

TEACHERS ACTIVITIES



Theme:

Like Little Gopher, we all possess gifts and talents that make us special to the people around us.

Topics For Discussion:

Introduce the concept of the “oral tradition” of literature to the class. Explain to the students that ancient and even more recent societies had a body of stories, sometimes called myths, legends, folktales, songs, etc., that were passed from older to younger generations through storytelling. Eventually these stories were recorded in print form, and we have them available in books today. *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush* is one of these stories. Discuss with students why this story was probably originated and the meaning it might have had to the people who first told it.



Traditional Native American art, including music, artwork, and dance, is tied to nature because native peoples believed in the importance of living in harmony with the earth. Discuss with the class any evidence they saw in the program of Native American respect for all living things. What does “living in harmony with nature” mean?



At the end of the story, Little Gopher has a new name. Ask the class why they think Little Gopher’s name was changed.



The program shows families and individuals keeping old traditions alive and practicing them today. Ask students why they think this is important— to Native Americans and to *all* Americans.



The program presents opportunities to diminish two common stereotypes about Native Americans: that they represent cultures of the past and that they are one cultural group, instead of many nations with unique customs and beliefs. Look for examples in the program that dispel these stereotypes. Continue this discussion as the class reads other stories and learns more about Native Americans.

Curriculum Extension Activities:

The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush is a *pourquoi* story, a traditional story that offers an explanation of some natural phenomenon. There are many Native American stories that explain the appearance of animals, plants, the seasons, the sky, the earth—nearly every aspect of life. Enlist the aid of the media specialist in locating some of these stories to read to the class. Discuss with students why these stories originated (e.g, people have a natural curiosity about the world around them; when they have no other explanation, they create one that fits with their beliefs about the interrelationship of all things). Science has provided us with explanations of many of these phenomena, such as why the sun shines in the daytime. What scientific explanations do students know about these natural phenomena? Discuss why there is a place for both the legends and science.



The Indian paintbrush is a wildflower. Have students find out what wildflowers grow in their local area or state. What characteristics do wildflowers have that might be different from many garden flowers (they don't require much attention, they can grow under most conditions, they come up every year, they grow in wild places, etc.)? Invite a horticulturalist or nursery person into the classroom to talk about wildflowers.



Plant some wildflower seeds in containers in the classroom.



Have students do earth paintings. They can make their own earth paint from soil or sand. Have them gather some samples of soil in a yogurt cup or margarine tub. (In most places, soil is usually slightly different colors, so they might want to gather more than one container.) Have the students crumble the soil into a powdery consistency, removing small stones and anything else. Then make a mixture of two parts soil, two parts water, and one part white glue, and stir it well. Have the students sketch a scene on a piece of tagboard and then paint their drawings with their earth paint. When the paintings are dry, the soil will be affixed to the paper.



Have the class research the history of Native Americans in their local area or state. What stories are associated with these nations? Invite a Native American storyteller into the classroom to tell stories and talk about the traditions of her/his people. (A local Native American Center or Arts and Humanities Council might recommend a speaker.)

It is a Native American belief that people get so much from the earth that we should never take more than we need and always give back when we can. Draw two flowers on the board. In the center of one, write, "What flowers give to us." On petals radiating from the center, have students brainstorm the benefits of having flowers on the earth. In the center of the other flower, write, "What we can give back." On the petals of those flowers, record the students' ideas about what we can give back not only to flowers, but to all living things.



Locate resources, both print and internet, that show pictures of Native American art from different cultures. This art might include jewelry, pottery, clothing, masks, totem poles, carvings, blankets and rugs, etc. Have students study the designs, symbols, and colors, comparing and contrasting the differences. Locate the nations represented by these works of art on a map of the United States (or perhaps North America). Discuss how where the artists live might influence their designs. Do any of the designs, symbols, or colors relate to the legends the students have read or heard about these nations?



Look at photographs of sunsets and sunrises and discuss the blending of the colors. Have students paint watercolor sunrises or sunsets.

SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKLIST:

THE EARTH UNDER SKY BEAR'S FEET
by Joseph Bruchac, illus. by Thomas Locker (Philomel)

THE FIRST STRAWBERRIES
by Joseph Bruchac, illus. by Anna Vojtech (Dial)

THE LEGEND OF THE BLUEBONNET
by Tomie dePaola (Putnam)

HER SEVEN BROTHERS
by Paul Goble (Bradbury)

FIRE RACE

by Jonathan London, illus. by Sylvia Long (Chronicle Books)

DID YOU HEAR WIND SING YOUR NAME?

by Sandra De Coteau Orie, illus. by Christopher Canyon (Walker)

HOW THE STARS FELL INTO THE SKY

by Jerrie Oughton, illus. by Lisa Desimini (Houghton Mifflin)

DRAGONFLY'S TALE

by Kristina Rodanas (Clarion)

HOW TURTLE'S BACK WAS CRACKED

retold by Gayle Ross, illus. by Murv Jacob (Dial)

"FIRST AMERICANS" SERIES

by Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve, illus. by Ronald Himler (Holiday House)

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