



Tell Me A Story

First Nations Storytelling in Saskatchewan

Grade One Language Arts



CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Grade One Language Arts

<http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/ela/planning03.html>

LESSON PLAN ONE: CLASSROOM INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will learn that First Nations legends are stories that are handed down from the past. Often, they teach a moral lesson or tell about how something came to be. The stories are of such a great age that the details cannot be verified. Students will learn that in Aboriginal culture, truths and lessons are told both through story and dance. They will think about why we like to listen to stories and what stories tell us about our cultures. Three stories will be read: *How the Birch Tree Got Its Stripes*, a mythological explanatory story; *Little Badger and the Fire Spirits*, a legendary quest story; *Hidden Buffalo*, an initiation legend. Students will learn that Elders, as bearers of wisdom, are to be treated with respect and listened to attentively.



Gathering of Cree First Nation people, circa 1905. Saskatchewan Archives Board S-B6796

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/aboriginal/k_12_resources/elaelem.html for *How the Birch Tree Got Its Stripes*, a mythological explanatory story by Freda Ahenakew, illustrated by George Littlechild. Saskatchewan: Fifth House, 1988.
- http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/artsed/g3arts_ed/drama021.htm for *Little Badger and the Fire Spirits*, a legendary quest story by Maria Campbell and illustrated by David MacLagan. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977, 1980.
- Weibe, Rudy. *Hidden Buffalo*, illustrated by Michael Lonechild. Calgary: Red Deer Press, 2003.

Myths are the things that never were, but always are.

Stephen of Byzantium, 6th century AD



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PROCEDURE

1. Prepare to teach by getting and reading copies of *How the Birch Tree Got Its Stripes*, *Little Badger and the Fire Spirits*, and *Hidden Buffalo*.
2. Have students sit in a listening circle and explain to them that the stories they will hear are very, very old and that young children just like them have listened to these stories for hundreds, even thousands, of years. In the past, they were told and retold from the storytellers' memories. Today they have been written down so that more people can read and hear them.
3. Explain that a legend is a story so old that no one can prove whether or not it is true. Stories were told to amuse and entertain the listeners and sometimes, to teach a lesson or to explain how something came to be. Tell students that winter was a good storytelling time, when it was cold and people gathered together around the fire.
4. Read the stories.

ADAPTATION AND EXTENSION

1. Art and music can also support and reinforce storytelling concepts.
2. Other legends can be added or substituted.
3. Combine First Nations storytelling with teaching multiculturalism and anti-racism. Explore the importance of storytelling among all cultures. Explore fairy tales, Disney movies and stories of importance in the lives of the students.
4. Combine storytelling with an exploration of rock paintings and carving. Stories and feats were preserved in ochre and stone, as well as in word and dance. Explain that a pictograph is a painting on stone while a petroglyph is a carving into stone.

LESSON PLAN TWO: AT THE MUSEUM

LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will explore the contents of a discovery box and tour exhibits in the Museum.

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- Materials and information sent to you in your Museum tour confirmation package.



Brimming with puppets, this discovery box is sure to capture the hearts of young students. With you as the *Raven* storyteller, and a host of helpers like Raccoon, Bear, Beaver, Moose and Mouse, your class will delight to stories that tell why Frog has long back legs and why Porcupine has quills.



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PROCEDURE

1. Prepare to teach and to tour the Museum by reviewing the resources listed. Divide your class into two groups before the visit. Discuss the required number of groups with the Museum Programmer when you book your visit. Select other staff members or parents to lead the groups. Advise the group leaders about what they will have to do.
2. Students will visit a Western Development Museum in Moose Jaw, North Battleford, Saskatoon or Yorkton. The entire class will assemble for a welcome and orientation.
3. The class will be divided into two, three or more groups depending on class size. Student's will interact with artifacts, replicas and photographs located in a discovery box.
4. The class will tour pertinent exhibits in the Museum using a tour handout to guide their exploration. This handout may be a question-and-answer sheet or a scavenger hunt. A tour script for the group leader will be sent with confirmation of your Museum tour booking.

ADAPTATION AND EXTENSION

1. A museum visit can be turned into a host of complementary activities like making a picture book, writing and singing a song, choreographing a dance which tells a story.
2. Visit a local museum. Go to www.saskmuseums.org to find museums and heritage sites around Saskatchewan.

LESSON PLAN THREE: WHEN A MUSEUM VISIT ISN'T POSSIBLE

LESSON OVERVIEW

Invite a First Nations or Métis storyteller to visit the classroom or invite a guest reader to visit the classroom to read a First Nations story. If an Elder can visit, ask the Elder to bring artifacts of interest for students to examine. Storytelling traditionally was a winter activity. If no First Nations or Métis Elders are available, invite a community Elder to share stories of living and growing up in Saskatchewan, or tales he or she heard as a child.

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- First Nations or Métis groups near you may provide Elders who will visit the classroom to tell stories. For protocol, consult www.sasklearning.gov.sk.ca/docs/native10/F_L_Objectives.html#IE
- Library collections hold many appropriate children's books and stories. Select other tales or stories that will interest your class. Use your Local History Book to provide ideas for stories.



First Nations family scraping a moose hide. Saskatchewan Archives Board S-B5954



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PROCEDURE

1. Survey your community for First Nations and Métis people. Invite an Elder to the classroom.
2. If an Elder cannot be found, select other stories from the school or local library, or ones you find online. Invite the principal, the resource room teacher or a community Elder or local celebrity to read the stories you have selected. Ask if they would share stories from their own lives.
3. Seat the class on the floor in a listening circle. Introduce the Elder or the guest reader. Ask the children to listen attentively to the stories.
4. When the stories are finished, talk about them with the children. Discuss that storytelling was an important pastime during the long winter months. Discuss the lives and lifestyles of one or more First Nations groups. Discuss how different groups have different stories.
5. Thank the Elder or guest reader for sharing the stories with the class.

ADAPTATION AND EXTENSION

1. Have students ask at home about family stories from their own family's experiences. Share the stories in a listening circle.

LESSON PLAN FOUR: CLASSROOM WRAP-UP

LESSON OVERVIEW

The class will write their own story. As a class, decide on the topic which the story will address. On chart paper, write the children's points as the story unfolds. Once the story is finished, a smaller "book" version will be produced, with students printing and illustrating each page. When the storybook is completed and the pages have been bound together, the class will come together in a listening circle. Invite parents and family members or other teachers and care partners to attend. The class will read, or tell, their story for the visitors. Music, dance or pantomime may enhance the reading of the story.

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- Chart paper and pen
- Paper and paint or crayons
- Aboriginal music to play in the background as the children illustrate the pages of their book



In the north in shelters like these and in the south in tipis, First Nation children would have listened to Elders tell traditional stories. Sketch by Meghan Buckle, 2005.



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PROCEDURE

1. Assemble the children in a listening circle. Explain that they will be able to write their own story and draw pictures to illustrate it.
2. Ask for suggestions on a topic - for example: why the beaver has a flat tail; why the seasons change; why the tamarack loses its needles. Ensure that most children agree with the choice.
3. Invite participation from the students to create an interesting explanation for the topic they have chosen. Record their thoughts and ideas on the chart paper as the plot develops and the story unfolds.
4. When the story is concluded, explain to the children that you will divide the words into a certain number of pages, so that each student gets one page to illustrate and to print the text. Someone will be assigned the cover picture and the title, date and credits.
5. Give class time to draw and colour the pictures for each page.
6. After class, assemble the pages into book form. You may wish to plasticize each page. If funds allow, you may wish to make a copy for each student. Be sure to include the children's names as authors and illustrators, the school name and location, and the year.
7. Discuss a special listening circle with the class. Decide if they would like to invite others to hear their story. Decide if they would like to add music, dance or actions to the reading of the story. Rehearse.
8. Invite family members or other classes to attend the story presentation. Sit in a listening circle and share the story.

ADAPTATION AND EXTENSION

1. If you choose, students can tell their story through song and dance. They may write a rhyming ballad to be sung instead of read. The choreography may reflect the action of the plot.



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RESOURCES

- www.skbooks.com gives other stories to consider.
- www.inac.gc.ca provides the Aboriginal Book List for Children.
- A host of pertinent websites and literature exists. Consider *How the Mouse Got Its Brown Teeth*, *Why the Possum's Tail is Bare*, *Hidden Buffalo* and *Indian Legends of Canada*.
- *Dances of the Northern Plains*, a video available from the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre.
- www.wdm.ca for a link to Celebrating Saskatchewan's Heritage.
- www.metismuseum.ca for The Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture from the Gabriel Dumont Institute.
- www.saskmuseums.org for information on museums and heritage sites around Saskatchewan.
- www.saskparks.net for information on the St. Victor petroglyphs and other sites of interest.
- Jones, T. E. H. *The Aboriginal Rock Paintings of the Churchill River*. Regina: Saskatchewan Department of Culture and Youth, Anthropological Series, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, No. 4, 1981.

FAST FACTS

- Before European contact, First Nations groups treasured their physical and spiritual relationship with the land because from it came everything - food, clothing, shelter, tools, medicine and ceremonial objects.
- Dynamic, thriving nations existed in North America with developed systems of governance, education, language and culture.
- First Nations were diverse in terms of language, clothing styles, cultures, governance structures and livelihoods.
- First Nations people preserved and transmitted cultural beliefs and mores through an oral tradition of storytelling.
- Wasakejack is a Cree trickster character who figures prominently in Cree mythology.
- An explanatory tale offers a reason for something, often for something found in the natural world.
- A quest story contains a hero or heroine in search of something, usually something of importance to the group as a whole.
- An initiation story contains a character who reaches a turning point in his or her life.
- Traditional concepts and beliefs were also preserved through dance.
- In traditional Aboriginal societies, creation stories are told only in winter, from about December 21 to March 21.
- The drum symbolizes the heartbeat of the Nation.
- Today there are eight First Nations' dialects in Saskatchewan: Dene, Woodland Cree, Swampy Cree, Plains Cree, Saulteaux, Dakota, Nakota, Lakota.