

# AIH-9: Legends and Stories of American Indians

## Summary

Students will learn why it is important to hear the legends and stories of American Indians.

## Group Size

Individual

## Materials

- *The Storytelling Stone*  
, Traditional Native American Myths and Tales (excellent book for this age level)
- *Native American Oral Traditions*  
, collaboration and Interpretation. Edited by Larry Evers and Barre Toelken. Teacher may want to preview this book and only use some of the legends. There is comparison to Russian mythology. Interesting.

## Background for Teachers

This is the first of five lessons in the Seventh Grade American Indian History Lesson Plan Unit:

AIH-9: Legends and Stories of American Indians

- [AIH-10: Adapting to A New Culture](#)
- [AIH-11: Utah American Indian and non-Indian Conflicts](#)
- [AIH-12: American Indian Tribal Sovereignty](#)
- [AIH-13: Utah's American Indian Tribes Today](#)

Understanding: Legend is an integral part of culture and comes from the land, background, religious beliefs and values of a people. Through American Indian legends and stories we can learn

"...respect. For everything—the Earth, yourself, the way you carry yourself, the way you treat other people." -- Eddie Spears, Lakota Sioux.

Resource Materials:

- *Scope Magazine*  
, November 10, 2003  
Stories, myths, and legends of American Indian origin.
- *American Indian Mythology*  
by Marriott, Alice and Carol K. Rachlin
- *Flying with the Eagle*  
, *Racing the Great Bear* by Bruchac, Joseph
- *Spider Spins a Story*  
by Max, Jill.

## Student Prior Knowledge

Introduction:

People walked upon the face of the land known as the United States of America long before it was a country. Some archeologists estimate that the first inhabitants arrived 40,000 years ago, and others 13,000 years, before the present day. Many American children are taught about Christopher Columbus discovering America and the First Thanksgiving at Jamestown. Yet, this is not the correct history. As so the history now unfolds.

The Indians that inhabited the lands of the Americas learned of this great land by experience. They were eclectic biologists and scientists in their own right. They knew of the waters, the trees, and the

various animals. They tilled the earth, grew food, and walked the paths through this great land. It was their homeland. They were the first people to inhabit this land. Their history is one of pride, sacredness, and knowledge of the land. Learning this history requires a look into their past, their trials, and the story of the days when others came to their land and began to change the face of their world forever. However, some of their traditional cultural values, ethics, and sacred beliefs exist to this day.

This unit is an attempt to help children understand the first people of this land and develop an even greater appreciation for their diversity, culture, and the generations whose hands helped forge this land and were pivotal in the building of this nation.

Some general information about American Indians:

Today there are many terms that describe the people who first inhabited this land. There is conflict about what to call these people. Part of the problem is that they are not one people, but many. Traditional names translated from their native languages generally mean "the People." Yet, they are called Native Americans, American Indians, First People, aboriginal and Indigenous People, and by a very general term "Indian." The word "Indian" is wrongly used, in its application as a term, which collectively designates tribal groups as "one people." Christopher Columbus' erroneous geography and impression that he had landed among the islands off Asia led him to call the peoples he met "los Indios." His casual use of the term "Indios" in his letters introduced the New World to European populations; thus, similar words in other European languages evolved, such as the French "Indien," the German "Indianer," the English "Indian." Subsequent usage of the term "Indian" for the New World's inhabitants evoked descriptive words as "savages," "infidels," and "heathens." However, Europeans had limited contact with groups of people with such diverse cultures and languages.

Initial establishment of the imagery of the "Indian," like the word itself, came from the pens of Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci. Such imagery and stereotypes have prevailed to the present through inaccurate written accounts and Hollywood movies. Each Indian tribe has its own language, which is different from those of other tribes; its own history and origins; its own customs (social and spiritual); its own traditional dances; its own styles of clothing; its own foods; its own values; its own culture; its own spiritual beliefs and practices; its own life styles; and its own tribal governments. Most tribes also have an extended family system.

Indian tribes are not one people, although many tribal philosophies and concepts are similar—e.g., nearly every tribe's beliefs have reference to a Supreme Being; refer to the earth as "Mother Earth" and sky as "Father Sky"; have a belief that all things in creation must have balance and harmony; and have respect for all animals, sea life, and birds, and for all things.

There were 560 federally recognized Indian tribes and bands, as of January 2000, in the forty-eight mainland United States of America. Alaska has the Aleuts, Eskimos, and Athapaskan tribal groups that number 229. But there are perhaps 300 more Native Entities in Alaska which, while eligible to receive services, are not federally recognized as tribes/nations.

Indian tribal groups also exist in Canada, Mexico, Central America, and South America. Tribes of the Caribbean were mostly destroyed by diseases that the Europeans brought, and the remaining Caribbean tribal peoples intermarried with the French, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, and black slaves.

There are 378 treaties which the U.S. government entered into with Indian tribes, the first being the treaty with the Delawares (September 17, 1778) and last the agreement with the Columbia and Colville (July 7, 1883).

There are 292 reservations, rancherias, and pueblos. These land areas are held in trust under the United States Department of Interior.

Today there are many new findings about the Indians. Science is linking peoples and their migrations as far away as Siberia. Someday these links to the past may open up explorations of where the native peoples really came from. Does the theory of the Bering Strait link peoples of two continents? Do the glaciers of Alaska hold secrets? What about connections with the people of South America? We are now in the process of interweaving cultures, people, and evidence that in the near future might establish these connections.

### Instructional Procedures

Essential Question 1: Why Is it important to hear the legends and stories and their origins to understand the American Indian culture?

Discuss how values are obtained in any culture and the part that storytelling plays in our lives.

Read as a group the Reader's Theater in *Scope*, November 10, 2003.

Follow this by reading the "Cross-Cultural Awareness" section.

Read *The Story Telling Stone* by Susan Fieldman (origin stories), ISBN 03853340028.

#### 5. *Native American Oral Traditions*

-- Collaboration & Interpretation ISBN 0874214157 T/S

Essential Question 2: Why is it important to hear a variety of stories, myths and legends? (To broaden the view and understanding of the students.)

The teacher will tell a story or legend to the class. This should be done in the same manner he/she expects the students to use later.

As a class, analyze the story for its effect on the culture we see around us. What does the story do for your understanding?

Storytelling. Each student will find a legend or story originating with one of the American Indian nations. Remind students to be sensitive to the fact that some stories are only told at certain times of the year.

Read and memorize the story. Remember that a story loses its power if changed.

### Assessment Plan

Essential Question 1 - Assessment

Written responses on why the stories and legends are told and retold.

Essential Question 2 - Assessment

Students will respond to one of the following essay questions:

Analysis: How have the legends and stories of the American Indians affected the culture of Utah?

Compare and contrast the elements in two stories you heard from different American Indian nations.

Evaluate the value of hearing a variety of stories and legends of the American Indian nations.

What have you learned? Why is it important?

### Bibliography

Utah State Office of Education

Social Studies Enhancement Committee

American Indian History

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