

ROBERSON MUSEUM AND SCIENCE CENTER

Iroquois Culture Pre-Visit Activity

Grade Level: 3-5

New York State Learning Standards: Arts 1-4; ELA 1, 3, 4; SS 1-3; MS&T 4

Pennsylvania Learning Standards: H 8.1, 8.3; A&H 9.2; S&T 3.4; E&E 4.2, 4.4, 4.8

Objectives: In this activity, the students will become familiar with the creation myth of the Iroquois by helping to create a picture book for the story. They will be exposed to the perspective of another culture and begin to understand the relationship between how the Iroquois lived and their beliefs. Stories are ways to pass on traditions and customs. This activity will encourage connections between art and reading.

Materials:

- A copy of the Iroquois creation story (See attached)
- Cardstock
- Construction paper, cut to fit onto three-quarters of cardstock
- Colored pencils, crayons, markers
- Pencils and erasers
- Binder or binder rings
- Three-hole punch
- Glue stick

Procedure:

1. Three-hole punch each sheet of cardstock. (*Note: This step and the following one can be done ahead of time, before the activity is assigned to the students, in order to save time when putting the book together.*)
2. Write or attach typed copies of each paragraph of the Creation Story onto a separate sheet of cardstock. If you are gluing typed copies of the story onto the cardstock, use a glue stick so that the paper does not wrinkle when it is dry.
3. Read the story to students.
4. Discuss the story afterwards. Some sample questions include:
 - How do the animals decide to help Skywoman?

- Some sample answers would be: the birds gather mud to soften her fall, the turtle allows her to fall on his back, the muskrat risks its life to provide land for Skywoman, etc.
- Why does Muskrat succeed in finding land for Skywoman when the other animals failed?
 - Muskrat was persistent and would not give up.
 - What is a creation story?
 - A sample answer would be an explanation of how the world began and how a particular culture developed.
 - Why do people come up with creation stories?
 - To explain where they live, purpose in life, how things came to be, etc.
 - Do you know any other stories of creation?
 - The Bible, the Muslim creation story, the Hindu creation story, the Aztec creation story.
 - Why does each culture have a different creation story?
 - Sample answers include: every civilization has its own sources of food, resources for building, climate, etc. that contribute to different aspects of its culture that become important to the people.
5. Describe the activity of creating a picture book for the Iroquois creation story.
 6. Create a contributor page and have each student sign it.
 7. Designate one group of students to create the title page, and encourage everyone in the group to contribute something.
 8. Depending on the number of students in the class, combine or separate different parts of the story so that everyone can have something to illustrate.
 9. Provide students with their own copy of the paragraph or sentence which they are illustrating and have them work separately on their illustrations.
 10. On the construction paper, have students sketch their drawings for the book. Check to see if the drawing is appropriate and make suggestions for any changes to the students.
 11. Students can either copy their final sketch onto a new sheet of construction paper or use the original sketch if they wish.
 12. Students should color in their drawings.
 13. Collect the drawings and use a glue stick to attach them to the cardstock with the text on the pages.
 14. Combine the cardstock in a binder or with binder rings, or have the book bound professionally.
 15. You can leave the book as is or have the pages laminated as well. The book can be put on display in the classroom.

Conclusion: When this activity is complete, students will have a better understanding of how cultures from around the world develop around different ideas and beliefs.

Extended Learning Activities

In order to develop a more in-depth idea of storytelling, students can write their own creation stories. They can choose a particular aspect of nature to explain, such as thunderstorms, rain, snow, wind, seasons, day & night, etc. Or, students can ask their parents, grandparents, or another member of their families, if they know of a particular traditional story about the origins of life, weather phenomena, animals, etc. Then students can share these stories with the rest of the class. This activity will allow students to practice their writing skills and to understand the differences across cultures.

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Date: March 2008

The Iroquois Creation Story

This version of the creation story is adapted from the website of the Iroquois Indian Museum in Howes Cave, New York (<http://www.iroquoismuseum.org/creation.htm>). The story has been divided into small paragraphs so that each may be illustrated separately for the picture book. You may combine the sentences or divide them further in order to accommodate the size of your class.

Before our world came into being, human beings lived in the SkyWorld. Below the SkyWorld was a dark watery world with birds and animals swimming around.

In the SkyWorld was the Celestial Tree from which all kinds of fruits and flowers grew.

The wife of the Chief of the SkyWorld was called Skywoman. One night, Skywoman who was expecting a baby, had a dream in which the Celestial Tree was uprooted.

When she told her husband the dream he realized that it was a very powerful message and that the people of the SkyWorld needed to do everything they could to make it come to pass.

Many of the young men in the SkyWorld tried with all their might to uproot the tree, but failed. Finally the Chief of the SkyWorld wrapped his arms around the tree and with one great effort he uprooted it.

This left a great hole in the crust of the SkyWorld. Skywoman leaned over to look into the hole, lost her balance and fell into the hole.

As she slipped she was able to grasp a handful of seeds from the branches of the Celestial Tree.

As Skywoman fell, the birds and animals in the water below saw her and decided that she would need help so that she would not be harmed.

Geese flew up and caught her between their wings and began to lower her down toward the water. The animals saw that Skywoman was not like them and would not be able to survive in the water.

Each of the animals dove into the water trying to bring up earth from the bottom for Skywoman to land on. Many animals tried and failed.

When it seemed like all had tried and failed, tiny Muskrat vowed to bring up earth no matter what happened to her. She went down, deep, deep, deep, until she was almost unconscious, but was able to reach out with one small paw and grasped some earth before floating back to the top.

When muskrat appeared with the Earth, the Great Turtle said it could be placed on his back.

When the tiny bit of earth was placed on Turtle's back, it began to grow larger and larger until it became the whole world. Sky Woman treaded the mud, making it into an island.

The geese gently set Skywoman on the earth and she opened her hands to let the seeds fall on the soil.
From the seeds grew the trees and grass, and life on Earth had begun.

Suggested Readings

- Ancona, George. **Powwow**. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1993.
- Braman, Arlette N. **Traditional Native American Arts and Activities**. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2000.
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- Bruchac, Joseph with illustrations by Anna Vojtech. **The First Strawberries: A Cherokee Story**. New York: Dial Books, 1993.
- Bruchac, Joseph with illustrations by Susan L. Roth. **The Great Ball Game: A Muskogee Story**. New York: Dial Books, 1994.
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- Hoyt-Goldsmith, Diane with photographs by Lawrence Migdale. **Cherokee Summer**. New York: Holiday House, 1993.
- Kalman, Bobbie. **Life in a Longhouse Village**. New York: Crabtree Publishing Company, 2001.
- Keegan, Marcia. **Pueblo Boy: Growing Up in Two Worlds**. New York: Cobblehill Books, 1991.
- Levine, Ellen with illustrations by Shelly Hehenberger. **If You Lived with the Iroquois**. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1999.
- Littlechild, George. **This Land is My Land**. California: Children's Book Press, 1993.
- Livo, Norma J. **Celebrating the Earth: Stories, Experiences and Activities**. Englewood: Teacher Ideas Press, 2000.
- Loyie, Larry. **As Long as the Rivers Flow**. Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2005.

Normandin, Christine. **Echoes of the Elders: The Stories and Paintings of Chief Lelooska.** New York: DK Publishing, Inc., 1996.

Sonneborn, Liz. **The Iroquois.** New York: Franklin Watts, 2002.

Tehanotorens. **Legends of the Iroquois.** Summertown, TN: The Book Publishing Company, 1998.