

Native American Storytelling and Games

Environmental Education Lesson
EDWARDS CAMP AND CONFERENCE CENTER

SUMMARY

Students will be able to gain insight into the history and culture of Native Americans by discussing and developing Native American stories and storytelling techniques and by playing some games traditionally played by Native Americans.

USAGE

Grade levels: K-12th grades. Year round. The storytelling and pictograph portion of the class can be held indoors or outdoors. Some of the games can even be played indoors if necessary, although most would work better outside.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson students should be able to...

- Be able to explain at least 2 reasons why Native Americans created and told stories.
- Understand what *pictographs* are and read or write a sentence or paragraph using them.
- Describe and participate in at least 2 different games played by Native Americans.
- Have a better understanding and appreciation of the Native American culture.

In addition students could...

- Use their imagination and creativity to come up with a story of their own.
- Explain how the games played in this lesson differ from most games played today.

MATERIALS

- Copies of Native American Stories –“Of Science and Indian Myths”, “How the Fawn got it’s Spots”, and “How Butterflies Came To Be.”
- Pictograph sheets, paper and pencils
- Game equipment (see each specific game description)—Camp Edwards supplies all needed equipment for these games.

INTRODUCTION (Background information)

Native Americans have always had a deep respect for animals and nature and have long included them as the main “characters” in stories and legends passed down for generations. These stories served as entertainment for tribes, usually including explanations for natural phenomena. They often had morals, and also taught young tribe members about animals and nature and fostered a respect for the natural world.

Some Native American tribes used *pictographs* (ancient drawings or paintings) as a form of written communication and also a form of art. They were often painted on tepees on clothing, and cave walls. They allowed tribes to share and pass on stories and to record historical events.

Historically, games were an important part of Native American culture. Some games were restricted to men, some to women, and some were open to all, including young and old. There were games of chance and games of skill. They were not always just for amusement, but also to learn and to gain or improve many skills and to hone the senses. Winners of games were highly respected in the tribe. Native Americans are thought to have invented a lot of team games or sports, including lacrosse. These games often taught cooperation and encouraged social interaction within tribes and with other tribes. One early explorer who came to North America described seeing a game of lacrosse in which hundreds of players took part.

WARM-UP ACTIVITIES

Ask the students some ways in which they think Native Americans used their “free time” or what they might have done for entertainment. Discuss their ideas and briefly introduce some background information on Native American stories and games, leading into the activities in this lesson.

ACTIVITIES

Stories and Legends

Share 1 or 2 stories (examples are attached) with the students, and discuss them. Ask the students why they think these stories or legends were told? Did they learn anything from the story?

If time permits, students can also be challenged to use their creativity to come up with a story of their own, following in the Native American tradition of explaining something in nature (why the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, how a raccoon got its mask, etc). After they create their stories, a few may be shared with the group.

Pictographs

Briefly introduce the term *pictograph* to the students, and pass out the pictograph handouts to the group. Discuss how and why many Native American tribes used pictographs. Have the students divide into groups of two and give them paper and a pencil. Have them create a sentence or paragraph of their own using pictographs. Then have the pairs exchange what they created and try to read what the other group “wrote”.
EXAMPLE:

Answer to pictograph example: To eat deer wise man trail deer into forest.

Ask the students how they would feel if they had to communicate through pictures instead of words?

Games

Discuss briefly why games were an important part of Native American culture. Try a few games with the students, depending on time.

The games listed here are games of chance, (gambling games), which were sometimes played for favors instead of money or possessions, and games of skill. Materials are listed for each game and all materials are supplied by Camp Edwards.

Hull Gull Handful How Many

Materials: 5 popcorn kernels or beans per person. Give each player 5 popcorn kernels or beans. Let group mingle. One person puts any number of kernels in their hand (from 0-5), holds out their hand with kernels hidden in it, and asks another "Hull Gull handful how many?" That person must then try to guess how many kernels he/she is holding in their hand. If they guess correctly, the guesser gets that amount of kernels. If the guess is incorrect, the guesser must give the person holding the kernels the difference between his guess and the actual amount. For example, If Jane holds 3 kernels and Bob guesses 5, Bob must give Jane 2 kernels. Then they continue the game with others in the group. If someone loses all their kernels, they may still play to win back kernels by making someone guess how many they have in their hand. The idea is to get the most kernels or beans.

-Background: Even though this was a game of chance, it was believed that the winners had done something good to make the gods or spirits glad and that was why they had won.

Stick Game

Materials: four small sticks and a small stone for each group of partners. Partners sit about 6-8 ft apart. They each lay two sticks on the ground in front of them. They take turns tossing a stone- underhand tosses only!- at the other person's stick. If one person hits the other's stick with the stone before it bounces on the ground, s/he gets to keep the stick and adds it to his/her two sticks. The game is played until all the sticks are in one person's possession.

-Background: This game, played by the Iroquois tribe, tested the throwing accuracy of tribe members.

Rock Game

Materials: 15 rocks for each group of partners. The rocks are set up in rows: **OOOOO**
one in the first, two in the second, three in the third, etc. Two players take **OOOO**
turns removing rocks. They may remove as many rocks at a time as they wish, **OOO**
as long as they take all the rocks from the same row on that turn. Rocks cannot **OO**
be taken from more than one row each turn. **O**

The person who is left with the last rock loses.

-Background: A played by the Iroquois and many Eastern tribes that tested cleverness and skills in planning.

Know Your Stone Game

Materials: one stone and one blindfold per participant. Each player picks or is given one stone, and given a minute to look at it and feel it. Tell them to try to feel the details of their stone. All the stones should then be collected. Next, the players get in a circle and are blindfolded. The stones should then be passed in one direction, around the circle, so everybody gets to touch every stone. If a stone comes to them that they believe is theirs, they should keep it. All other stones should be passed on in the correct direction to the next person. If everyone remembers their stone, there will not be any leftover at the end. To make it more challenging, players can be blindfolded before they get their stones for the first time, so they never actually see them.

-Background: This game was used to improve the senses, and teach attention to details.

Stalking Game

Materials: one to four blindfolds, depending on size of group- This game is best played in groups of 5-7. Players sit in a large circle on the ground facing the center. A blindfold is then put on one person in the circle. The blindfolded person must remain seated at all times, with legs crossed. Another person (the stalker) in the circle must then attempt to approach the blindfolded person and gently touch him/her before he/she touches the stalker. Whoever touches the other first wins that round. The stalker should go slowly and quietly as possible, so the blindfolded person cannot tell which direction the stalker is coming from. The blindfolded person cannot just wave their hands around in front of them. They need to be listening for where the stalker is coming from. Observers in the circle must be as quiet as possible and not do anything to distract the players. Players take turns being blindfolded and being the stalker.

Variation: Can also be played by putting a few sticks in front of the blindfolded person, and having the stalker approach and take one stick without being touched.

-Background: This game was used to help improve awareness and use of the senses, and also to improve stalking and hunting skills.

Flinch

Materials: one leather pouch or bean bag. Players stand in a circle with arms out and crossed so that fingertips touch opposite elbows. One person (the thrower---usually the instructor) starts in the middle of the circle. They throw or pretend to throw the pouch to someone in the circle. If it is thrown, the player it is thrown to must catch it. If they drop it, they are out and must sit down. If it is faked, the player may not move at all! If they do, they are out and must sit down. Stress the need for honesty in this game. The game is played until there is one person left. This person is considered the bravest and if time allows, can be the thrower in the next round.

-Background: This game was played at gatherings to show bravery and skill. This game requires a lot of honesty. Native Americans never argued about whether or not they were out. In fact, many tribes didn't even have a word that meant dishonest or "to lie".

Fox and Rabbit

Materials: two sticks – one big and one smaller. Have an even number of players. Have the players sit in a circle. Count off by twos. All the "ones" are rabbits and all the "twos" are foxes. The foxes pass the bigger stick around the circle. Only the foxes can touch the fox stick! The rabbits pass the small stick around the circle. Only the rabbits can touch the rabbit stick! The idea is for the fox to try to catch the rabbit (the fox stick needs to touch the rabbit stick). The rabbits try to keep their stick away from the fox stick. The sticks can be passed in any direction at any time, but may not be thrown across the circle. (The sticks have to be passed to the fox or rabbit closest to either side of them). No one should hold a stick more than a few seconds. Play until the rabbit is caught. If time allows, switch and let the rabbits be foxes. Stress safety - Sticks need to be passed around carefully.

-Background: This was a game that tested and improved strategy and teamwork skills.

Hot Rocks

Materials: two sticks per team and at least one stone per player / Open flat area. Divide class into groups of 4-5 students. Each team stands in a line for a relay race. At one end

of the field, place the stones into a pile for each team. Make sure there is exactly the same number of stones in each pile. Give the first person in each line two sticks. One person at a time goes from each team and picks up a stone from their pile using only the two sticks. The stones cannot touch any part of their bodies, including the hands! They then have to carry the stone back to their team and give the sticks to the next person in line so they can go. The first team to get all their stones to the finish line wins.

-Background: Many of the tribes in the Southwest used this game to develop skills for cooking. They often used hot rocks from their fire pit to cook over, since many of the pots they made were flammable, and could not be placed on a fire.

Optional Activities

The storytelling, pictographs, and several of the games can be played inside if there is inclement weather.

WRAP-UP:

Ask the students to compare present day leisure activities to traditional Native American leisure activities. What are the differences? Similarities? Which do they prefer and why?

PRE-ACTIVITIES:

-Research Native Americans and their relationship to and attitudes about nature and animals.

POST ACTIVITIES:

-Have students create a story using Native American storytelling traditions or using pictographs if they did not get a chance to do this during the class at Camp Edwards.
-Have students research some history about Native American art, and let them create artwork inspired by Native Americans, such as dreamcatchers, sand paintings, rainsticks, pottery, baskets, etc.

RESOURCES:

Native American Games and Stories. Bruchac, James and Bruchac; Joseph Fulcrum Publishing, 2000.

Keepers of the Animals Bruchac, Joseph and Caduto, Michael; Fulcrum Publishing, 1991

www.native-languages.org/kids

www.kiddyhouse.com/Thanksgiving/Native.html

Revised 1/2006 m. christensen

