

THE TEACHINGS

The Integration of Oral Storytelling into the Language Arts Curriculum



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Resources:

1. Raven Tales: Raven and the First People – DVD
2. American Indian Voices Presents Johnny Moses –VHS
3. *Raven and the First Men* – as told by Eldrbarry
4. Raven and the First People - Black Line Master
5. Oral Reading Check - BLM

Background Information:

Often in Provincial curriculum First Nations teachings are referred to as legends, myths, and tales, attributing a sort of fictional triviality to the important stories of the Northwest Coast Nations. However, Aboriginal communities hold a different view of these tales. They see them as real, important, and substantial *teachings* for First Nations communities. According to the storyteller Johnny Moses, the stories are more than just stories. They are teachings:

My grandparents mostly taught us children through the traditional stories, what we call the teachings. We heard many, many stories -- while we were eating, while we were at home, while we were traveling in the car from one gathering to another. After we heard a story several times, they would have us tell the story to them. If we made mistakes telling the story, they wouldn't say which parts of the story were right or which were wrong. They would just tell the story again, and we had to find our mistakes by listening to the way they told it.

Originally printed in SHAMAN'S DRUM magazine, Spring 1991.

When studying stories in Language Arts the traditional focus is on the written word, sentence structure, punctuation, spelling, and grammar. With the new focus on Oral Speaking in the prescribed learning outcomes Aboriginal tales can be given the preferred treatment. Instead of focusing on written outcomes, students can focus on using their oral speaking skills to tell a story.

It is believed that storytelling is both a gift from the Creator and an art that requires a great amount of skill and technique to hold the audience spellbound. The storytellers must possess a gift of memory, creativity, humor and drama. The role of the storyteller is also as a historian or keeper of knowledge who educates the audience about life, the past, and provides insights into minds and spirits to facilitate a better understanding of who we are.

Stan Cuthand, Cree Elder

North American Aboriginal stories are based on oral tradition and their teaching and dissemination should reflect this traditional practice. We do not have to completely push aside the traditional reading and writing models of the schools, but in fact can use these methods to improve our grasp of the oral mode.

ORAL STORYTELLING LESSON OUTLINE

PART I: Accessing Prior Knowledge – ask students what they know about:

- a) First Nations of the northwest coast.
- b) How First Nations communicate (art, songs, storytelling, dances, etc)?
- c) Why First Nations have storytellers? (oral tradition)
- d) What other cultures have storytellers?
- e) What First Nations stories are about? Who are the characters?

PART II: Introduction to the storyteller Johnny Moses

Moses is a master storyteller, traditional healer, and respected spiritual leader who carries the medicine teachings of his Northwest Coast ancestors. Born at Ohiat, a remote Nuu-chah-nulth (Nootka) village on the west coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Moses has a multi-tribal ancestry, which includes the Nuu-chah-nulth, Saanich, Snohomish, Duwamish, and Chehamus peoples. He was raised until age nine by his maternal grandparents, who first began to train him in northern Nuu-chah-nulth and Saanich traditions.

At age thirteen, after being healed of cancer, Moses was called to carry on his family's medicine traditions and given his great-grandfather's name, *Whis.stem.men.knee* (Walking Medicine Robe). In addition to training under seven traditional medicine teachers and serving as a minister in the Indian Shaker Church, Moses also acquired an academic education and graduated at age eighteen from the University of Victoria with a B.A. in Education.

Fluent in seven Native languages as well as English, Moses has become a roving ambassador for his Northwest cultures, sharing the traditional stories, songs, and dances in both the United States and Canada. Working with the permission and encouragement of his elders, he shares the *Si.si.wiss* medicine teachings and healing ceremonies of his people through an informal organization known as the Red Cedar Circle.

The following interview was compiled from several conversations recorded in December 1990 by Timothy white.



PART III: Viewing - Play VHS tape, *American Indian Voices presents Johnny Moses*.

Play the following segments:

- a) Potlatch Song
 - b) Introduction of Stories
 - c) Bear and Aunt Story
1. Ask students what makes Johnny Moses a good story teller (expression, drama, characterization, inflection, repetition etc.)
 2. Invite class to help orally summarize the story as notes are taken on the board.
 3. Explain that they will be hearing and viewing another story that they will eventually be summarizing and retelling orally.

PART IV: Introduction to *Raven Finds the First Men* as told by Eldrbarry

<http://www.eldrbarry.net/rabb/rvn/first.htm>

1. **Access Prior Knowledge** – ask the students if they know anything about this tale or other creation stories.
2. **Read *Raven Finds the First Men*** as told by Eldrbarry (or if you are brave tell the story from memory).
3. Ask students to get into A/B partners. Partner A tells B a brief summary of the story. Partner B reports back to class (you may wish to only have one or two report back but ensure that they are all ready to do so).

PART VI: Introduction to *Raven Tales: Raven and the First People* – DVD

1. Ask the class, do you think this version of the story will be different? Why?
2. Watch the movie (25 min.).
3. Have a class discussion on the similarities and differences between the written story and the movie.
4. Use Black Line Master #1 *Raven and the First People* to outline setting, characters, plot, climax, and resolution.

PART VII: Oral Storytelling. Students should have a good grasp of the story by now.

1. Students should have a good point form summary of the story.
2. Have student practice telling the story orally with a partner. Partner A tells the story without notes. Partner B has notes and can prompt A when necessary.
3. Ask them to make it exiting and interesting.
4. Continue practicing oral storytelling using good expression and emotion.
5. Prepare to tell the tale in front of the class.

Prescribed Learning Outcomes

Grade 6/7

Oral Language

Uses speaking and listening to interact with others for the purposes of

- Contributing to class success
- Discussing and comparing ideas and opinions
- Improving and deepening understanding
- Staying on topic in focused discussions
- Presenting in a clear, focused, organized, and effective manner

Select and use strategies when interacting with others, including

- Accessing prior knowledge
- Making and sharing connections
- Taking turns as speaker and listener
- Paraphrasing to clarify meaning
- Practicing delivery
- Focusing on the speaker
- Listening for specifics

Recognize and apply the features of oral language to convey and derive meaning, including

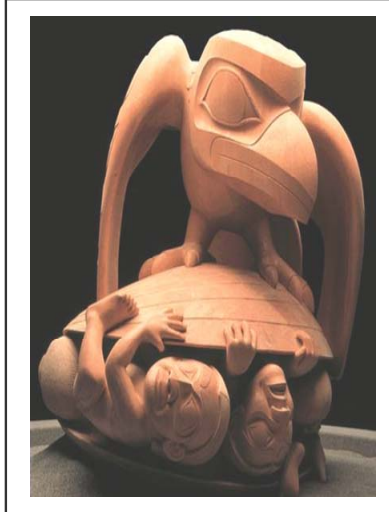
- Context (audience, purpose, situation)
- A variety of sentence lengths and structures.
- Smooth transitions and connecting words



RAVEN AND THE FIRST PEOPLE

SETTING:

This story takes place in the time before time, before humans walked this world. *Narnauks*, supernatural beings, rule the world. Raven, Eagle, and Frog meet on a beach.



CHARACTERS:

1. **EAGLE**, a wise and cautious being.
2. **RAVEN**, a powerful mischievous trickster.
3. **FROG**, a mysterious sand portentous riddler.
4. **THE FIRST MEN**, nervous, helpless, enthusiastic.
5. **THE FIRST WOMEN**, clever, independent.

PLOT: SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

1.	Eagle and raven meet frog on the beach.
2.	Frog tells them of great changes, the “coming of man”.
3.	They discover a “Great Clam Shell” with something inside.
4.	To their surprise, they have discovered the first humans.
5.	They are nervous, but Raven convinces them to emerge.
6.	Raven tries to teach them how to survive in the world but they only dance and fight, driving Eagle crazy.

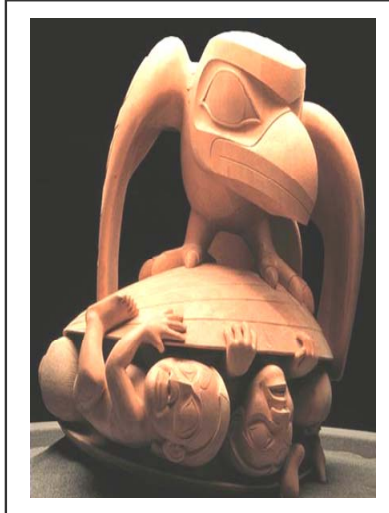
7.	Eagle takes charge and teaches them how to hunt and fish.
8.	Raven grows tired of the needy humans and wants to put them back.
9.	The wise Frog returns and leads Raven and Eagle to another shell.
10.	It contains female humans!

CLIMAX AND RESOLUTION:

11.	At first, the male and female humans are shy and nervous.
12.	They soon overcome their fears and begin to mingle.
13.	Eventually, they create villages and families.
14.	Raven, although a trickster by nature would provide for the humans.
15.	In time, he brings the Sun, the Moon, the Stars, Salmon, and Cedar.

RAVEN AND THE FIRST PEOPLE

SETTING:



CHARACTERS:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

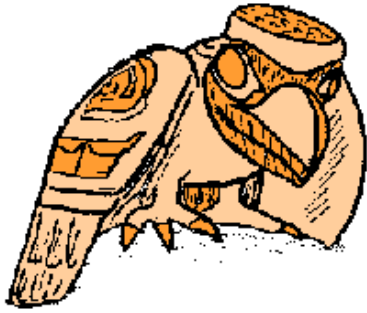
PLOT: SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

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CLIMAX AND RESOLUTION:

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Raven and the First Men

A Raven Tale as told by [Eldrbarry](#)

This tale I know was told among the Haida, and probably other tribes of the Pacific Northwest.

There are different stories about how Raven created the world and the first men. Some of them have the Raven forming the first people out of clay. But I like this story.

After the great flood had at long last receded, Raven had gorged himself on the delicacies left by the receding water, so for once, perhaps the first time in his life, he wasn't hungry. But his other appetites, his curiosity and the unquenchable itch to meddle and provoke things, to play tricks on the world and its creatures, these remained unsatisfied.

Raven gazed up and down the beach. It was pretty, but lifeless. There was no one about to upset, or play tricks upon. Raven sighed. He crossed his wings behind him and strutted up and down the sand, his shiny head cocked, his sharp eyes and ears alert for any unusual sight or sound. The mountains and sea, the sky now ablaze with the sun by day and the moon and stars he had placed there, it was all pretty, but lifeless. Finally Raven cried out to the empty sky with a loud exasperated cry.

And before the echoes of his cry faded from the shore, he heard a muffled squeak. He looked up and down the beach for its source and saw nothing. He strutted back and forth, once, twice, three times and still saw nothing. Then he spied a flash of white in the sand.

There, half buried in the sand was a giant clamshell. As his shadow fell upon it, he heard another muffled squeak. Peering down into the opening between the halves of the shell, he saw it was full of tiny creatures, cowering in fear at his shadow.

Raven was delighted. Here was a break in the monotony of the day. But how was he to get the creatures to come out of their shell and play with him? Nothing would happen as long as they stayed inside the giant clamshell.

They were not going to come out as long as they were so afraid of him. So Raven leaned over his head, close to the shell, and with all the cunning and skill of that smooth trickster's tongue, that had so often gotten him in and out of so many misadventures during his troubled and troublesome existence, he coaxed and cajoled and coerced the little creatures to come out and play in his wonderful shiny new world.

As you know the Raven has two voices, one harsh and strident, and the other which he used now, a seductive, bell-like croon which seems to come from the depth of the sea, or out of the cave where winds are born. It is an irresistible sound, one of the loveliest in the world.

It wasn't long before first one and then another of the little shell-dwellers emerged from the shell. Some scurried back when they saw the Raven, but eventually curiosity overcame their caution and all of them had crept or scrambled out.

Very strange creatures they were: two legged like Raven, but otherwise very different. They had no feathers. Nor fur. They had no great beak. Their skin was pale, and they were naked except for the dark hair upon round, flat-featured heads. Instead of strong wings like raven, they had thin stick-like arms that waved and fluttered constantly. They were the first humans.

For a long time Raven amused himself with these new playthings. Laughing as they explored with wonder a much expanded world. Sometimes they helped each other, sometimes they fought over something they had found. Raven even taught them some tricks, but soon he became tired of their ceaseless activity.

For one thing, they were so helpless out in the world. They needed shelter from the sun and the rain. They were so fearful and seemed so small. And there were no girls among them, only boys. Raven was about to shove these tired, demanding and annoying creatures back into their shell and forget them, when, as so often happens with Raven, he had an idea for some fun.

Raven began to search for the girls. For it is the way of things in the world that there are both males and females of every creature. Somewhere there must be girls. Raven searched and searched. Under logs and behind rocks, he looked. But he could not find the hiding place of the first girls.

But as he searched, the tide was going out, and as it reached its lowest, the Raven spotted some giant Chitons clinging to the rocks. These giant

shellfish had but one shell, fastened tightly to the rocks with huge soft lips around their edges. Raven pried one loose with his beak. And there inside was a girl. He pried off another, and another, and another in each was a girl. They were very similar to the creatures he had found in the clamshell, but more like the Chiton, softer and rounder, in contrast to the hard shell and strong muscles of the clam. And these were just as frightened of the Raven. He gathered them onto his back with difficulty, and brought them to the boys he had found in the clamshell.

Raven was expecting the boy creatures to be very happy he had found the girl creatures, but to his surprise. They were frightened of them and some even ran back into the Giant clamshell to hide. The girl creatures were just as shy and huddled together watching the males with fearful and curious eyes. Both the boy and girl creatures seemed very modest and sought to cover their bodies with strips of kelp and woven sea weed from the shore.

The boy creatures were astonished and embarrassed and confused by feelings they had never before had. They didn't know how to behave. But some of them overcame their fear and began to do things to attract the attention of the girl creatures Raven had brought. Some began to show off the tricks they had been taught - leaping and running and wrestling with other boy creatures. Some of the girl creatures overcame their shyness, first with quick glances then finally allowing the boy creatures to approach them, and even leaving the safety of their huddled group of girl creatures. Gradually the two groups began to mingle into one and just as gradually the boy creatures and girl creatures overcame all their fears and paired off, walking hand in hand, their eyes absorbed in each other totally.

Raven watched all this with increasing interest and surprise. Among all the creatures of the world, there were few whose males and females were so very different. The males proud, agile and strong, the females gentle, soft and tender. Sometimes the males would be too rough in their play with the females and there would be tears. But those same tears seemed to have an emotional power over the males bringing out of them protective instincts. The strengths of each balanced the weakness of each.

And since that day, Raven has never been bored. In fact, at times he has almost regretted bringing the first men and women together. From the strong muscles of the clam and the soft lips of the Chiton, from the pairing of these

first people came the first families. Children were born, some strong and male, some soft and female. Many generations have been born, have grown and flourished, have built and created or fought and destroyed. Many have blamed the Raven for playing a terrible joke on humanity, for often men and women just barely get along, but somehow from this strange combination of reason and intuition, of muscle and emotion arose that which was needed for the race to survive the storms of life on the shores.

Raven himself felt strange protective urges for these first people. Though a glutton and trickster by nature, he would again and again provide for these creatures he found in the clamshell. In time he would bring them the Sun, Moon and Stars; Fire; Salmon and Cedar, teach them the secrets of hunting, and the world. Raven would watch these weak creatures become both strong and loving, courageous and compassionate, able to fend for themselves and survive.

And their children were no timid shell-dwellers, but they continued to be children of the wild coast, of the stormy shores between the land and the sea. They challenged the strength of the stormy north Pacific wresting their livelihoods from the sea even as they made their homes on its shores.

In the original Haida story - Raven mates the Chitons with the groins of the men from the Clam shell, they experience strange emotions, then the Chitons, back again on the rocks, grow large and the first Haida - both men and women are "given birth from these" - The sexual correspondence of the clam with its male "foot", and the Chiton with its "labia" like lips is obvious - as are the allusions to intercourse and pregnancy. It is found in Bill Reid's and Robert Bringhurst's **RAVEN STEALS THE LIGHT** (Univ of Washington Press, 1984). Perhaps a little earthy for sixth graders - [the sexual connections between the Clam and its extended foot (male); and the "labia" of the Chiton (female) while not obvious are there] it is an interesting story on the differences between the sexes - all one of Raven's tricks I like the concept presented that this is one of the "strengths of humanity". In my version, there is a depicting of the changing relationships between boys and girls as they grow up. This can be told with some degree of humor.

For more on Raven and the peoples of the Pacific Northwest, see my bibliography in [Raven's Roost](#).

You are viewing: <http://www.eldrbarry.net/rabb/rvn/first.htm> -- © 1997 Barry McWilliams

Follow These Links: [Back to Raven](#)

Thanks for visiting! Your remarks and suggestions are welcome!

Please E-mail me at: eldrbarry@eldrbarry.net

Oral Reading Check

Name: _____ Date: _____

Raven and the First Men

<http://www.eldrbarry.net/rabb/rvn/first.htm>

Raven gazed up and down the beach. It was pretty, but lifeless. There was no one about to upset, or play tricks upon. Raven sighed. He crossed his wings behind him and strutted up and down the sand, his shiny head cocked, his sharp eyes and ears alert for any unusual sight or sound. The mountains and sea, the sky now ablaze with the sun by day and the moon and stars he had placed there, it was all pretty, but lifeless. Finally Raven cried out to the empty sky with a loud exasperated cry.

Scoring Guide _____ minus _____ = _____
of miscues Self-corrections Miscues Counted

_____ Acceptable: 0-10
_____ Unacceptable: 11+miscues

Observations _____ fluent Oral Reading
_____ good self-correction strategies
_____ needs to use phonics (_____)
_____ needs to use structural elements (_____)
_____ overuses context

Comments _____

