some were brown. Some were scarlet. And some were crimson.

And now each year when the autumn comes the leaves of the trees take on these many colors. The forests are flooded with soft and glowing beauty. The Wyandottes then say the blood of the Bear has again been thrown down from the sky upon the trees of the Great Island.

Blue Corn Maiden and the Coming of Winter

An Acoma Legend

Blue Corn Maiden was the prettiest of the corn maiden sisters. The Pueblo People loved her very much, and loved the delicious blue corn that she gave them all year long. Not only was Blue Corn Maiden beautiful, but she also had a kind and gentle spirit. She brought peace and happiness to the People of the Pueblos.

One cold winter day, Blue Corn Maiden went out to gather firewood. This was something she would not normally do. While she was out of her adobe house, she saw Winter Katsina. Winter Katsina is the spirit who brings the winter to the Earth. He wore his blue-and-white mask and blew cold wind with his breath. But when Winter Katsina saw Blue Corn Maiden, he loved her at once.

He invited her to come to his house, and she had to go with him. Inside his house, he blocked the windows with ice and the doorway with snow and made Blue Corn Maiden his prisoner. Although Winter Katsina was very kind to Blue Corn Maiden and loved her very much, she was sad living with him. She wanted to go back to her own house and make the blue corn grow for the People of the Pueblos.

Winter Katsina went out one day to do his duties, and blow cold wind upon the Earth and scatter snow over the mesas and valleys. While he was gone, Blue Corn Maiden pushed the snow away from the doorway, and went out of the house to look for the plants and foods she loved to find in summer. Under all the ice and snow, all she found was four blades of yucca.

She took the yucca back to Winter Katsina's house and started a fire. Winter Katsina would not allow her to start a fire when he was in the house.

When the fire was started, the snow in the doorway fell away and in walked Summer Katsina. Summer Katsina carried in one hand fresh corn and in the other many blades of yucca. He came toward his friend Blue Corn Maiden.

Just then, Winter Katsina stormed through the doorway followed by a roar of winter wind. Winter Katsina carried an icicle in his right hand, which he held like a flint knife, and a ball of ice in his left hand, which he wielded like a hand-axe. It looked like Winter Katsina intended to fight with Summer Katsina.

As Winter Katsina blew a blast of cold air, Summer Katsina blew a warm breeze. When Winter Katsina raised his icicle-knife, Summer Katsina raised his bundle of yucca leaves, and they caught fire. The fire melted the icicle.



Painting of "Blue Corn Maiden" by Cher Lyn

Winter Katsina saw that he needed to make peace with Summer Katsina, not war. The two sat and talked.

They agreed that Blue Corn Maiden would live among the People of the Pueblos and give them her blue corn for half of the year, in the time of Summer Katsina. The other half of the year, Blue Corn Maiden would live with Winter Katsina and the People would have no corn.

Blue Corn Maiden went away with Summer Katsina, and he was kind to her. She became the sign of springtime, eagerly awaited by the People.

Sometimes, when spring has come already, Winter Katsina will blow cold wind suddenly, or scatter snow when it is not the snow time. He does this just to show how displeased he is to have to give up Blue Corn Maiden for half of the year.