

2006
Produced by
Utah State Office of Education
and
San Juan School District Media Center

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Aldean Learns to Make Flutes

A Story About a White Mesa Ute Boy

Cultural Note

In traditional Ute culture, the flute was used for healing ceremonies, or sometimes for courting. A man would play a song to win the heart of a woman. According to tradition, only she could hear the music being played for her.

The White Mesa Utes, located in White Mesa, Utah, are members of the Ute Mountain Ute tribe. The Ute Mountain Ute tribal headquarters are located about 90 miles east, in Towaoc, Colorado.

Vocabulary

curious

hesitate

hollowed

mature

twisted

Glossary

ii'nap - flute

chikévunap - carving

puhmum wúkain - tools

káan - home

yagátii - music

Reading Suggestions

Do an Internet search for Aldean Ketchum. You will find a picture of him playing his flute at the Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City.

Learn to make or do something your mom, dad, grandma or grandpa like to do or make. Perhaps they could teach you to change a tire, plant a garden, write a song, sew, take a picture, or cook.

Do you play a musical instrument? Visit an exhibit or attend a performance that involves dance, music, speech, or drama.



Aldean spent many more hours with his grandfather learning to make and play flutes. He continues that tradition today, so he can preserve the language and the healing songs of the Ute culture.

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A Story About a White Mesa Ute Boy



Adapted by
Merry M. Palmer
As told by
Aldean “Lightning Hawk” Ketchum

Illustrated by
Aldean “Lightning Hawk” Ketchum

Cultural Consultant
Mary Jane Yazzie

Editing and layout by
Kathryn Hurst

The Native American Indian Literacy Project was made possible by funds from the Utah State Office of Education (USOE). It is a joint effort of the USOE and San Juan School District Media Center. For more information about this project, contact Shirlee Silversmith at (801) 538-7838.

The booklets are available on a CD from the USOE. You may print the booklets off the CD, free of charge, for educational purposes. If you would like to purchase printed copies of the booklets, contact San Juan School District Media Center at (435) 678-1229.

As Grandfather played the flute, sweet *yagátii*, music, filled the air. He stopped halfway through the song, chuckled, and said, “This is your great-grandfather’s song. I’m glad you want to learn how to make flutes. I will also teach you how to play the songs of our people.”

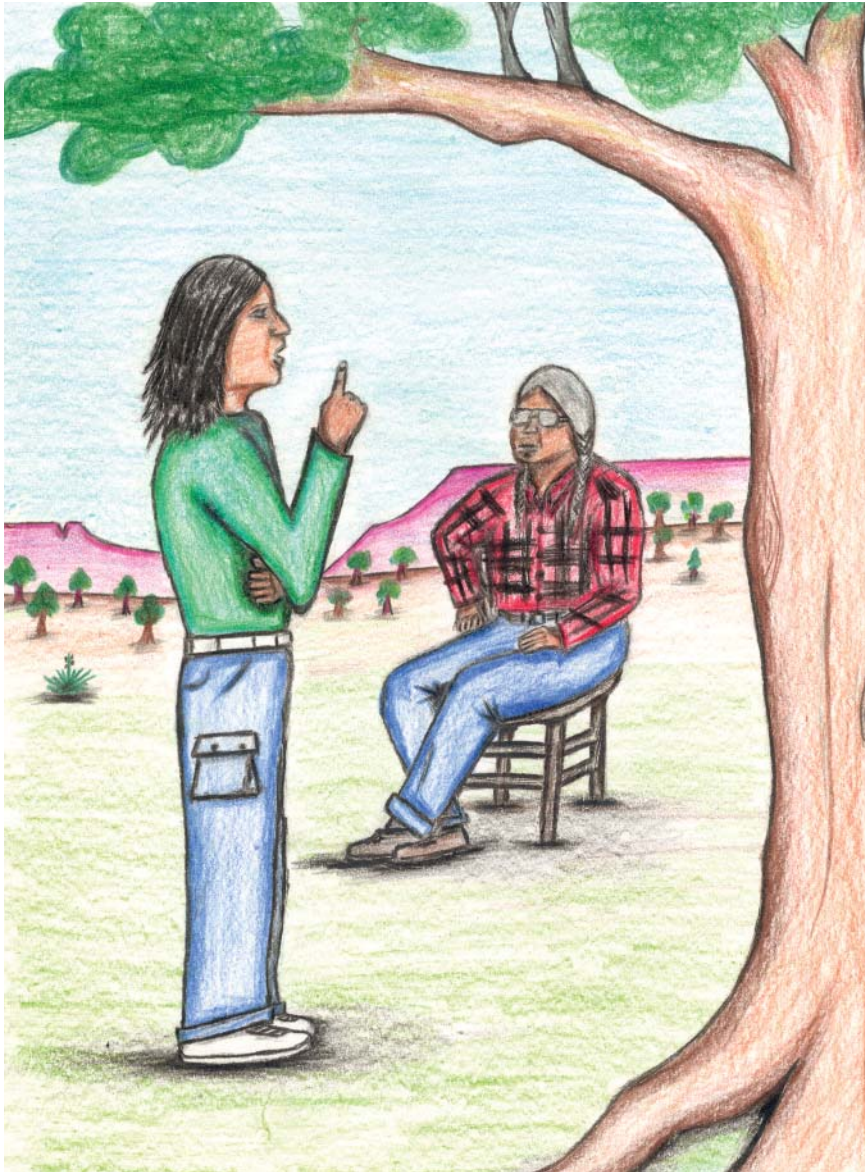




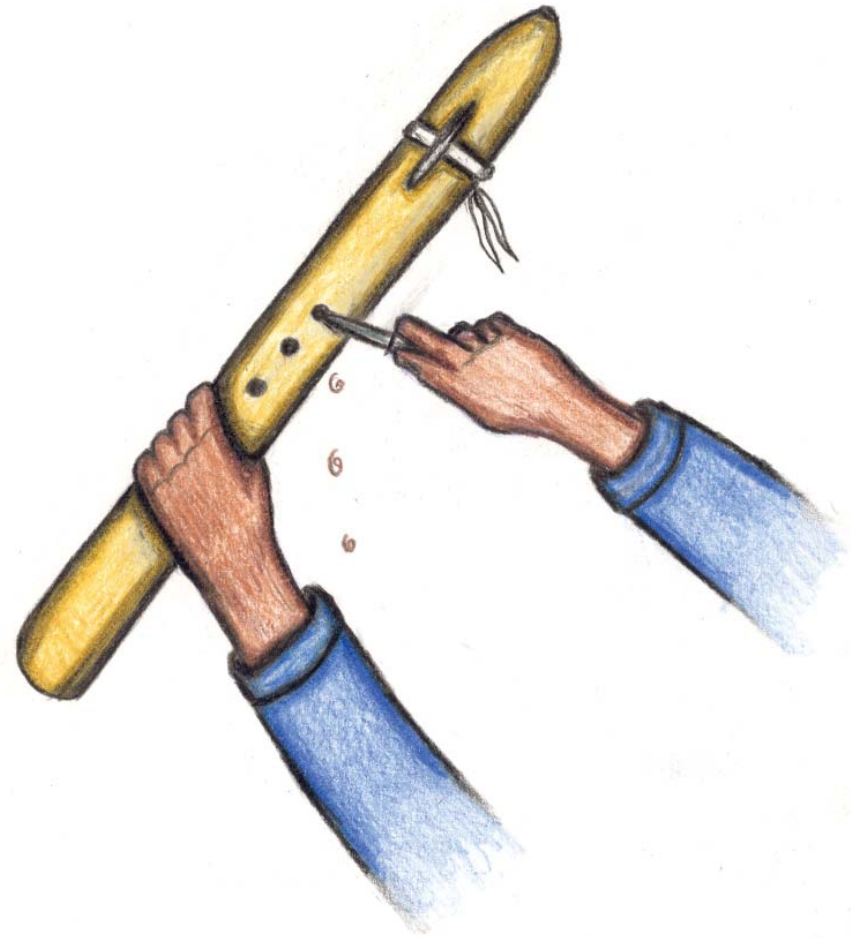
The next day, Grandfather finished the flute by tying feathers just below the mouthpiece. Aldean knew his grandfather sometimes carved animals or birds and glued them onto the flute, but he kept this one simple. Grandfather held it up for Aldean to examine. The polished wood glowed in the light. Then Grandfather placed the flute to his lips.



Aldean's grandfather made *ii'nap*, flutes, but Aldean never paid much attention. Instead, he liked playing outside and having a good time with his friends.

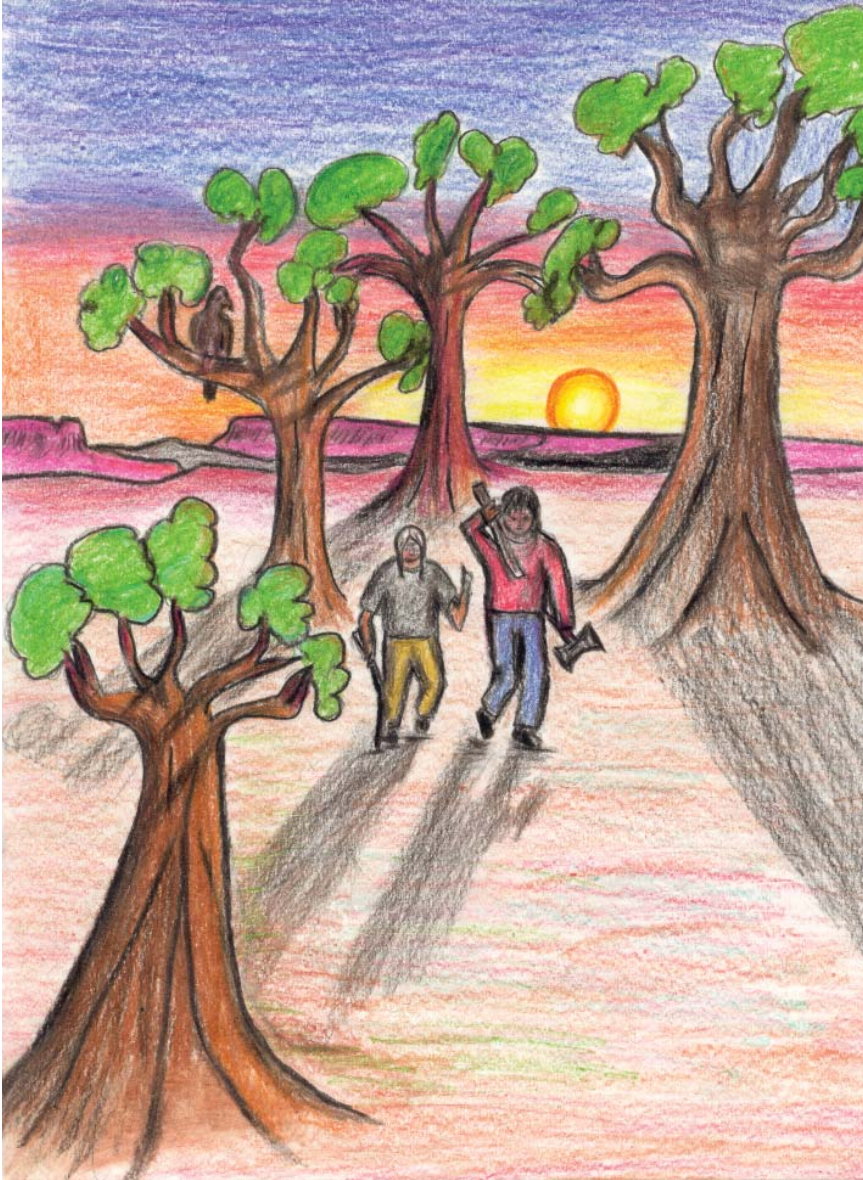


When Aldean grew up, he became curious about his grandfather's art. He asked his grandfather if he remembered how to make flutes. Grandfather did not hesitate. "Come to my house tomorrow," he told Aldean. "Bring your pocketknife and an ax."

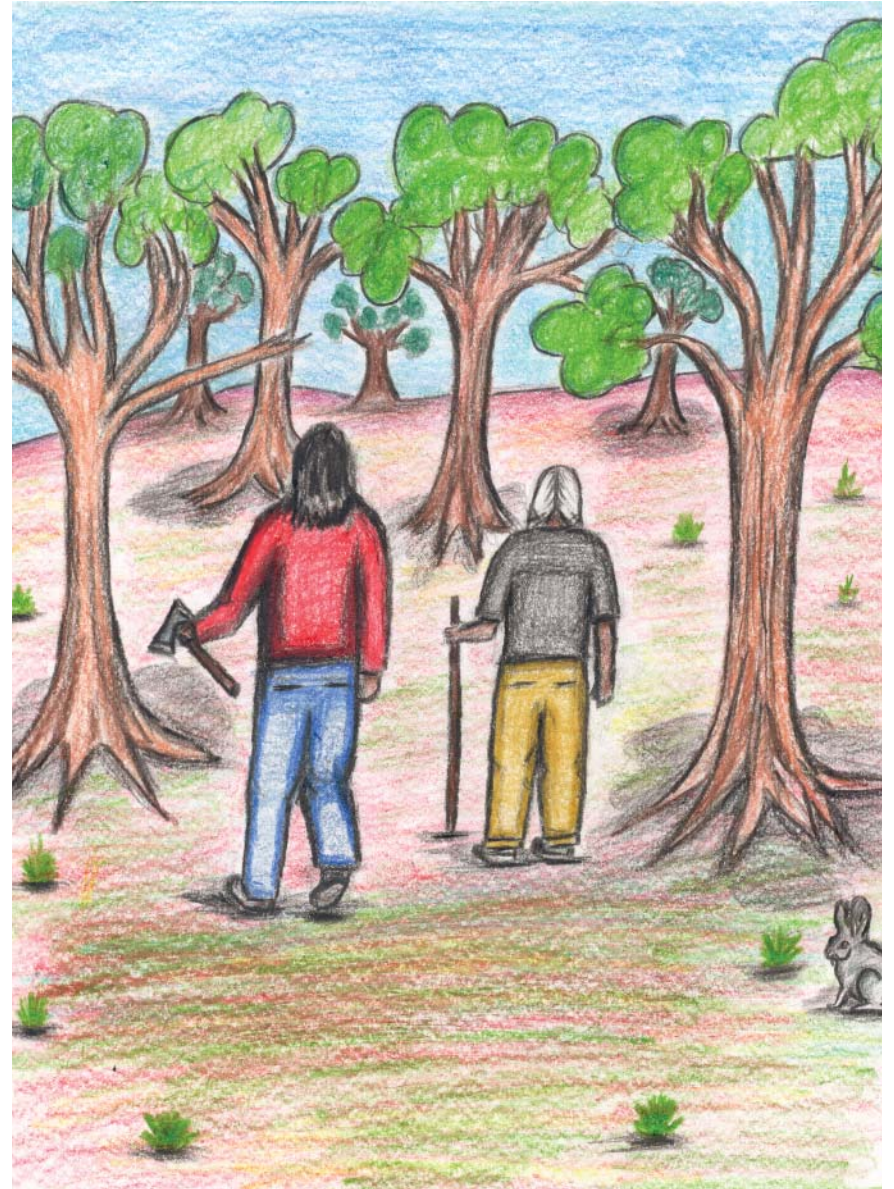


Every day, Aldean went to his grandfather's home to help him create the flute. Grandfather hollowed out the center and carved a mouthpiece. Next, he drilled five holes into the body, but he did not use any modern equipment. He used only his pocket knife. After he drilled the holes, Grandfather sounded each note to make sure the pitch and tone were perfect. Then he smoothed oil over the body of the flute.

As the sun disappeared, Grandfather and Aldean picked up their tools and the piece of wood. They headed back through the forest to their homes. "Come back tomorrow," Grandfather called as they parted. "Making a flute takes time and care."



The next day, Grandfather and Aldean went into the cedar forest to select the tree. They spent all afternoon picking the perfect one. It needed to be a mature juniper that would not mind if they took part of it for a flute.





Once they located the tree, they cut off only the section they needed. They were careful not to destroy the tree. Grandfather split the wood. Soon, he had a piece he could shape into a flute.

“The flute is a healing instrument,” he said, sitting on an old log. He patted the log, and Aldean sat beside him. “We use it to heal our inner spirit,”

Grandfather said as he opened his knife and began cutting the knobs from the wood. “Healing first begins inside. After we heal the inner spirit, we can heal the physical part of our bodies.”

“A long, long time ago, the Pueblo Indians learned to make flutes,” Grandfather continued. He shaved off the bark. “They passed the knowledge down from generation to generation, from tribe to tribe. Many tribes know the power of flute music. Now you will, too, Lightning Hawk.” As Grandfather worked, the shavings curled and fell to the ground. Aldean loved the pitchy smell of the freshly cut wood. Grandfather carved until the woods grew dark around them.

