

Storytelling & Folklore

Cross-Curricular Focus: History/Social Sciences



Think about all the history and stories of our culture. We preserve them by writing them down in books. Today, we also have technology to use. In the early days, though, people did not have a language that could be written. They had only their own voices. They used their voices to pass down their history. They told special stories and spoke about their customs. These stories are called **folklore**.

Early Native American groups did not have a written language. Many of their stories were in the form of myths that explained mysteries of nature. Some were legends about past heroes of their culture. Many of the stories included elements of **religion** and magic. Modern methods of storytelling are available today. However, many tribes choose to continue the custom of oral storytelling and folklore. It is part of their cultural experience.

Many Native American tribes have a history of believing in spirits. They believe that the spirits often take the form of animals found in nature. The animal spirits watch over them. However, they also see the ancient gods as animal tricksters. A trickster is a character who plays tricks and jokes on others. A trickster often causes trouble or inconvenience. It really doesn't mean any terrible harm, though.

Many traditional Native American ceremonies use animal costumes. The ceremonies honor the animals in the hopes that they will save their tricks for someone else. Other ceremonies are held to help the tribe prepare for a special event. They celebrate things like marriages, births, battles, harvests or hunts.

Name: _____

Answer the following questions based on the reading passage. Don't forget to go back to the passage whenever necessary to find or confirm your answers.

1) If the only way you had to save your family history was by using your voice, what stories would you choose to tell? _____

2) Why do you think many Native Americans continue storytelling even though other methods are available today? _____

3) What is something in nature that might be fun to explain through a mythical story _____

4) What is a trickster? _____

5) Why do the Native American ceremonies include animal costumes? _____