

Focus:

Students recognize that there are multiple layers of knowledge, understanding, values and direction to deeper knowledge within the stories of Aboriginal people. There is no separation of knowledge into isolated categories for Aboriginal people: all aspects of knowledge are related.

Curriculum Connection:

5.2.1-2 Acknowledge oral traditions, narratives and stories as valid sources of knowledge about the land and diverse Aboriginal cultures and history

Teacher Preparation:

For Aboriginal people in Canada and throughout the world, oral traditions are not simply a means of entertainment or passing the time. Oral traditions, usually in the form of storytelling, is a long-standing customary means of passing on:

- » values,
- » knowledge of the land upon which the people depend for survival,
- » knowledge of plants for food and medicines,
- » learnings from the animals for survival,
- » knowledge of the ecosystem and use of the plants,
- » skills that have been perfected over time,
- » ceremonies and spiritual teachings,

- » understanding of historical relationships with other tribes and other cultures,
- » understanding of the moon, the stars, the sun and the skies (astronomy) and what they mean to our existence on earth, and
- » the sacred relationship we have with water: the importance of water for life and the power of the water in our world.

Preview the video: "Creation Story" from the DVD or Website, and the worksheet entitled "What's In a Story?" prior to beginning the lesson.

www.sacredrelationship.ca/videos

Key Learnings:

- » Oral traditions are a valid way of documenting history, practices, geography and ways of living
- » Oral traditions are used to pass information down from generation to generation
- » Oral tradition teaches us how to apply customary values and knowledge to new situations over time

Materials and Resources Required:



- » DVD/Online Video "Creation Story"
www.sacredrelationship.ca/videos



- » "What's In a Story?" Worksheet
- » visit www.sacredrelationship.ca to view all videos



DID YOU KNOW :

EVERY TRIBE IS ACTUALLY A CULTURE WITH ITS OWN CEREMONIES, STRUCTURES, VALUES AND PRACTICES. EACH TRIBE IN CANADA HAS ITS OWN CREATION STORY.

Launch:

Cue the video "Creation Story" and pause on the opening frame which states the following:

"Story telling is the way Aboriginal people teach their children, pass on their values and remember their history."



Ask students, "What does that mean to you?" Guide a class discussion about what we generally think about when someone says 'I'm going to tell you a story.' Ensure the students grasp the idea that in Canadian society we often think that a story is:

- » not necessarily true,
- » is used for entertainment only, or
- » that if something is not written down it is not valid. (i.e. the only valid history is written, published history).

Support students to understand that since the beginning of time on Mother Earth, Aboriginal people have ensured that information, knowledge and skills (that would have been otherwise forgotten), were remembered through their stories.

Introduce the concept that paper can be lost or destroyed. Alternatively, a collective memory that lives within the mind and memory of not one person, but a society of people, is virtually impossible to 'lose'. As a result, a collective memory, passed from

generation to generation is a reliable and valid means of recording and documenting knowledge and information.

Have a student volunteer to read the two lines at the bottom of the screen:

"It is the story that inspires people to learn more. It is the story that begins all learning journeys."

Ask students how this might be different than learning from a textbook or from one book about a particular topic.


This brief discussion should lead to the understanding that in Aboriginal ways of learning (through stories), the learner must take responsibility for his or her own learning. The learner collects information (stories) from many people and therefore gains a deeper understanding from multiple perspectives. This can be compared to the way of learning that many people in a western, paper focused, society have supported: if it is not on paper it is not valid or reliable.



View the video with the students.

At the end of the video ask the students what challenge they think the Elder telling the story is issuing to them. (Note: he asks "What kind of children are we leaving this world?"). Have students ponder this challenge as you move to the next activity.

Activate:

Group students into pairs or small  groups. Ask one person per group to distribute a copy of the worksheet "What's In a Story?" to each member of the group. Have each student complete their own copy of the worksheet. Then, ask the group to discuss each question and arrive at the best answer within their group.

Connect:

Bring the students back to the larger group. Invite the students to share their responses with the class and to discuss their thoughts and reflections.

Remind the students that this is one creation story to carry the knowledge and teachings of the Cree people in northern Alberta! Every First Nation (i.e. Cree, Dene, Blackfoot, Salteaux etc) has their own creation story; thus there are many more across Canada.

Ask students to return to their partners or small groups; they will require a computer with internet access. Together, they will research a creation story from a different tribe in Canada and to draw out the teachings, knowledge, history and values from that story.

Students will be given the class period to carry out their research and re-tell the stories that they found. This re-telling can be in person in a full class gathering or can be recorded on video through a webcam or other video recording media that is available in the school.

What's In a Story?

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

1. Remember back to when the drop hits the pool of water at the beginning of the video. What do you think the ripples represent about learning from a story?

2. What does the Elder say that water is in the story when he first begins his story?

3. The Elder says that there were four women, (he also calls them Grandmothers) that the Creator asked to come here to this world. Can you name them in order: the first, second, third and the fourth woman to come?

4. So if the Elder calls them all women, but they are not all women like we think of women (in human form) then what does he really mean in the story when he calls them women?

5. When the Elder says that Canada is built on our stories because we were here first, what does he mean?

6. The Elder says that today the women's voice is taken out of decision making. What does he say this has resulted in? Why is the women's voice out of decision making now? What is he referring to?

7. How did the Elder learn all of this?

8. Why do you think the other Elders are listening to this Elder? They look like they are his age or older so we would think that they already know everything that he knows. What message does this give you?

9. What does the Elder say that children need to be taught so that our world will survive?

10. What are you going to do in response to the Elder's challenge: what kind of a child are you going to be in this world?

What's In a Story?

1. Remember back to when the drop hits the pool of water at the beginning of the video. What do you think the ripples represent about learning from a story?

The ripples represent the knowledge that spreads from the one original story. The knowledge spreads to more people, to more generations and to further learning.

2. What does the Elder say that water is in the story when he first begins his story?

He says that water is the origin of life.

3. The Elder says that there were four women, (he also calls them Grandmothers) that the Creator asked to come here to this world. Can you name them in order: the first, second, third and the fourth woman to come?

First was the moon.

Second was Mother Earth.

Third was the water.

Fourth was the human woman that we see now.

4. So if the Elder calls them all women, but they are not all women like we think of women (in human form) then what does he really mean in the story when he calls them women?

He is really referring to something that gives life. The moon is important to the cycle of life on earth. Mother Earth is the land that allows everything to grow and provides us with food (through plants and animals). Water is the most critical element of life. Everything on earth and in the air has an element of water and we would die through loss of water before loss of food or other elements. Human women give life because they carry babies, nurture them and they produce life in that way.

5. When the Elder says that Canada is built on our stories because we were here first, what does he mean?

When Europeans first came to this land they would have died without Aboriginal people. Europeans learned how to live on this land, how to survive, how to find their way on the land, what to eat, what was medicine, what water sources were safe to drink, everything... from the stories of the Aboriginal people

6. The Elder says that today the women's voice is taken out of decision making. What does he say this has resulted in? Why is the women's voice out of decision making now? What is he referring to?

He says that this is why there is chaos. He is referring to the change in laws, governing models and societal structure that came with the settlers and was imposed at the expense of Aboriginal societal structures, governing models and ways of living before the arrival of Europeans. The Elder is indicating that by making this change the settlers knocked the balance of nature out of alignment. That is it important that everyone in our societies, and our families, has an important role. The woman had a say before the arrival of the European settlers and by taking away the 'voice' of the givers of life and the nurtures of life we have created chaos in our communities and in our country.

7. How did the Elder learn all of this?

He learned from the stories that his Grandfather told him.

8. Why do you think the other Elders are listening to this Elder? They look like they are his age or older so we would think that they already know everything that he knows. What message does this give you?

In Aboriginal worldview, learning is something that humans (and all living things) must do our entire lives, until the day we die. The other Elders that are listening are still learning from the Elder who is speaking and they respect his story as valid knowledge and history.

9. What does the Elder say that children need to be taught so that our world will survive?

We need to teach our children to respect and protect the earth, the birds, the animals and the trees. He is saying that if we don't teach children to respect the earth and all things on the earth, then our world will be destroyed and there will be no life.

10. What are you going to do in response to the Elder's challenge: what kind of a child are you going to be in this world?