

Sacred Images - Celebrations

Summary

The symbols left behind on rock walls depict images that were important to the people who left them. The earth and the forces in nature, the animals, plants, water, and humans are interconnected, dependent upon each other and are essentially one.

Materials

- *I'm In Charge of Celebrations*
by Byrd Baylor
- *Sacred Images A Vision of Native American Rock Art*
Exhibit and Book
A skein of yarn
Animal name tags
Paper for "Totem Animal" story

Background for Teachers

Native Americans have lived in Utah for thousands of years. They have a reverence for the Earth, the animals and nature and regard these as sacred things. The meaning of the symbols that they left behind on rock walls is unknown, however many depict images of animals, plants, humans, and perhaps, higher powers. The etchings (petroglyphs) and the drawings (pictographs), as well as the way people regard nature can teach us about who we are, where we came from, and how we can flourish in the future.

Student Prior Knowledge

Every day that we are alive is a wonderful gift, especially if we are aware of our surroundings and the beauty and power in nature. There is something to celebrate every day if we look closely at our incredible world. Even though we do not know for certain what the ancient Native Americans were trying to express with their rock art, we do know that most depict scenes with figures in nature. We can infer that nature was and still is important to Native Americans and they thought a lot about things in nature.

Instructional Procedures

Activity: Read *I'm In Charge of Celebrations* to the students.

Ask the students these questions:

What events in nature does the author celebrate?

Of these celebrations, which would you choose to celebrate?

Can you think of other things in nature that you would celebrate?

Do you think the people who created the rock symbols celebrated events in nature? Why or why not?

Who created the rock art and when was it created?

What symbols could you find?

What do you think these artists were trying to express?

Do you think that their messages can still be applied today? Why or why not?

After reading and discussing *I'm In Charge of Celebrations* visit the exhibit and/or examine the book. Ask students to think of ways that the messages are similar. What can we learn from them today?

Brainstorm with the class to generate a Nature word bank using the symbols in the Rock Art

photographs.

Make "name tags" for each student, assigning them as a particular animal or plant that may have been common in the time of the ancient Native American artists. Students may be assigned as water, air, or as humans, as well.

Students form a large circle, wearing their name tags. One student begins by holding the skein of yarn. The student keeps hold of a strand and must decide which thing in nature he/she depends upon most and tosses the skein to the student wearing that tag. This continues until all students are "interconnected" and "dependent" upon one another, forming a "web of life". Then the teacher announces that something has happened to the balance (drought, pollution, over-hunting, over population, etc) and one thing has disappeared. That student must drop his/her strand until all things in nature have been affected and no one is connected. A discussion of the rock art symbols and the importance of honoring and respecting the earth and her powers should follow this exercise.

Writing Activity: "Mind Journey - Finding a Totem Animal".

Students are seated in a comfortable position with their eyes closed while Native American Indian flute music is playing softly in the background. The teacher instructs the students to relax while "Mind traveling" back in time to the age that Rock Art was created. Students are instructed to use each of their five senses to experience the environment at that time. Then they are asked to visualize an animal moving past them, observing the behavior of this creature and what it is doing. Teacher instructs the students that this particular animal has chosen its student to teach him/her how to live a productive, positive, and happy life. This animal has given the student its strength and attributes and is now their "Totem Animal."

After being "brought forward to the Now", students are asked to write in first person as their Totem Animal, its attributes, and the Mind Journey experience. The words generated by the brainstorming activity may be used in this assignment, and for spelling and defining activities.

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