

Sacred Images - Preserving History Through Storytelling

Summary

Students will learn about history recording in an oral culture. They will understand how ancient storytellers used rock art to record their stories.

Time Frame

4 class periods of 45 minutes each

Life Skills

Communication, Social & Civic Responsibility

Materials

- *Sacred Images A Vision of Native American Rock Art*
Native American creation stories, in *Keepers of the Animals* by Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchau. 1991.
- *Sacred Images*
(page 23, Mae Perry)
- [Coyote Steals Rolling Rock's Blanket](#)
(from Ute People, Utah State Office of Education) (copies for each student)
- [Finger Puppets](#)
(From Ute People, Utah State Office of Education)
- *Keepers of the Earth "Tunka-shila, Grand father Rock"*
(Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac 1991) optional
- *Dinosauring "Iktomi and the Boulder"*
(Houghton Mifflin 4th Grade Edition) optional
- *Before You Came This Way*
(Byrd Baylor 1969) optional
- *Coyote Steals the Blanket*
(retold by Janet Stevens) optional

Additional Materials Needed

- Pencil and paper to record an interview with a grandparent or elder relative
- Paper and crayons or markers to record this information using symbols.

Background for Teachers

All communities are defined by their cultures which include languages, day to day living experiences, and histories. The languages of Native Americans were only spoken, not written. This meant that their unique tribal histories and life experiences had to be remembered by the people as it was passed down from generation to generation. This is what is called an oral tradition. Storytelling was a tool used by the Native American communities as a way for these traditions and histories to be passed down and recorded.

Student Prior Knowledge

Native Americans are great storytellers. For generations their language was not written, so the history of their people had to be told orally. It was very important that children listen to the stories because they had to retell them to their children. Some stories have to do with the creation of life. These stories teach the importance of respecting and caring for the earth and its inhabitants and what

happens to those who fail to do so.

Instructional Procedures

Activity: The Origin of American Literature

Read the passage by Scott Momaday. "American literature begins with the first human perception of the American landscape expressed and preserved in language. Literature we take commonly to comprehend more than writing. If writing means visible constructions within a framework of alphabets, it is not more than six or seven thousand years old, we are told. Language, and in it the formation of that cultural record which is literature, is immeasurably older. Oral tradition is the foundation of literature...With respect to the oral tradition of the American Indian, these attitudes are reflected in the character of the songs and stories themselves. Perhaps the most distinctive and important aspect of that tradition is the way in which it reveals the singer's and the storyteller's respect for and belief in language. At the heart of the American Indian oral tradition is a deep and unconditional belief in the efficacy of language. Words are intrinsically powerful. They are magical. By means of words one can bring about physical change in the universe." (pp.15-16 *The Man Made of Words*)

Activity: The Power of Stories

Read the narrative by Mae Perry and *Coyote Steals the Rolling Rock's Blanket* aloud. Copies of the story should be reread by the students several times.

Students should be reminded of the importance of knowing the story correctly as variations of the story could change its meaning, just as variations in the story of a family could alter their history.

Native stories were also told as a way to teach a concept. Students should think about what concept could be learned from this story.

Once the student feels competent to retell the story using finger puppets, they are given the opportunity to retell the story to the class or small group of students. Listeners can decide if the story was told accurately or if any important details have been omitted.

Time should be given for students to define and discuss the meaning of the vocabulary words.

These words will be used in the Core Extension Lessons.

Questions for Students:

From whom did Coyote take the blanket?

Who told him to take it back?

What is the moral of the story?

Vocabulary Words:

Rock Cycle

Sedimentary

Igneous

Metamorphic

Pictograph

Petroglyph

Preservation

Respect

Vandalize

Activity: Family Stories

Tell the students a story about a Grandparent or elder relative. Discuss the importance of family stories, what we can learn from them, and the problem that would arise if there was not a written language to record such stories.

Then, check for listening comprehension by asking questions about the story that you have just told them, Discuss the importance of good listening skills and brainstorm ways that they could pass down these stories to their ancestors without using written words.

Using the photographs of the Rock Art, have the students tell what they think the makers were trying to express. Remind them that this is what we have to remember the ancient artists by. If the art is defaced or destroyed, their story will not be remembered as they had no written language to record the exact meaning.

Students are then assigned to interview a Grandparent or elder relative, gathering and writing information about what it was like when they were children, something they remember about their family, or a story about themselves.

Students must use only symbols to "rewrite" the general idea of the story. They will then share their history with the class.

Questions for Students:

What if this is these symbols are only thing left of your family's history?

How should your "history" be treated or protected?

How do you feel about the preservation and protection of the ancient Native American's Rock Art?

Authors

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