Part 1

THE SACRED EARTH AND THE POWER OF STORYTELLING

“Let us tell the old stories, Let us sing the sacred songs.”

—N. Scott Momaday, “Carriers of the Dream Wheel”
Native American Mythology

CENTURIES BEFORE THE FIRST Europeans arrived on the shores of North America, Native Americans had established hundreds of thriving nations, each with a unique culture and heritage. Each nation had its own tradition of oral literature—stories that were passed down from one generation to the next as they were told and retold in the privacy of households and in tribal ceremonies. These stories embodied the tribe’s past and told of its close relationship with the natural world. The result is a literature that is timeless, a literature created by no one author but by the people as a whole.

Creation Myths

An important part of the oral tradition of each culture was its myths. A myth is an anonymous, traditional story that relies on the supernatural to explain a natural phenomenon, an aspect of human behavior, or a mystery of the universe. Myths try to explain why the world is the way it is. They provide imaginative ways to help people feel at home in the world and make sense of it. Creation myths tell how the world and human beings came to exist. Some myths, called origin myths, explain how natural phenomena, such as the stars, moon, and mountains, came to be or why a society has certain beliefs and customs. Often, elements of both creation myths and origin myths appear in one story, as in this myth of the Taos Pueblo people:

“When earth was still young and giants still roamed the land, a great sickness came upon them. All of them died except for one small boy. One day while he was playing, a snake bit him. The boy cried and cried. The blood came out, and finally he died. With his tears our lakes became. With his blood the red clay became. With his body our mountains became, and that was how earth became.”

“You know, everything had to begin, and this is how it was: the Kiowas came one by one into this world through a hollow log.”

—N. Scott Momaday from The Way to Rainy Mountain

Total Pole at Saxman Totem Park, Ketchikan. Tlingit. Wood sculpture. Ketchikan, Alaska, USA.
Archetypes
The myths told by peoples around the world share common elements known as archetypes. An archetype (ār’ ke təp’) is a symbol, story pattern, or character type that is found in the literature of many cultures. An example of an archetype is children with opposite qualities who are born of the same parent. In Iroquois myth, Sky Woman gives birth to twins, one good and one evil. This event explains the eternal struggle between light and dark and between order and chaos.

Tricksters
Another archetype found in Native American mythology is the trickster. This character type, frequently an animal—such as a coyote, a raven, or a mink—that speaks and displays other human traits, has two sides to its personality. Tricksters are rebels who defy authority and frequently cause trouble, but they are also clever and creative figures who can unexpectedly reveal wisdom. For example, in one Native American myth, the coyote brought death into the world when he realized that the earth would become too crowded if people were to live forever. In a Navajo myth, the Holy People were gathered to place the stars in the sky. This process was taking so long that Coyote grew impatient, snatched the bag of stars, and hurled it into the heavens, forming the Milky Way. A Kiowa myth explains how a trickster stole the sun from those who lived on the other side of the earth so that all people could share day and night equally.

The Function of Myths
Native American myths told by various tribes have several things in common. Many emphasize a strong spiritual bond between the Creator, humanity, and the entire natural world. They emphasize that it is the duty of human beings to maintain a balance within the natural world.

In many Native American cultures, each family group, or clan, believed it descended from a particular animal or other natural object, called the totem. Members of the bear clan, for example, honored the bear as their clan ancestor. The bear in turn served as the clan’s guardian spirit, helping and protecting its members. The bear clan was responsible for preserving the myths of the bear.

Myths and rituals continue to play a central role in traditional Native American cultures. They are used to give people a sense of order and identity, to heal the sick, to ensure a plentiful supply of food, to teach moral lessons, and to initiate young people into adulthood and the wisdom of the tribal past.

RESPONDING AND THINKING CRITICALLY

1. In your opinion, what is the most vital role of mythology in a culture?
2. How do Native American myths express a dual view of reality?
3. What are some archetypes that can be found in such forms of popular culture as comic books, movies, and video games?

OBJECTIVES
• Analyze characteristics of myths
• Connect to historical context of literature
How the World Was Made

MEET THE CHEROKEE

Their neighbors, the Creek, called them Cherokee, meaning “people with another language.” They called themselves Aniyunwiya, “the real people.” Hundreds of years ago, the Cherokee were the largest Native American nation in what is now the southeastern United States. Like most other Native American peoples, the Cherokee possessed a vibrant oral culture. Myths helped the Cherokee understand the world around them, live in harmony with nature, and pass on their beliefs and values to their descendants.

In the mid-1500s, the Cherokee used stone tools and hunted bears, elk, and deer. They lived in log cabins with bark roofs, no windows, and a smoke hole in the roof, in towns of about 200 people. At any given time, the Cherokee were in either peace mode or war mode. Because they lived in an alternating state, the Cherokee government was made up of two sets of officials: a white chief, who ruled during peacetime, and a red chief, who ruled during wartime.

Treaty of Augusta In the frenzy of activity surrounding the American Revolution, Cherokee landholdings were drastically reduced. The Cherokee had been friendly trading partners with the British throughout the 1700s but had fallen into debt. In the Treaty of Augusta in 1773, the Cherokee and Creek were forced to cede vast swaths of their tribal lands in Georgia to repay these debts to the British. Hoping to regain their traditional hunting grounds, the Cherokee pledged their support for the British at the beginning of the American Revolution. In the 1770s and 1780s, the Cherokee engaged in a flurry of skirmishes with the American army. They lost each time and were forced to surrender more lands.

Assimilation In the 1800s, the Cherokee learned to adapt by assimilating elements of white culture.

They learned new farming, weaving, and construction methods. In 1821, Sequoyah, a half-Cherokee who had served in the U.S. Army, developed a system of writing the Cherokee language called a syllabary, a set of written characters in which each character represents a syllable. When Sequoyah pitched the syllabary to the tribal council, the chiefs marveled at its prospects and immediately accepted the new technology. Within a few years, almost the entire Cherokee nation was literate. In 1828, the Cherokee used their syllabary to publish The Cherokee Phoenix, the first Native American newspaper. But adopting white cultural practices did nothing to disarm the westward expansion. In 1830, the Cherokee were forcibly removed from their land under the Indian Removal Act. Some 15,000 Cherokee were placed in internment camps. Meanwhile, settlers pillaged and burned Cherokee homes.

Trail of Tears In 1838–1839, the Cherokee were exiled from their ancestral home and forced to march 1,000 miles to present-day Oklahoma, then known as Indian Territory. As many as 4,000 Cherokee died during the grueling 116-day journey. The soldiers refused to slow down for the sick and exhausted. Today, most Cherokee still live in Oklahoma, while several thousand, the descendants of those who escaped the Trail of Tears, still live in North Carolina.
Connecting to the Myth

The natural world was an endless source of mystery for storytellers of the past. "How the World Was Made" is a creation myth, or a story that explains how the world began. Stories have also been written to explain other natural phenomena. As you read, think about the following questions:

- What other events or characteristics in the natural world might be explained through a story?
- In what ways might a story reflect the storyteller’s own view of the world?

Building Background

Between 1887 and 1890, James Mooney, an anthropologist for the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., lived with the Cherokee in North Carolina. He won their trust and was able to collect a number of firsthand accounts of Cherokee rituals and stories, including the myth “How the World Was Made,” which he published in 1900 in Myths of the Cherokee.

Setting Purposes for Reading

Big Idea The Sacred Earth and the Power of Storytelling

As you read “How the World Was Made,” notice what it reveals about the Cherokees’ relationship with nature.

Literary Element Archetype

An archetype is a character type, a descriptive detail, an image, or a story pattern that recurs frequently in the literature from many cultures and evokes strong emotional responses. As you read “How the World Was Made,” look for archetypal elements.


Vocabulary

- vault (vālt) n. an arched structure forming a roof or ceiling; p. 24 The church’s vault arched high over our heads.
- alight (ə līt) v. to descend and come to rest; p. 24 The cat watched the pigeon alight on the roof.
- conjurer (kon’jər ar) n. one who performs magic; sorcerer; p. 25 The conjurer amused the audience with his tricks.

Vocabulary Tip: Synonyms Synonyms are words that have the same or similar meanings. Note that synonyms are always the same part of speech.

Reading Strategy Identifying Sequence

Identifying sequence is finding the logical order of ideas or events. Common forms of sequencing include time order, spatial order, and order of importance. Often, two or more types of sequencing are used in one literary work. In fact, time order, spatial order, and order of importance are all employed in this Cherokee genesis myth.

Reading Tip: Taking Notes Use a chart to record an example of each type of sequencing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Detail</th>
<th>Type of Sequencing</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Men came after the animals and plants&quot;</td>
<td>Order of Importance (also time order)</td>
<td>Animals and plants were created before men so that men would be able to survive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interactive Literary Elements

To review or learn more about the literary elements, go to www.glencoe.com.
The earth is a great island floating in a sea of water, and suspended at each of the four cardinal points by a cord hanging down from the sky vault, which is of solid rock. When the world grows old and worn out, the people will die and the cords will break and let the earth sink down into the ocean, and all will be water again. The Indians are afraid of this.

When all was water, the animals were above in Gålûñ’lâtî (go lûn/g lot’i), beyond the arch; but it was very much crowded, and they were wanting more room. They wondered what was below the water, and at last Dâyuni’sî (dô yun e’ si), “Beaver’s Grandchild,” the little Water-beetle, offered to go and see if it could learn. It darted in every direction over the surface of the water, but could find no firm place to rest. Then it dived to the bottom and came up with some soft mud, which began to grow and spread on every side until it became the island which we call the earth.

It was afterward fastened to the sky with four cords, but no one remembers who did this.

At first the earth was flat and very soft and wet. The animals were anxious to get down, and sent out different birds to see if it was yet dry, but they found no place to alight and came back again to Gålûñ’lâtî. At last it seemed to be time, and they sent out the Buzzard and told him to go and make ready for them. This was the Great Buzzard, the father of all the buzzards we see now. He flew all over the earth, low down near the ground, and it was still soft. When he reached the Cherokee country, he was very tired, and his wings began to flap and strike the ground, and wherever they struck the earth there was a valley, and where they turned up again there was a mountain. When the animals above saw this, they were afraid that the whole world would be mountains, so they called him back, but the Cherokee country remains full of mountains to this day.

When the earth was dry and the animals came down, it was still dark, so they got the sun and
set it in a track to go every day across the island from east to west, just overhead. It was too hot this way, and Tsiska’gili’ (chēs kā’ gi’i’) the Red Crawfish, had his shell scorched a bright red, so that his meat was spoiled; and the Cherokee do not eat it. The conjurers put the sun another hand-breadth² higher in the air, but it was still too hot. They raised it another time, and another, until it was seven handbreadths high and just under the sky arch. Then it was right, and they left it so. This is why the conjurers call the highest place Gûlkwà’gine Dí’galûn’lâtiyûn’ (gul kwô’ gê nâ’ de’ gol un(g) lot ê yun(g’)), “the seventh height,” because it is seven handbreadths above the earth. Every day the sun goes along under this arch, and returns at night on the upper side to the starting place.

There is another world under this, and it is like ours in everything—animals, plants, and people—save that the seasons are different. The streams that come down from the mountains are the trails by which we reach this underworld, and the springs at their heads are the doorways by which we enter it, but to do this one must fast and go to water and have one of the underground people for a guide. We know that the seasons in the underworld are different from ours, because the water in the springs is always warmer in winter and cooler in summer than the outer air.

When the animals and plants were first made—we do not know by whom—they were told to watch and keep awake for seven nights, just as young men now fast and keep awake when they pray to their medicine.³ They tried to do this, and nearly all were awake through the first night, but the next night several dropped off to sleep, and the third night others were asleep, and then others, until, on the seventh night, of all the animals only the owl, the panther, and one or two more were still awake. To these were given the power to see and to go about in the dark, and to make prey of the birds and animals which must sleep at night. Of the trees only the cedar, the pine, the spruce, the holly, and the laurel were awake to the end, and to them it was given to be always green and to be greatest for medicine, but to the others it was said: “Because you have not endured to the end you shall lose your hair every winter.”

Men came after the animals and plants. At first there were only a brother and sister until he struck her with a fish and told her to multiply, and so it was. In seven days a child was born to her, and thereafter every seven days another, and they increased very fast until there was danger that the world could not keep them. Then it was made that a woman should have only one child in a year, and it has been so ever since.

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2. A hand-breadth is a unit of measurement based on the width of a hand. It varies from 2½ to 4 inches.

3. Many Native American cultures believe that each plant, animal, and human has its own natural spirit that gives it power. Medicine, in this instance, refers to this spirit.

**Vocabulary**

**conjuror** (kon’ jar ur) n. one who performs magic; sorcerer.

**Reading Strategy** Identifying Sequence When do the following events take place in relation to those you have already read about?
RESPONDING AND THINKING CRITICALLY

Respond
1. Which events in this myth do you find most memorable and why?

Recall and Interpret
2. (a) What is the little Water-beetle’s role in the creation of Earth? (b) What does this tell you about Cherokee reverence for all creatures?
3. (a) What do the “conjurers” do? (b) Who do you think the conjurers are? Explain.
4. (a) Which animals and plants are able to keep awake for seven nights? (b) What moral lesson might this episode teach?

Analyze and Evaluate
5. (a) What does the narrator say when Cherokee tradition has no answer or explanation for an occurrence? (b) How does the narrator’s phrasing enhance the myth? Explain.
6. For the Cherokee, are humans more important than plants or animals or equal to them? Support your view with examples from the myth.

Connect
7. **Big Idea** The Sacred Earth and the Power of Storytelling (a) Why do the Cherokee people explain natural phenomena, such as mountains, underground springs, nocturnal predators, or evergreen trees, in story terms? (b) What do these explanations suggest about the Cherokee relationship with nature?

LITERARY ANALYSIS

**Literary Element** Archetype
One example of an archetype found in myths and folktales from many cultures is a daunting challenge or test that only heroic characters can overcome.

1. How does this archetype appear in “How the World Was Made”?
2. What examples of this archetype can you recall from other myths and folktales?

Writing About Literature

**Explore Purpose of Myth** Traditional societies preserve and retell their myths for a variety of reasons. For example, myths often express basic religious beliefs and explain social customs. In a paragraph, explain why you think the Cherokee storytellers retold and passed on “How the World Was Made.”

READING AND VOCABULARY

**Reading Strategy** Identifying Sequence
In a myth, such as “How the World Was Made,” events usually occur in chronological, or time order.

1. List the sequence of events in the myth.
2. Which detail is an exception to the time order?

**Vocabulary** Practice

**Practice with Synonyms** Find the synonym for each vocabulary word from the myth listed in the first column.

1. vault
   a. dome  b. universe
2. alight
   a. land  b. arise
3. conjurer
   a. chief  b. magician

Web Activities For eFlashcards, Selection Quick Checks, and other Web activities, go to www.glencoe.com.
A single knoll rises out of the plain in Oklahoma, north and west of the Wichita Range. For my people, the Kiowas, it is an old landmark, and they gave it the name Rainy Mountain. The hardest weather in the world is there. Winter brings blizzards, hot tornadic winds arise in the spring, and in summer the prairie is an anvil’s edge. The grass turns brittle and brown, and it cracks beneath your feet. There are green belts along the rivers and creeks, linear groves of hickory and pecan, willow and witch hazel. At a distance in July or August the steaming foliage seems almost to writhe 1 in fire. Great green and yellow grasshoppers are everywhere in the tall grass, popping up like corn to sting the flesh, and tortoises crawl about on the red earth, going nowhere in the plenty of time.

Loneliness is an aspect of the land. All things in the plain are isolate; 2 there is no confusion of objects in the eye, but one hill or one tree or one man. To look upon that landscape in the early morning, with the sun at your back, is to

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1. *Writhe* means “to twist as in great pain.”
2. *Isolate* means “solitary.”
lose the sense of proportion. Your imagination comes to life, and this, you think, is where Creation was begun.

I returned to Rainy Mountain in July. My grandmother had died in the spring, and I wanted to be at her grave. She had lived to be very old and at last infirm. Her only living daughter was with her when she died, and I was told that in death her face was that of a child.

I like to think of her as a child. When she was born, the Kiowas were living the last great moment of their history. For more than a hundred years they had controlled the open range from the Smoky Hill River to the Red, from the headwaters of the Canadian to the fork of the Arkansas and Cimarron. In alliance with the Comanches, they had ruled the whole of the southern Plains. War was their sacred business, and they were among the finest horsemen the world has ever known. But warfare for the Kiowas was preeminently a matter of disposition rather than of survival, and they never understood the grim, unrelenting advance of the U.S. Cavalry. When at last, divided and ill-provisioned, they were driven onto the Staked Plains in the cold rains of autumn, they fell into panic. In Palo Duro Canyon they abandoned their crucial stores to pillage and had nothing then but their lives. In order to save themselves, they surrendered to the soldiers at Fort Sill and were imprisoned in the old stone corral that now stands as a military museum. My grandmother was spared the humiliation of those high gray walls by eight or ten years, but she must have known from birth the affliction of defeat, the dark brooding of old warriors.

Her name was Aho, and she belonged to the last culture to evolve in North America. Her forebears came down from the high country in western Montana nearly three centuries ago. They were a mountain people, a mysterious tribe of hunters whose language has never been positively classified in any major group. In the late seventeenth century they began a long migration to the south and east. It was a journey toward the dawn, and it led to a golden age. Along the way the Kiowas were befriended by the Crows, who gave them the culture and religion of the Plains. They acquired horses, and their ancient nomadic spirit was suddenly free of the ground. They acquired Tai-me, the sacred Sun Dance doll, from that moment the object and symbol of their worship, and so shared in the divinity of the sun. Not least, they acquired the sense of destiny, therefore courage and pride. When they entered upon the southern Plains they had been transformed. No longer were they slaves to the simple necessity of survival; they were a lordly and dangerous society of fighters and thieves, hunters and priests of the sun. According to their origin myth, they entered the world through a hollow log. From one point of view, their migration was the fruit of an old prophecy, for indeed they emerged from a sunless world.

Although my grandmother lived out her long life in the shadow of Rainy Mountain, the immense landscape of the continental interior lay like memory in her blood. She could tell of the Crows, whom she had never seen, and of the Black Hills, where she had never been. I wanted to see in reality what she had seen more perfectly in the mind’s eye, and traveled fifteen hundred miles to begin my pilgrimage.

Yellowstone, it seemed to me, was the top of the world, a region of deep lakes and dark timber, canyons and waterfalls. But, beautiful as it is, one might have the sense of confinement there. The skyline in all directions is close at hand, the high wall of the woods and deep cleavages of shade. There is a perfect freedom in the mountains, but it belongs to the eagle and the elk, the badger and the bear. The Kiowas reckoned their stature by the distance they could see, and they were bent and blind in the wilderness.

Descending eastward, the highland meadows are a stairway to the plain. In July the inland slope of the Rockies is luxuriant with flax and buckwheat, stonecrop and larkspur. The earth

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3. *Infirm* means “physically weak” or “feeble.”
4. *Preeminently* means “primarily.”
5. *Pillage* means “to loot” or “to plunder.”
6. Tai-me (tí’má), the Sun Dance doll, wears a robe of white feathers.
7. *Luxuriant* means “marked by rich or plentiful growth.”
8. *Flax* is a flowering plant whose fibers are spun to make cloth. *Buckwheat* is a plant whose seeds are used as a cereal grain. *Stonecrop* is a flowering plant found on rocks and walls. *Larkspur* is known for its showy flower stalks.
Informational Text

The Migration Route of the Kiowa

The migration route of the Kiowas unfolds and the limit of the land recedes. Clusters of trees, and animals grazing far in the distance, cause the vision to reach away and wonder to build upon the mind. The sun follows a longer course in the day, and the sky is immense beyond all comparison. The great billowing clouds that sail upon it are shadows that move upon the grain like water, dividing light. Farther down, in the land of the Crows and Blackfeet, the plain is yellow. Sweet clover takes hold of the hills and bends upon itself to cover and seal the soil. There the Kiowas paused on their way; they had come to the place where they must change their lives. The sun is at home on the plains. Precisely there does it have the certain character of a god. When the Kiowas came to the land of the Crows, they could see the dark lees of the hills at dawn across the Bighorn River, the profusion of light on the grain shelves, the oldest deity ranging after the solstices. Not yet would they veer southward to the caldron of the land that lay below; they must wean their blood from the northern winter and hold the mountains a while longer in their view. They bore Tai-me in procession to the east.

A dark mist lay over the Black Hills, and the land was like iron. At the top of a ridge I caught sight of Devil’s Tower upthrust against the gray sky as if in the birth of time the core of the earth had broken through its crust and the motion of the world was begun.

9. Lees are the sides of hills that are away from the wind.

10. Solstices are days when the earth and the sun are in a certain alignment. In the Northern Hemisphere, the summer and winter solstices are the longest and shortest days of the year.

11. Wean their blood means “to become acclimated by removing themselves gradually.”

12. Devil’s Tower, an 865-foot-high column of volcanic rock in Wyoming, was designated as a national monument in 1906.
There are things in nature that engender an awful quiet in the heart of man; Devil’s Tower is one of them. Two centuries ago, because they could not do otherwise, the Kiowas made a legend at the base of the rock. My grandmother said:

_Eight children were there at play, seven sisters and their brother. Suddenly the boy was struck dumb; he trembled and began to run upon his hands and feet. His fingers became claws, and his body was covered with fur. Directly there was a bear where the boy had been. The sisters were terrified; they ran, and the bear after them. They came to the stump of a great tree, and the tree spoke to them. It bade them climb upon it, and as they did so it began to rise into the air. The bear came to kill them, but they were just beyond its reach. It reared against the tree and scored the bark all around with its claws. The seven sisters were borne into the sky, and they became the stars of the Big Dipper._

From that moment, and so long as the legend lives, the Kiowas have kinsmen in the night sky. Whatever they were in the mountains, they could be no more. However tenuous their well-being, however much they had suffered and would suffer again, they had found a way out of the wilderness.

My grandmother had a reverence for the sun, a holy regard that now is all but gone out of mankind. There was a wariness in her, and an ancient awe. She was a Christian in her later years, but she had come a long way about, and she never forgot her birthright. As a child she had been to the Sun Dances; she had taken part in those annual rites, and by them she had learned the restoration of her people in the presence of Tai-me. She was about seven when the last Kiowa Sun Dance was held in 1887 on the Washita River above Rainy Mountain Creek. The buffalo were gone. In order to consummate the ancient sacrifice—to impale the head of a buffalo bull upon the medicine tree—a delegation of old men journeyed into Texas, there to beg and barter for an animal from the Goodnight herd. She was ten when the Kiowas came together for the last time as a living Sun Dance culture. They could find no buffalo; they had to hang an old hide from the sacred tree. Before the dance could begin, a company of soldiers rode out from Fort Sill under orders to disperse the tribe. Forbidden without cause the essential act of their faith, having seen the wild herds slaughtered and left to rot upon the ground, the Kiowas backed away forever from the medicine tree. That was July 20, 1890, at the great bend of the Washita. My grandmother was there. Without bitterness, and for as long as she lived, she bore a vision of deicide.

Now that I can have her only in memory, I see my grandmother in the several postures that were peculiar to her: standing at the wood stove on a winter morning and turning meat in a great iron skillet; sitting at the south window, bent above her beadwork, and afterwards, when her vision failed, looking down for a long time into the fold of her hands; going out upon a cane, very slowly as she did when the weight of age came upon her; praying. I remember her most often at prayer. She made long, rambling prayers out of suffering and hope, having seen many things. I was never sure that I had the right to hear, so exclusive were they of all mere custom and company. The last time I saw her she prayed standing by the side of her bed at night, naked to the waist, the light of a kerosene lamp moving upon her dark skin. Her long, black hair, always drawn and braided in the day, lay upon her shoulders and against her breasts like a shawl. I do not speak Kiowa, and I never understood her prayers, but there was something inherently sad in the sound, some merest hesitation upon the syllables of sorrow. She began in a high and descending pitch, exhausting her breath to silence; then again and again—and always the same intensity of effort, of something that is, and is not, like urgency in the human voice. Transported so in the dancing light among the shadows of her room, she seemed beyond the reach of time.

13. Engender means “to give rise to” or “to produce.”
14. The Big Dipper is part of a larger constellation called Ursa Major, the Great Bear.
15. Consummate means “to bring to completion.”
16. Deicide is the killing of a god.
But that was illusion; I think I knew then that I should not see her again.

Houses are like sentinels in the plain, old keepers of the weather watch. There, in a very little while, wood takes on the appearance of great age. All colors wear soon away in the wind and rain, and then the wood is burned gray and the grain appears and the nails turn red with rust. The windowpanes are black and opaque;\(^{17}\) you imagine there is nothing within, and indeed there are many ghosts, bones given up to the land. They stand here and there against the sky, and you approach them for a longer time than you expect. They belong in the distance; it is their domain.\(^{18}\)

Once there was a lot of sound in my grandmother’s house, a lot of coming and going, feasting and talk. The summers there were full of excitement and reunion. The Kiowas are a summer people; they abide the cold and keep to themselves, but when the season turns and the land becomes warm and vital they cannot hold still; an old love of going returns upon them. The aged visitors who came to my grandmother’s house when I was a child were made of lean and leather, and they bore themselves upright. They wore great black hats and bright ample shirts that shook in the wind. They rubbed fat upon their hair and wound their braids with strips of colored cloth. Some of them painted their faces and carried the scars of old and cherished enmities.\(^{19}\) They were an old council of warlords, come to remind and be reminded of who they were. Their wives and daughters served them well. The women might indulge themselves; gossip was at once the mark and compensation of their servitude. They made loud and elaborate talk among themselves, full of jest and gesture, fright and false alarm. They went abroad\(^{20}\) in fringed and flowered shawls, bright beadwork and German silver.\(^{21}\) They were at home in the kitchen, and they prepared meals that were banquets.

There were frequent prayer meetings, and great nocturnal feasts. When I was a child I played with my cousins outside, where the lamplight fell upon the ground and the singing of the old people rose up around us and carried away into the darkness. There were

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17. *Opaque* means “unable to let light through.”
18. A *domain* is “a territory over which control is exercised.”
20. Here, *abroad* means “away from one’s home.”
21. *German silver* is an alloy that resembles real silver.
Informational Text

gone there, I thought, to live and die, for there, of all places, was its small definition made whole and eternal. A warm wind rose up and purled\(^{22}\) like the longing within me.

The next morning I awoke at dawn and went out on the dirt road to Rainy Mountain. It was already hot, and the grasshoppers began to fill the air. Still, it was early in the morning, and the birds sang out of the shadows. The long yellow grass on the mountain shone in the bright light, and a scissor-tail hied\(^{23}\) above the land. There, where it ought to be, at the end of a long and legendary way, was my grandmother’s grave. Here and there on the dark stones were ancestral names. Looking back once, I saw the mountain and came away.

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22. \textit{Purled} means “rippled with a murmuring sound.”

23. \textit{Hied} means “went quickly.”

**RESPONDING AND THINKING CRITICALLY**

**Respond**

1. How did you react to the description of the end of the Kiowas’ old way of life?

**Recall and Interpret**

2. (a) What is the importance of Rainy Mountain? (b) Why do you think, does Momaday feel that Rainy Mountain is “where Creation was begun”?

3. Summarize what you learned about the Kiowa surrender and the last Sun Dance. Then explain Momaday’s attitude toward these events, supporting your answer with details from the selection.

4. (a) What elements of Kiowa traditional beliefs were part of the grandmother’s life? (b) What do you learn about the Kiowa people from the way that they respond to the end of their traditional lifestyle?

**Analyze and Evaluate**

5. (a) Explain why Momaday considers his grandmother a living embodiment of Kiowa history. (b) Did you find this description convincing? Why or why not?

6. Momaday watches a cricket that he says came to Rainy Mountain to die, “for there, of all places, was its small definition made whole and eternal.” He also describes his grandmother’s grave. Which of these works best for you as a symbol? Explain.

**Connect**

7. Momaday once said, “I don’t see any validity in the separation of man and landscape.” He has also called human alienation from nature “one of the great afflictions of our time.” How are these ideas embodied in the selection? Support your answer.
Connecting to the Reading Selections

Oral cultures use storytelling to pass on ancient traditions. The four literary works compared here—a Huron myth, a West African folktale, and two Native American poems—reflect this tradition of storytelling in different ways.

Huron—Eastern Woodland

**The Sky Tree**...............................................................myth ..................... 35

*From water emerges Turtle Island*

Chinua Achebe and John Iroaganachi

**How the Leopard Got His Claws**...........................myth ..................... 37

*The storyteller—a vital interpreter of history*

Leslie Marmon Silko

**Prayer to the Pacific**......................................................poem ..................... 42

*The origin of rain and the migration of peoples*

Sherman Alexie

**The Summer of Black Widows**...............................poem ..................... 44

*Endurance—an essential quality of stories*

**COMPARING THE** **Big Idea** The Sacred Earth and the Power of Storytelling

Storytellers played a vital role in oral cultures. They both preserved ancient myths and traditions and made them live for new generations.

**COMPARING** Mythic Elements

A **myth** is a traditional story that explains a belief, a custom, or a force of nature. Certain mythic elements, such as creation or journeys, are used by storytellers in many different cultures.

**COMPARING** Cultures

The writers featured here each reflect their times and places, as well as transmit the heritage and belief systems of their cultures.
The Sky Tree

MEET THE HURON

The Huron people believed that Earth was an island resting on the back of the Great Turtle that swam in the primal waters. So their name for themselves, Wendat, in their own language means “islanders.” The name Huron, meaning “boar’s head” or “rough hair,” was given to them by the French explorers with whom they traded furs. In the 1600s, the Huron were members of a confederacy of tribes living northeast of the Great Lakes in what is now southern Canada. Even before the French arrived, the Huron were great traders. In the mid-1600s, their long conflict with the Iroquois nations (see page 47) reached a climax when the Iroquois seized control of the fur trade and forced the Huron to flee their homelands.

LITERATURE PREVIEW

Connecting to the Myth

What would you risk to save the person you love most? As you read “The Sky Tree,” see how Aataentsic, the Earth-mother, responds to this challenge.

Building Background

“The Sky Tree” is an example of a type of creation story known as an earth-diver myth. In this type of myth a being dives into the primal waters to retrieve mud. This mud is spread on the back of the Great Turtle, eventually growing to form an island that becomes Earth.

Setting Purposes for Reading

**Big Idea** The Sacred Earth and the Power of Storytelling

Notice how this myth conveys the Huron belief in the relationship between human beings and the natural world.

**Literary Element** Oral Tradition

Oral tradition is literature that passes by word of mouth from one generation to the next. Consider why the Huron created and preserved “The Sky Tree.”


**Objective** In studying this selection, you will focus on the following:

- relating literature to cultural values
- understanding oral tradition
- using questioning strategies
In the beginning, Earth was covered with water. In Sky Land, there were people living as they do now on Earth. In the middle of that land was the great Sky Tree. All of the food which the people in that Sky Land ate came from the great tree. The old chief of that land lived with his wife, whose name was Aataentsic, meaning “Ancient Woman,” in their longhouse near the great tree. It came to be that the old chief became sick and nothing could cure him. He grew weaker and weaker until it seemed he would die. Then a dream came to him and he called Aataentsic to him.

“I have dreamed,” he said, “and in my dream I saw how I can be healed. I must be given the fruit which grows at the very top of Sky Tree. You must cut it down and bring that fruit to me.”

Aataentsic took her husband’s stone ax and went to the great tree. As soon as she struck it, it split in half and toppled over. As it fell a hole opened in Sky Land and the tree fell through the hole. Aataentsic returned to the place where the old chief waited.

“My husband,” she said, “when I cut the tree it split in half and then fell through a great hole. Without the tree, there can be no life. I must follow it.”

Then, leaving her husband she went back to the hole in Sky Land and threw herself after the great tree.

As Aataentsic fell, Turtle looked up and saw her. Immediately Turtle called together all the water animals and told them what she had seen.

“What should be done?” Turtle said.

Beaver answered her. “You are the one who saw this happen. Tell us what to do.”

“All of you must dive down,” Turtle said. “Bring up soil from the bottom, and place it on my back.”

Immediately all of the water animals began to dive down and bring up soil. Beaver, Mink, Muskrat, and Otter each brought up pawfuls of wet soil and placed the soil on the Turtle’s back until they had made an island of great size.

When they were through, Aataentsic settled down gently on the new Earth and the pieces of the great tree fell beside her and took root.

1. Aataentsic was the Earth-mother in Huron mythology. The Huron believed themselves to be the children of Aataentsic.

2. A longhouse was a bark-covered Native American communal dwelling that could have space for multiple families as well as rooms for tribal ceremonies.

Reading Strategy Questioning Why is the old chief’s dream important to the story?
RESPONDING AND THINKING CRITICALLY

Respond
1. Would you describe Aataentsic’s actions as heroic? Why or why not?

Recall and Interpret
2. (a) What is the Sky Tree? (b) Why is it important to the people in Sky Land?
3. (a) Why does Aataentsic cut down the Sky Tree? (b) What does this action reveal about her relationship with her husband?
4. (a) Which animal observes Aataentsic’s fall? (b) What role does this animal assume?

Analyze and Evaluate
5. (a) What is the function of the old chief’s dream in “The Sky Tree”? (b) What does this myth suggest about the importance that Native Americans attribute to knowledge gained from dreams?
6. (a) What motivates Aataentsic to follow the Sky Tree into the hole? (b) How do you view her actions?

Connect
7. Big Idea The Sacred Earth and the Power of Storytelling What does the role of the water animals in the creation of Earth suggest about Native American attitudes toward other living creatures?

LITERARY ANALYSIS

Literary Element Oral Tradition
Oral tradition is a way of recording the past, glorifying leaders, and teaching moral values.
1. Why do you think the Huron preserved and perpetuated a myth such as “The Sky Tree”?
2. How might this myth have been used by the Huron to teach a moral lesson?

Reading Strategy Questioning
Review the questions that you wrote in your double-entry journal and answer them now.

Academic Vocabulary

function (fungk' shan) n. the action or purpose for which something is intended
tradition (tra dish' an) n. an inherited pattern of belief or custom

Practice and Apply
1. What is the function of the Great Turtle in Huron mythology?
2. What tradition do the Huron preserve about the Earth-mother Aataentsic?

WEB ACTIVITIES

For eFlashcards, Selection Quick Checks, and other Web activities, go to www.glencoe.com.
If you look at the world in terms of storytelling, you have, first of all, the man who agitates, the man who drums up the people—I call him the drummer. Then you have the warrior, who goes forward and fights. But you also have the storyteller who recounts the event, and this is the one who survives, who outlives all the others. It is the storyteller who makes us what we are, who creates history. The storyteller creates the memory that the survivors must have; otherwise, their surviving would have no meaning.

—Chinua Achebe

In the beginning . . . all the animals in the forest lived as friends. Their king was the leopard. He was strong, but gentle and wise. He ruled the animals well, and they all liked him.

At that time the animals did not fight one another. Most of them had no sharp teeth or claws. They did not need them. Even King Leopard had only small teeth. He had no claws at all.

Only the dog had big, sharp teeth. The other animals said he was ugly, and they laughed at him.

Achebe’s myth is an adaptation of a children’s story by teacher and writer John Iroaganachi. Achebe’s version is full of dark undertones that suggest an allegorical link to the British colonial era and the Nigerian Civil War, which lasted from 1967 to 1970. Various military regimes, representing hostile ethnic groups, have periodically seized power in Nigeria since it declared its independence from Britain in 1960. Today, continued political corruption and ethnic struggles have stalled the progress of Nigeria toward unity, peace, and stability.

Author Search For more about Chinua Achebe and John Iroaganachi, go to www.glencoe.com.
“It is foolish to carry sharp things in the mouth,” said the tortoise.

“I think so, too,” said the goat.

The monkey jumped in and began to tease the dog.

“Don’t worry, my dear friend,” said the monkey. “You need your teeth to clear your farm.”

The animals laughed at the monkey’s joke.

When the farming season came round, King Leopard led the animals to their farmland. They all worked hard to prepare their plots. At the end of the day they returned home tired. They sat on log benches in the village square. As they rested they told stories and drank palm wine.

But soon it would be the rainy season, and the animals would have no shelter from the rain.

The deer took this problem to King Leopard. They talked about it for a long time. King Leopard decided to call the animals together to discuss it.

One bright morning . . . King Leopard beat his royal drum. When the animals heard the drum, they gathered at the village square. The tortoise was there. The goat was there, too. The sheep, the grass-cutter, the monkey, the hedgehog, the baboon, the dog and many others were there.

King Leopard greeted them and said, “I have called you together to plan how we can make ourselves a common shelter.”

“This is a good idea,” said the giraffe.

“Yes, a very good idea,” said many other animals.

“But why do we need a common house?” said the dog. He had never liked King Leopard.

“The dog has asked a good question,” said the duck. “Why do we need a common shelter?”

“We do need somewhere to rest when we return from our farms,” replied King Leopard.

“And besides,” said the goat, “we need a shelter from the rain.”

“I don’t mind being wet,” said the duck. “In fact, I like it. I know that the goat does not like water on his body. Let him go and build a shelter.”

“We need a shelter,” said the monkey, jumping up and down in excitement.

Perhaps we need one, perhaps we don’t,” said the lazy baboon sitting on the low fence of the square.

The dog spoke again. “We are wasting our time. Those who need a shelter should build it. I live in a cave, and it is enough for me.” Then he walked away. The duck followed him out.

“Does anyone else want to leave?” asked King Leopard. No one answered or made a move to go.

“Very well,” said King Leopard. “Let the rest of us build the village hall.”

The animals soon scattered about to find building materials. The tortoise copied the pattern on his back and made the plan of the roof. The giant rat and mouse dug the foundations. Some animals brought sticks, some ropes, others made roof-mats.

As they built the house, they sang many happy songs. They also told many jokes. Although they worked very hard, everyone was merry.

After many weeks they finished the building.

It was a fine building. The animals were pleased with it. They agreed to open it with a very special meeting.

On the opening day the animals, their wives and children gathered in the hall. King Leopard then made a short speech. He said: “This hall is yours to enjoy. You worked very hard together to build it. I am proud of you.”

The animals clapped their hands and gave three cheers to their king.

From that day they rested in their new hall whenever they returned from their farm.

But the dog and the duck kept away from the hall.

One morning the animals went to their farms as usual. King Leopard went to visit a chief in another village.

At first the sun was shining. Then strong winds began to blow. Dark clouds hid the sun. The first rain was coming. The songbirds stopped their singing. The humming insects became quiet. Lightning flashed across the dark clouds. Claps of thunder sounded. The rain poured and poured.

The animals in their farms saw the rain coming and began to hurry to the village hall.

The dog also saw the rain coming and returned to his cave. But it was a very, very heavy rain. Water began to enter the cave. Soon it was flooded.

The dog ran from one end of his cave to the other. But the water followed him everywhere. At last he ran out of the cave altogether and made straight for the hall of the animals.

1. Palm wine is created from the sap of a palm tree.
2. The grass-cutter is a type of rodent.
3. A hedgehog is a small, hairy mammal; some varieties have quills.
The deer was already there. He was surprised to see the dog enter the hall.

“What do you want here?” said the deer to the dog.

“It is none of your business,” replied the dog.

“It is my business,” said the deer. “Please go out, this hall is for those who built it.”

Then the dog attacked the deer and bit him with his big, sharp teeth. The deer cried with pain. The dog seized him by the neck and threw him out into the rain.

The other animals came in one after the other. The dog barked and threw each of them out. They stood together shivering and crying in the rain. The dog kept barking and showing his teeth.

Then the deer cried out:

O Leopard our noble king,
Where are you?
Spotted king of the forest,
Where are you?
Even if you are far away
Come, hurry home:

The worst has happened to us
The worst has happened to us . . .
The house the animals built
The cruel dog keeps us from it,
The common shelter we built
The cruel dog keeps us from it,
The worst has happened to us
The worst has happened to us . . .

The cry of the deer rang out loud and clear. It was carried by the wind. King Leopard heard it on his way back from his journey and began to run toward the village hall.

As he got near, he saw the animals, wet and sheltering under a tree. They were all crying. As he got nearer still, he could see the dog walking up and down inside the hall.

King Leopard was very angry. “Come out of the hall at once,” he said to the dog. The dog barked and rushed at him. They began to fight. The dog bit the leopard and tore his skin with his claws. King Leopard was covered with blood. The dog went back to the hall. He stood at the door barking and barking. “Who is next? Who! Who!” he barked.

King Leopard turned to the animals and said: “Let us go in together and drive out the enemy. He is strong, but he is alone. We are many. Together we can drive him out of our house.”

But the goat said: “We cannot face him. Look at his strong teeth! He will only tear us to pieces!”

“The goat is right,” said the animals. “He is too strong for us.”

The tortoise stood up and said: “I am sure we are all sorry about what has happened to the leopard. But he was foolish to talk to the dog the way he did. It is foolish to annoy such a powerful person as the dog. Let us make peace with him. I don’t know what you others think. But I think he should have been our king all along. He is strong; he is handsome. Let us go on our knees and salute him.”

“Hear! Hear!” said all the animals. “Hail the dog!”

Tears began to roll down the face of the leopard. His heart was heavy. He loved the animals greatly. But they had turned their backs on him. Now he knew they were cowards. So he turned his back on them and went away. Because of his many wounds


**Viewing the Art:** Does this sculpture of a baboon resemble any of the animals in the story? Explain.
he was weak and tired. So he lay down after a while to rest under a tree, far from the village.

The animals saw him go. But they did not care. They were too busy praising their new king, the dog. The tortoise carved a new staff for him. The toad made a new song in his praise:

The dog is great
The dog is good
The dog gives us our daily food.
We love his head, we love his jaws
We love his feet and all his claws.

The dog looked round the circle of animals and asked, “Where is the leopard?”

“We think he has gone away, O King,” said the goat.

“Why? He has no right to go away,” said the dog. “Nobody has a right to leave our village and its beautiful hall. We must all stay together.”

“Indeed,” shouted the animals. “We must stay together! The leopard must return to the village! Our wise king has spoken! It is good to have a wise king!”

The dog then called out the names of six strong animals and said to them: “Go at once and bring back the leopard. If he should refuse to follow you, you must drag him along. If we let him go, others may soon follow his wicked example until there is no one left in our village.

That would be a very bad thing indeed. It is my duty as your king to make sure that we all live together. The leopard is a wicked animal. That is why he wants to go away and live by himself. It is our duty to stop him. Nobody has a right to go away from our village and our beautiful hall.”

“Nobody has a right to go away from the village,” sang all the animals as the six messengers went to look for the leopard.

They found him resting under the tree beyond the village. Although he was wounded and weak he still looked like a king. So the six messengers stood at a little distance and spoke to him.

“Our new king, the dog, has ordered you to return to the village,” they said.

“He says that no one has a right to leave the village,” said the pig.

“Yes, no one has a right to leave our village and its beautiful hall,” said the others.

The leopard looked at them with contempt. Then he got up slowly. The six animals fell back. But the leopard did not go toward them. He turned his back on them and began to go away—slowly and painfully. One of the animals picked up a stone and threw it at him. Then all the others immediately picked up stones and began to throw. As they threw they chanted: “No one has a right to leave our village! No one has a right to leave our village!”

Although some of the stones hit the leopard and hurt him, he did not turn round even once. He continued walking until he no longer heard the noise of the animals.

The leopard traveled seven days and seven nights. Then he came to the house of the blacksmith. The old man was sitting at his forge. The leopard said to him: “I want the strongest teeth you can make from iron. And I want the most deadly claws you can make from bronze.”

The blacksmith said: “Why do you need such terrible things?” The leopard told his story. Then the blacksmith said: “I do not blame you.”

The blacksmith worked a whole day on the teeth, and another full day on the claws. The leopard was pleased with them. He put them on
and thanked the blacksmith. Then he left and went to the house of Thunder.

The leopard knocked at the door and Thunder roared across the sky.

“I want some of your sound in my voice,” said the leopard. “Even a little bit.”

“Why do you want my sound in your voice?” asked Thunder. “And why have you got those terrible teeth and claws?”

The leopard told his story. “I do not blame you,” said Thunder. He gave the sound to the leopard. “Thank you for the gift,” said the leopard. And he began his journey home.

The leopard journeyed for seven days and seven nights and returned to the village of the animals. There he found the animals dancing in a circle round the dog. He stood for a while watching them with contempt and great anger. They were too busy to notice his presence. He made a deep, terrifying roar. At the same time he sprang into the center of the circle. The animals stopped their song. The dog dropped his staff. The leopard seized him and bit and clawed him without mercy. Then he threw him out of the circle.

All the animals trembled.

But they were too afraid to run. The leopard turned to them and said:

“You miserable worms. You shameless cowards. I was a kind and gentle king, but you turned against me. From today I shall rule the forest with terror. The life of our village is ended.”

“What about our hall?” asked the tortoise with a trembling voice.

“Let everyone take from the hall what he put into it,” said the leopard.

The animals began to weep as they had wept long ago in the rain. “Please forgive us, O Leopard,” they cried.

“Let everyone take from the hall what he put into it,” repeated the leopard. “And hurry up!” he thundered.

So the animals pulled their hall apart. Some carried away the wood, and some took the roof-mats. Others took away doors and windows. The toad brought his talking drum and began to beat it to the leopard and to sing:

Alive or dead the leopard is king.
Beware my friend, don’t twist his tail.

But the leopard roared like thunder and the toad dropped his drum and the animals scattered in the forest.

The dog had already run a long way when the leopard roared. Now he ran faster and faster. His body was covered with blood, and he was very, very weak. He wanted to stop and rest a little. But the fear of the leopard was greater than his weakness. So he staggered and fell and got up and staggered on and on and on...

After many days the dog came to the house of the hunter.

“Please protect me from the leopard,” he cried.

“What will you do for me in return?” asked the hunter.

“I will be your slave,” said the dog. “Any day you are hungry for meat I shall show you the way to the forest. There we can hunt together and kill my fellow animals.”

“All right, come in,” said the hunter.

Today the animals are no longer friends, but enemies. The strong among them attack and kill the weak. The leopard, full of anger, eats up anyone he can lay his hands on. The hunter, led by the dog, goes to the forest from time to time and shoots any animals he can find. Perhaps the animals will make peace among themselves someday and live together again. Then they can keep away the hunter who is their common enemy.

Quickwrite

The animal leaders in Achebe’s myth use violence to seize and wield power. What lessons do you think Achebe suggests through his depiction of the animals and their encounters with the hunter? Write a paragraph explaining your views.
Before You Read

Leslie Marmon Silko grew up hearing traditional Native American stories and myths at the Laguna Pueblo Reservation near Albuquerque, New Mexico. Silko’s writing emphasizes the vital function of the audience in the oral tradition as well as the importance of nature and ritual in Pueblo culture. Silko writes, “Storytelling always includes the audience and the listeners, and, in fact, a great deal of the story is believed to be inside the listener, and the storyteller’s role is to draw the story out of the listeners.”

Silko’s poem uses myth to draw a comparison between the west-to-east movement of rain clouds and the migration of early peoples to America. Historians have theorized that tens of thousands of years ago these migrants arrived in America from Asia. They most likely traveled across a land bridge where the Bering Strait now separates Asia and North America.

Author Search For more about Leslie Marmon Silko, go to www.glencoe.com.
I traveled to the ocean
    distant
    from my southwest land of sandrock
    to the moving blue water
    Big as the myth of origin.

Pale
    pale water in the yellow-white light of
    sun floating west
    to China
    where ocean herself was born.

Clouds that blow across the sand are wet.

Squat in the wet sand and speak to the Ocean:
    I return to you turquoise the red coral you sent us,
    sister spirit of Earth.

Four round stones in my pocket I carry back the ocean
to suck and to taste.

Thirty thousand years ago
    Indians came riding across the ocean
carried by giant sea turtles.

Waves were high that day
great sea turtles waded slowly out
    from the gray sundown sea.

Grandfather Turtle rolled in the sand four times
    and disappeared
    swimming into the sun.

And so from that time
    immemorial,¹
    as the old people say,
    rain clouds drift from the west
gift from the ocean.

Green leaves in the wind
    Wet earth on my feet
    swallowing raindrops
    clear from China.

¹. *Immemorial* means “extending back beyond memory or record.”

**Discussion Starter**

How does the speaker’s explanation of the origin of rain in “Prayer to the Pacific” illustrate the Native American attitude toward nature? Discuss this question in your group. Use specific details from the poem to support your opinions. Then share your conclusions with the class.
Poetry slam champion Sherman Alexie has attracted attention for the variety of his literary skills. Born in 1966, Alexie grew up on the Spokane Indian Reservation in Washington State. He is a three-time winner of the World Heavyweight Championship Poetry Bout and wrote the screenplay for Smoke Signals, the first movie entirely produced, directed, and acted by Native Americans. Alexie adapted the screenplay from a short story from his collection The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven. The film won both the Audience Award and the Filmmakers Trophy at the 1998 Sundance Film Festival. He compared his role in making the film to that of African American filmmaker Spike Lee. “Spike didn’t necessarily get films made as much as he inspired filmmakers to believe in themselves.

That’s what’s going to happen here. These 13-year-old Indian kids who’ve been going crazy with their camcorders will finally see the possibilities.”

Alexie has been recognized for his ability to infuse his writing about the difficulties of life on Indian reservations with humorous insights. Of his writing, he once said, “I write about the kind of Indian I am: kind of mixed up, kind of odd, not traditional. I’m a rez kid who’s gone urban.” At the same time, Alexie’s work draws upon many traditional Native American themes, such as the cultural significance of storytelling.

Author Search For more about Sherman Alexie, go to www.glencoe.com.
The spiders appeared suddenly after that summer rainstorm.

Some people still insist the spiders fell with the rain while others believe the spiders grew from the damp soil like weeds with eight thin roots.

The elders knew the spiders carried stories in their stomachs.

We tucked our pants into our boots when we walked through fields of fallow stories. An Indian girl opened the closet door and a story fell into her hair. We lived in the shadow of a story trapped in the ceiling lamp.

The husk of a story museumed on the windowsill. Before sleep, we shook our blankets and stories fell to the floor. A story floated in a glass of water left on the kitchen table. We opened doors slowly and listened for stories. The stories rose on hind legs and offered their red bellies to the most beautiful Indians.

Stories in our cereal boxes. Stories in our firewood. Stories in the pockets of our coats. We captured stories and offered them to the ants, who carried the stories back to their queen. A dozen stories per acre.

We poisoned the stories and gathered their remains with broom and pan.

The spiders disappeared suddenly after that summer lightning storm. Some people still insist the spiders were burned to ash while others believe the spiders climbed the lightning bolts and became a new constellation.

The elders knew the spiders had left behind bundles of stories. Up in the corners of our old houses we still find those small, white bundles and nothing, neither fire not water, neither rock nor wind, can bring them down.

1. Fallow means “unseeded, idle, or burned-out.”
COMPARING THE Big Idea

The Sacred Earth and the Power of Storytelling

Writing Read the following quotations from the selections. Write a brief essay in which you compare two or more of the quotations. Base your comparison on the way the quotations exemplify the power of storytelling and the tradition of the creation myth in oral cultures. Cite evidence from the selections to support your main ideas.

“My husband,” she said, “when I cut the tree it split in half and then fell through a great hole. Without the tree, there can be no life. I must follow it.”
—Huron, “The Sky Tree”

“How the animals will make peace among themselves someday and live together again. Then they can keep away the hunter who is their common enemy.”
—Chinua Achebe and John Iroaganachi, “How the Leopard Got His Claws”

“And so from that time immemorial, as the old people say, rain clouds drift from the west gift from the ocean.”
—Leslie Marmon Silko, “Prayer to the Pacific”

“The elders knew the spiders carried stories in their stomachs.”
—Sherman Alexie, “The Summer of Black Widows”

COMPARING Mythic Elements

Group Activity Personification, supernatural occurrences, and stories about the origin of the universe are features of myths in a variety of cultures. The Huron myth, Achebe’s myth, Silko’s poem, and Alexie’s poem use these elements for a variety of purposes. In a small group, discuss the following questions. Cite evidence from the selections to support your points.

1. How does each writer describe different aspects of the origin of the universe?
2. What is the importance of the writer’s cultural background in each of these selections?
3. How does the personification of animals contribute to each of the selections?
4. What insights about life offered by the writer do you find most compelling?

COMPARING Cultures

Speaking and Listening Before the writers in various cultures recorded their stories in books, storytellers recounted tales orally. Research one or more of the cultures represented by the selections: Huron (also called Wyandot), Nigerian, Pueblo, or Spokane. As you investigate, compare and contrast the belief systems of these cultures. Then compose a mythic story that describes the origin of some aspect of life. Tell your story to the class in the oral tradition of one of the cultures you have investigated.

OBJECTIVES

- Compare myths of various cultures.
- Use questioning as a reading strategy.
- Analyze oral traditions.
MEET DEKANAWIDA

When Iroquois tribes in present-day New York State were torn apart by fighting, one man stepped in to instill peace. Dekanawida (däk uh-nə wē′ də) believed from an early age that he was predestined to unite the Iroquois nation. “It is my business to stop the shedding of blood among human beings,” he said.

Traditional accounts of his life vary. He was thought to be a Huron born around 1550 near what is now Kingston, Ontario. In one account, Dekanawida was the son of a virgin mother who, in the months leading up to his birth, observed omens that told Dekanawida would be a source of evil and destruction for the Huron people. To save her tribe, Dekanawida’s mother tried three times to drown her infant son in an icy river, but to her disbelief, woke up each of the following mornings with the child resting softly in her arms. His mother interpreted this as a sign that he was fated to live and began to rear the boy.

“**The Word I bring is that all peoples shall love one another and live together in peace.**”

—Dekanawida

A Quest for Peace As a young man, Dekanawida trekked southward on a spiritual quest to perform his destined work. He forged a strong friendship with Hiawatha, an Onandaga tribal leader. Both men agreed that continual warring was making the tribes vulnerable to outside attack. Legend has it that Dekanawida was the laconic mastermind of the Iroquois Constitution. Because Dekanawida may have had a speech impediment, Hiawatha, a charismatic leader and great orator, was his spokesman and interlocutor. Dekanawida was highly esteemed by the Iroquois people. In fact, he was the first “pine tree chief,” or chief chosen on the basis of merit rather than by heredity.

In 1570, the two leaders established an alliance among the five nations of the Iroquois—the Seneca, Cayuga, Oneida, Onondaga, and Mohawk. Dekanawida created the alliance’s constitution, which established rules for decision making and debate. Around 1600, after Dekanawida had completed the task of establishing the confederacy, he mysteriously vanished. But thanks to the peaceful government he had helped create, the confederacy was able to resist outside pressures for almost two hundred years.

Dekanawida was born around 1550 and vanished around 1600.
Connecting to the Text
Think of times when you have worked with others to make a decision or to achieve a common goal. In the Iroquois Constitution, Dekanawida ensures peaceful decision making by the five nations. As you read, think about the following questions:

- How might the language someone uses help or hinder a common decision?
- How have groups that you have been involved in finally reached a consensus?

Building Background
After the Iroquois Confederacy was founded around 1570, there was peace, and the tribes prospered. Together the five tribes prevented French, English, and Dutch colonists from annexing their lands. The Revolutionary War, however, caused deep rifts between the tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy, resulting in its end. But its legacy was a lasting one. Dekanawida’s system was so effective that Benjamin Franklin urged fellow colonists to view it as a model.

Setting Purposes for Reading

**Big Idea**  The Power of Storytelling
Notice the ways in which the Iroquois Constitution reflects the Native Americans’ use of language to describe their reverence for the natural world.

**Literary Element**  Author’s Purpose
The author’s purpose is the author's intent in creating a work. As you read the constitution, carefully examine its provisions to see how they support Dekanawida’s goals.


**Interactive Literary Elements Handbook**  To review or learn more about the literary elements, go to www.glencoe.com.

**OBJECTIVES**
In studying this selection, you will focus on the following:

- understanding author’s purpose
- drawing conclusions about culture

**Reading Strategy**  Drawing Conclusions About Culture

When you draw a conclusion, you use a number of pieces of information to make a general statement about people, places, events, or ideas. As you read, draw conclusions about Iroquois society by looking at the values expressed in the constitution.

**Reading Tip: Conclusions Diagram**  Use a diagram to record details from the selection as well as your conclusions about the Iroquois.

**Vocabulary**

- **disposition** (dis´ pə zish´ən) n. one’s general way of thinking or feeling; p. 49  *Julia had a cheerful disposition.*

- **convene** (kan vən´) v. to come together; assemble; p. 50  *Congress will convene to hear the president’s speech tonight.*

- **posterity** (pos ter´ ò tē) n. generations of the future; all of one’s descendants; p. 50  *Mr. Norris requires students to create a record of their thoughts for posterity.*

- **temper** (tem´ par) v. to modify or moderate; soften; p. 50  *Alvaro tempers his anger by counting to ten.*

- **deliberation** (di lib´ ə rā´ shən) n. careful consideration; p. 51  *After long deliberation, the city council voted to build a new library.*
The Tree of the Great Peace

I am Dekanawida and with the Five Nations' Confederate Lords I plant the Tree of the Great Peace. I plant it in your territory, Adodarho,1 and the Onondaga Nation, in the territory of you who are Firekeepers.2

I name the tree the Tree of the Great Long Leaves. Under the shade of this Tree of the Great Peace we spread the soft white feathery down of the globe thistle3 as seats for you, Adodarho, and your cousin Lords.

We place you upon those seats, spread soft with the feathery down of the globe thistle, there beneath the shade of the spreading branches of the Tree of Peace. There shall you sit and watch the Council Fire of the Confederacy of the Five Nations, and all the affairs of the Five Nations shall be transacted at this place.

Roots have spread out from the Tree of the Great Peace, one to the north, one to the east, one to the south, and one to the west. The name of these roots is the Great White Roots and their nature is Peace and Strength.

If any man or any nation outside the Five Nations shall obey the laws of the Great Peace and make known their disposition to the Lords of the Confederacy, they may trace the Roots to the Tree and if their minds are clean and they are obedient and promise to obey the wishes of the Confederate Council, they shall be welcomed to take shelter beneath the Tree of the Long Leaves.

We place at the top of the Tree of the Long Leaves an Eagle who is able to see afar. If he sees in the distance any evil approaching or any danger threatening, he will at once warn the people of the Confederacy.

The Care of the Fire

The Smoke of the Confederate Council Fire shall ever ascend and pierce the sky so that other nations who may be allies may see the Council Fire of the Great Peace.

You, Adodarho, and your thirteen cousin Lords shall faithfully keep the space about the Council Fire clean and you shall allow neither dust nor dirt to accumulate. I lay a Long Wing before you as a broom. As a weapon against a crawling creature I lay a staff with you so that you may thrust it away from the Council Fire.

The Laws of the Council

Whenever the Confederate Lords shall assemble for the purpose of holding a council, the Onondaga Lords shall open it by expressing their gratitude to their cousin Lords and greeting them, and they shall make an address and offer thanks to the earth where men dwell, to the

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1. Adodarho was an Onondaga chief who enjoyed a position of honor in the Confederate Council. His name became an honorific, or traditional title, for Iroquois leaders.
2. Firekeepers were important chiefs who oversaw the Council Fire, which symbolized the confederacy.
3. Globe thistle is a plant that has prickly leaves and blue flowers. Like a dandelion, the flower becomes a mass of white, silky fuzz, or down, when it goes to seed.

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Vocabulary

disposition (diz’ pə zish’ an) n. one’s general way of thinking or feeling

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Reading Strategy

Drawing Conclusions About Culture

What can you conclude about the Iroquois attitude toward strangers or outsiders?

Big Idea

The Power of Storytelling

How does the opening of a council meeting reflect the importance of storytelling in Native American culture?
streams of water, the pools, the springs and the lakes, to the maize and the fruits, to the medicinal herbs and trees, to the forest trees for their usefulness, to the animals that serve as food and give their pelts for clothing, to the great winds and the lesser winds, to the Thunderers, to the Sun, the mighty warrior, to the moon, to the messengers of the Creator who reveal his wishes and to the Great Creator who dwells in the heavens above, who gives all the things useful to men, and who is the source and the ruler of health and life.

All the business of the Five Nations’ Confederate Council shall be conducted by the two combined bodies of Confederate Lords. First the question shall be passed upon by the Mohawk and Seneca Lords; then it shall be discussed and passed by the Oneida and Cayuga Lords. Their decisions shall then be referred to the Onondaga Lords (Firekeepers) for final judgment.

When the Council of the Five Nation Lords convene, they shall appoint a speaker for the day. He shall be a Lord of either the Mohawk, Onondaga, or Seneca Nation.

No individual or foreign nation interested in a case, question, or proposition shall have any voice in the Confederate Council except to answer a question put to him or them by the speaker for the Lords.

If the conditions which shall arise at any future time call for an addition to or change of this law, the case shall be carefully considered, and if a new beam seems necessary or beneficial, the proposed change shall be voted upon and, if adopted, it shall be called, “Added to the Rafters.”

The Clans
Among the Five Nations and their posterity there shall be the following original clans: Great Name Bearer, Ancient Name Bearer, Great Bear, Ancient Bear, Turtle, Painted Turtle, Standing Rock, Large Plover, Little Plover, Deer, Pigeon Hawk, Eel, Ball, Opposite-Side-of-the-Hand, and Wild Potatoes. These clans, distributed through their respective Nations, shall be the sole owners and holders of the soil of the country, and in them is it vested as a birthright.

People of the Five Nations [who are] members of a certain clan shall recognize every other member of that clan, irrespective of the Nation, as relatives.

The lineal descent of the people of the Five Nations shall run in the female line. Women shall be considered the progenitors of the Nation. They shall own the land and the soil. Men and women shall follow the status of the mother.

The Leaders
The Lords of the Confederacy of the Five Nations shall be mentors of the people for all time. The thickness of their skin shall be seven spans—which is to say that they shall be proof against anger, offensive actions, and criticism. Their hearts shall be full of peace and good will and their minds filled with a yearning for the welfare of the people of the Confederacy. With endless patience they shall carry out their duty, and their firmness shall be tempered with a tenderness for their people. Neither anger nor fury shall find

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4. Maize is corn.
5. The Iroquois leaders thought of their confederacy of five nations as a longhouse, a communal Iroquois dwelling with an east door, a west door, and a central fire. The terms beam and Added to the Rafters continue this comparison.

Vocabulary

- **convene** (kan vën′e) v. to come together; assemble
- **posterity** (pos ter′ a tê) n. generations of the future; all of one’s descendants
- **temper** (tem′ par) v. to modify or moderate; soften

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6. Progenitors are direct ancestors or originators of an ancestral line.
7. Mentors are wise and trusted advisers.
lodgment in their minds, and all their words and actions shall be marked by calm deliberation.

The Festivals
The rites and festivals of each Nation shall remain undisturbed and shall continue as before because they were given by the people of old times as useful and necessary for the good of men.

The recognized festivals of Thanksgiving shall be the Midwinter Thanksgiving, the Maple or Sugar Making Thanksgiving, the Raspberry Thanksgiving, the Strawberry Thanksgiving, the Corn Planting Thanksgiving, the Corn Hoeing Thanksgiving, the Little Festival of Green Corn, the Great Festival of Ripe Corn, and the complete Thanksgiving for the Harvest.

The Symbols
A large bunch of shell strings, in the making of which the Five Nations’ Confederate Lords have equally contributed, shall symbolize the completeness of the union and certify the pledge of the Nations represented by the Confederate Lords of the Mohawk, the Oneida, the Onondaga, the Cayuga, and the Seneca, that all are united and formed into one body or union called the Union of the Great Law, which they have established.

Five arrows shall be bound together very strong, and each arrow shall represent one nation. As the five arrows are strongly bound, this shall symbolize the complete union of the nations. Thus are the Five Nations united completely and enfolded together, united into one head, one body, and one mind. Therefore they shall labor, legislate, and council together for the interest of future generations.
RESPONDING AND THINKING CRITICALLY

Respond

1. What is your opinion of Dekanawida’s abilities as a peacemaker? Explain.

Recall and Interpret

2. (a) What does Dekanawida say is the nature of the roots of the Tree of the Great Peace? (b) What is placed at the top of the tree? Explain what this suggests about the purpose behind the Iroquois Confederacy’s formation.

3. (a) Describe the rules Dekanawida includes about making changes to the law. (b) Given these rules, how would you characterize Dekanawida’s skills as a planner?

4. Explain the symbols of the confederacy described on page 51. In what way, do you think, does the design of the symbols reflect Dekanawida’s vision for the confederacy?

Analyze and Evaluate

5. (a) How does the Iroquois Constitution divide authority among the five nations? (b) What benefits did the Iroquois stand to gain by structuring decision making this way?

6. (a) Judging by the provision about the leaders, what were important leadership qualities in the confederacy? (b) Do you think Dekanawida was right to stress these qualities? Explain.

Connect

7. Big Idea The Power of Storytelling (a) Native American life was organized around the cycles of nature. How is this fact reflected in the Iroquois Constitution? (b) Explain in what other ways the constitution displays the Iroquois reverence for nature. Then tell how you think such a reverence strengthened the Iroquois.

LITERARY ANALYSIS

Literary Element Author’s Purpose

The author’s purpose may be to entertain, to inform, to explain, to persuade, or to describe. After forming your initial idea of the author’s purpose, double-check your notion against the information in the piece.

1. What is Dekanawida’s basic purpose in creating the Iroquois Constitution?

2. What different comparisons does he introduce to convey his ideas of peace and unity?

Writing About Literature

Analyze Cultural Context The Iroquois Constitution describes rituals associated with the functioning of the Confederate Council. What was the point of these rituals? What do they indicate about the values of Iroquois society? In two paragraphs, analyze and evaluate the rituals.

Vocabulary Practice

Practice with Analogies Choose the word pair that best completes the analogy.

1. convene : gather ::
   a. soar : fall
   b. build : erect
   c. save : spend

2. posterity : ancestors ::
   a. lair : den
   b. lane : path
   c. kindness : cruelty

READING AND VOCABULARY

Reading Strategy Drawing Conclusions

To draw conclusions about the Iroquois, think about how the details tell you something about Iroquois society. Then make a general statement expressing your insight. Review the passage on page 50 that describes how women are to be considered and what women shall own. What conclusions do you draw about the importance of women in Iroquois society?

Web Activities For eFlashcards, Selection Quick Checks, and other Web activities, go to www.glencoe.com.