

Standard One – Lesson One

Achievement Goal:
Retell several tribal origin stories and respectfully discuss similarities and differences.

Time:
Two class periods

Core:
Cultural Arts, History, Language Arts



Grades: 3rd - 5th



Background:

There are as many different origin stories as there are different cultures and peoples. Each group of people has their own beliefs about how the world and universe came to be. The origin stories relate how the universe and the earth were created and how time and space were established. In this lesson the students will learn about origin stories of tribes and how to demonstrate respect for others' beliefs.

American Indian tribes, like many other peoples, have explanations for how they originated as a distinct, unique people. Many stories tell of powerful beings that created peoples' place in the world. From these stories, tribes derived laws, values, traditions and ceremonies. Many origin stories stressed kindness, generosity, cooperation and respect for the earth. In these stories, the universe could not be created without these teachings.

Some of the American Indian creation stories tell of bad or mean beings or characters. These bad characters rarely prevail, but their presence and actions serve a useful purpose by teaching valuable lessons about the potential for harm in bad decisions.

Many tribal individuals consider their beliefs as important everyday elements that contribute to rich tradition and cultural heritage. These stories are represented in ceremonies and teachings. They are passed on to each new generation in stories. The beliefs and traditions connect people to the land, plant life, all living creatures, and to the mysteries of birth, life, death and the spirit world. Some native people compare these connections to those they have with family and relatives.

American Indian origin stories are not to be treated or told as simple "fairy tales." Respect for others' beliefs will make this lesson an experience that teaches appreciation of diverse communities.

Student Activity:

- Explain briefly what an American Indian origin/creation story is to the class.
- Engage the students in a search for local American Indian origin stories. If found, bring the story(s) into class for discussion.

- Acquire a video from (1) below and show selected creation stories to the class.
- Have the students study the Internet web sites (2), (3) and (4) below and read selected origin stories. If Internet connections are not available for students, print and distribute copies of selected origin stories for them to read.
- Compare in class an American Indian origin story to another culture's origin story. Facilitate a discussion. Remind the students that American Indian stories are just as valid as other cultures' stories and these beliefs must be presented with respect.
- Have the students create a classroom mural that depicts an American Indian creation story and share with the school by placing it in a hallway or gymnasium.
- Have the students interpret the mural in a brief written report.
- Conduct a class discussion on the similarities and differences between American Indian origin stories. Origin stories teach of creation but also many other lessons. Ask the students what lessons, values, and beliefs the stories reveal. What cultural knowledge and skills do the origin stories teach?

Evaluation:

- Assess students' abilities to search for and find American Indian origin stories using the resources below.
- Evaluate the students' discussion participation.
- Assess students' respect for the similarities and differences between various American Indian origin stories.

Resources:

Video: Tales of Wonder II, Traditional Native American Children's Stories, 1998
 Rich-Heape Films, Inc. 60 min. (http://www.richheape.com/native-american-videos/Tales_of_Wonder_II_Native_American_Stories_For_Children.htm)

1. "Native American Culture Site", listing several traditional stories from a variety of tribes, <http://www.ewebtribe.com/NACulture/stories.htm>
2. "Origin Stories of Plains Indians", Smithsonian Institution, http://americanhistory.si.edu/hohr/buffalo/origin_frmset.html
3. "Native American Lore Index Page", personal website, <http://www.ilhawaii.net/~stony/loreindx.html>
4. <http://www.indianlegend.com/default.htm> Several origin stories and traditional tales from more than a dozen tribes. The website is in a easy-to-use format.