

Learning About Montana Indian Oral Traditions

Fast Facts

Curriculum Area: Social Studies
Grade Level: Grade Five
Suggested Duration: Two-Four Days

Stage 1 Desired Results

Established Goals

GLE 5.4.2 Students will recognize each Montana tribe has its own unique oral history and most place their people in their current traditional lands.

Understandings

- Each tribe has its own oral history, beginning with its origin, and the oral history is as valid as a written history. These histories pre-date the “discovery” of North America by explorers (EU3).
- Some tribal histories and traditions may be private, to be understood and used only by members of that tribe, and some tribes may tell certain stories during certain times of the year; this must be respected (EU3).

Essential Questions

- How does who I am shape my views?
- How does _____ tribe’s oral tradition contribute to its unique cultural heritage?
- How and when can we use the knowledge that as we learn history there may be more than one point of view? More than one story?

Students will be able to...

- research a Montana tribe to learn about its oral history (this may include a tribe which keeps such history and tradition private).
- explain what they have learned about a Montana tribe’s oral history.
- share some of the Montana tribal oral histories in discussions so all the class members gain knowledge about oral history perspectives in different tribes.

Students will know...

- the etiquette involved in politely researching and respecting a tribe’s traditions. For example, prior to researching, the class will discuss how to research and how to ask about oral history when interviewing tribal members.

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- oral histories/stories from at least two Montana tribes and how a tribe’s oral tradition contributes to its unique cultural heritage.
- where and how to apply their new skills in recognizing and respecting diverse points of view in their reading and discussion of history.

Stage 2 Assessment Evidence

Performance Tasks

1. Research a Montana tribe’s oral history, traditions, and stories. Write a summary of what you have learned. This can be a retelling of the tribe’s oral history (an event), or it can be a summary.
2. Retell the story, sharing it in discussion. Use your written summary for talking points. If another student has researched the same tribal history, compare your summaries.
3. Explain what you learned about a Montana tribe’s unique cultural heritage through its oral history. This can be a written activity or a discussion activity with entire class participation.

Stage 3 Learning Plan

Learning Activities:

E= Equip students, help them experience the key ideas and explore the issues

Introduce the lesson, and give each student a copy of the “Oral Histories of Montana Tribes” pages at the end of this lesson. After the class reads the information together (you, as the teacher should use the information for talking points in your overview), students are reminded to place the notes in their notebook.

If the history book you are using in your classroom has a section on explorers of North America, have students quickly look at specific pages where “discovery” is discussed—for example, Columbus, Dutch explorers, English explorers. How are Indians written about in the section? Which specific tribes are discussed, or are any specific tribes discussed?

Review the ideas students will learn about history and point of view. Take time to explore the definition of “discovery”, and make sure students are aware that “discovery” of an area is not necessarily a discovery. Indigenous people had been in North and South America for many thousands of years.

Introduce the concept of an “Oral History” to students. Ensure they understand the points made in “Oral Histories of Montana Tribes.” Go over the etiquette of polite research, taking time to make students aware of respect for another culture’s values and traditions.

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Have students (individually, or in small groups) select the Montana tribe they intend to research. Remind them they are looking specifically for the tribe's oral history. Remind students they will be taking notes to make a summary of a historical event or story. They must be thorough, leaving nothing out.

E= Allow students to evaluate their work and its implications

Spend one-two class periods researching Montana tribal histories and taking notes. Reserve a third class period for students to write an accurate retelling or summarization. If they have learned other related information (for example, the tribe they selected does not share its stories, or the stories are told only at certain times or only by certain tribal members), that information should be shared in a final, separate paragraph.

At mid-point of the second day, groups should begin sharing their research in small group discussions, and helping one another to ensure that complete information is being summarized. The third day is spent in writing the summarization/retelling.

When students hand in their final work; they should also attach the notes they wrote as they researched.

Class members report on the tribal oral history. Best listening behavior is encouraged by the teacher, so all students take notes on each tribe as it is reported. The notes are included as a graded activity.

T= Be tailored (personalized) to the different needs, interests, and abilities of learners

Students who are not able to complete all of the assignment (for example, a student with an IEP) may participate with the larger group based on their different needs and abilities.

O= Be organized to maximize initial and sustained engagement as well as effective learning

This particular lesson may take two-four days (50-minute periods), depending on students' backgrounds. Discussion and frequent active rethinking should keep student engagement and learning high.

Materials/Resources Needed

Montana tribe oral histories and stories. See list below.

"Essential Understanding 3," [*Essential Understanding Regarding Montana Indians*](#). Helena, MT: Montana Office of Public Instruction, 2010, 2013.

This is for teacher background information only.

Fox, Ed. D., Sandra J. [*Connecting Cultures & Classrooms: K-12 Curriculum Guide: Language Arts, Science, Social Studies*](#). Helena, MT: Montana Office of Public Instruction, 2006.

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This provides helpful teacher background in discussing history from multiple points of view (pages 77-82).

[Oral Histories/Stories](#)

Bullchild, Percy. *The Sun Came Down: The History of the World as My Blackfeet Elders Told It*. New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1985.

Fox, Sandra J. Ed.D. *Connecting Cultures and Classrooms: Indian Education K-12 Curriculum Guide: Language Arts, Science, Social Studies*. Helena, MT: Montana Office of Public Instruction, 2006. There is a list of traditional stories on pages 16-17.

Hungry Wolf, Adolf. *Legends Told By the Old People*, Book Pub Co., 1972. This includes Sioux, Assiniboine, Gros Ventre, and Salish/Kootenai stories.

Ktunaxa Legends. Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 1997.

Indian Tales of the Northern Rockies. Montana Indian Publications, 1971. This includes Crow, Gros Ventre, Salish/Kootenai, and Blackfeet stories.

Indian Tales of the Northern Plains. Billings, MT: Montana Council for Indian Education, 1971. This includes Crow and Blackfeet stories.

Medicine Crow, Joseph. *From the Heart of the Crow Country: The Crow Indians' Own Stories*. New York, NY: Orion, 1992.

Old Coyote, Henry and Barney. *The Way of the Warrior: Stories of the Crow People*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2003.

Tall Bull, Henry and Tom Weist. *Cheyenne Legends of Creation*. Billings, MT: Montana Council for Indian Education, 1972.

[Turtle Island Storytellers network Oral Histories Web site](#)

Susag, Dorothea, M. *Roots and Branches A Resource of Native American Literature – Themes, Lessons, and Bibliographies*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1998.

Oral Histories of Montana Tribes

Essential Questions We Will Discuss

1. How does who I am shape my views?
2. How does a particular tribe's oral traditions and history contribute to its unique cultural heritage?
3. How and when can we use the knowledge that as we learn history there may be more than one point of view? More than one story?

Information You Need to Know

Each Montana tribe has a history, just as your history book presents the story of America's known historical events. Traditionally, a Montana tribe's history can be traced back to the beginning of time. Many of the Montana tribal histories are only told orally. They were passed down from generation to generation so the history of the tribe could be known to each new generation. While most tribes did not have a written language, their histories tell the story of what happened in the past.

The timeframes of a tribe's history differ from a written history book, because time was observed differently within that tribe. Written history texts refer to dates based on a calendar, as though a list of dates is the only way to organize a history. A tribe's oral history is also based on time, but time may be expressed through the description of the seasons in the stories handed down through careful retellings.

Things to keep in mind as you do your research on a Montana Tribe's oral history and its origin story

- Montana tribal histories differ in point of view from your American history book.
- Your history book and a tribal history present "points of view"; each point of view changes, depending on whose story is being told.
- Identifying and respecting another culture's viewpoints of historical events is basic to your understanding of how histories can influence our ideas and points of view.
- Your history book may identify explorers (at the beginning of the text) as "discoverers" of the American continent. However, hundreds of tribes lived on the continent prior to European exploration. These tribes all kept oral traditional histories, passed down carefully from generation to generation.
- Tribal creation stories are not myths or legends. They are oral histories, passed down from generation to generation.
- Many of the Montana tribal histories place their people in current traditional lands in Montana.
- Some tribes only tell certain stories and histories during a certain time of the year—a particular season.
- Some tribes regard their histories and traditions as very private, and not to be shared with those outside of the tribe. If you are researching, respect the tribal traditions and do not ask for specific information about ceremonies and stories in that case.

Vocabulary

Ancestor

A person from whom one is descended; a relative who lived in the past.

Culture

A system of beliefs, values and assumptions about life that guide behavior and are shared by a group of people. It includes customs, language, and material artifacts. These are given from generation to generation.

Heritage

Something passed down from one generation to the next generation.

History

The study of the past; a record of what happened in the past. It is a story most often related through the experience of the teller.

Oral History

Each tribe has a history that can be traced to the beginning of time. Many of these histories are told only orally, as they have been passed down through generations. Some tribes may only tell certain stories during certain times of the year, and this knowledge should be respected. **Important to know:** oral histories are primary resources—they provide firsthand evidence of historical events, although they are not written down.

Oral Tradition

A tribe’s traditional beliefs and legends that have been passed from generation to generation by word.

Point of View

The standpoint from which something is considered or valued. **Synonyms:** Standpoint, viewpoint, way of thinking, perspective.

Primary Source

Primary resources provide firsthand evidence of historical events. They are, generally, unpublished. Materials such as manuscripts, photographs, maps, artifacts, audio and video recordings, oral histories, postcards, and posters. [UCLA Institute on Primary Sources]

Secondary Source

Materials such as textbooks, which synthesize and interpret primary source materials. [UCLA Institute on Primary Sources]

Tolerance

Respecting beliefs and actions which differ from one’s own beliefs and ideas. Respecting what others value and do.