



IROQUOIS CREATION STORY Lesson Plan

BY: Dawn Maracle Mohawk from Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory near Belleville, Ontario

Topic: Language

Time frame: 4-7 days

Activity:

-Once a brief background of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and backgrounds of various cultural stories have been given, you are ready to proceed to the Creation Story. I have given a brief outline on the importance of Creation Stories - you may use this as a personal note, or share it with your students. Take what you find to be appropriate.

[for teacher]

The Creation Story of the Kanienkehaka is the first story to be told. It explains the world view or basic outlook on life that the Mohawk and Iroquoian people believe in. This world view, along with race, language and culture make Mohawk people different from their neighbors in North America and around the world.

Our Creation Stories tell us where we came from and that we have always been here. We can take pride in knowing that our Elders have passed these stories on as truth to us, and that we have a responsibility to take care of the Mother Earth.

There are many things that occur in the Creation Story that are very extraordinary. The Creation Stories of the world all have similar elements in this way, such as the one in the Bible of Christianity. These stories are meant, in various cultures, to explain to people what their values were. They were often delivered in the form of a story for entertainment and memorizing purposes. There are people who spend their whole lives learning the stories, for there is something new in every re-telling. Storytellers are teachers; they are information delivery specialists, who must know the right time for a specific story. Once a story has begun, all present are to listen so there is no other sound but the storyteller's voice.

The storyteller is to first explain where s/he heard the story from, and then, they may begin. I took at least five versions of the story, both oral and written. The bibliography will list most of them.

-You may choose to read this story to the students, or to prepare a book with blank upper pages and the text below. I have prepared the paragraphs so that each will fit onto a different page with a different corresponding picture.

*If you choose to do this, you will have to spend one to two classes organizing different students to draw different pictures. The idea is to allow each student to contribute **something** to the book. The title page, title lettering, a page of contributors (or two or three), etc. This encourages self esteem, confidence in teamwork, and when the job is done, you have a wonderful keepsake of the story that is personal to your classroom and school.

I would highly recommend doing this, as it has worked well in my experience. I would laminate and bind the book once it is completed to increase its integrity and shelf life.

SKYWOMAN: The Creation Story (The beginning)

It is said that in the regions above the world where we live, there were beings who did not know what it was to cry, feel pain, or die. They lived in lodges with their families, in a clearing in the forest.

There was one house where a man and woman being lived: the man was called *tehnino:taton*, meaning he had special powers, and had to be protected from others while he was growing up.

All the lodges were placed so that one door faced the rising sun in the east; the other facing the setting sun in the west. The women lived in the south side, while the men lived in the north.

The man being became sick although no one in the Sky World knew what it was to be sick. As time passed he became more weak and soon died. He was placed in a burial case and placed near the ceiling of his house.

Soon the woman being appeared to be pregnant. The people of the village repeatedly asked her who the father of the baby was, but she did not answer. One day she gave birth to a female being named Aientsik which means Fertile Earth.

The child-being was healthy and grew very fast. One day though, she began to cry. Nothing the people of the village did would make her stop. The mother placed her in front of the burial case, and she stopped crying. After a long time she felt better, and came back to the rest of the village.

This happened many times. The people of the village could sometimes hear her talking, but they did not know who she was talking to. One day she came back from visiting her father, and told her mother that she was to be married.

Her mother made bread of corn softened by boiling, and mixed berries in with it. When she was finished, she put it into a basket for Aientsik.

The next day the young woman set out for the village of Tharonhiawakon, or He Who Holds Up the Sky. This is the place where her father told her to go. Everything on the way was just as her father had told her.

The young woman offered this man the corn and berry bread, and he accepted. She stayed there for three nights. During this time the man began to feel sick. He had a dream that made him feel uncomfortable. He gathered the people of his village to find the meaning of the dream.

The next day the man brought Aientsik to the Tree of the Standing Light. He asked her to uproot the tree, saying that he would feel better once the tree was lifted. She did as he asked.

He then told her to look into the hole. As she leaned forward to see what was below that tree, the man pushed her into the hole. Surprised, she grabbed for help and took the roots of the strawberry, corn and tobacco with her as she fell.

She fell in darkness for some time, but soon she could see water below her with animals in it. The Loon looked up to see this woman falling, and asked the Turtle if she could land on his back. Turtle agreed. The geese and ducks flew up to meet her and carry her safely on their backs to meet the others. It is because the animals first saw her when she was falling from the sky, that she is often referred to as Skywoman.

Three animals tried to bring up dirt from the bottom of the great waters. The first two failed. The muskrat took a deep breath and was gone for a long time, but he came up with dirt clenched in his tiny paws. He placed the mud on the back of the Turtle.

Every day Aientsik walked around the edge of the Turtle, noticing that every time she completed walking in a circle, the dirt had grown and the land was becoming larger. Soon plants were beginning to grow from the roots she had grabbed when she had fallen into this world. Every day when she returned to her resting place there was a fire and corn or beans and squash for her to eat. Corn, beans and squash have been known ever since as the three sisters, providers for the Kanienkeha (Mohawk) people.

-Discussion: -When the woman is caught by the ducks and geese, one of the animals realizes she cannot live in the water. She needs to live on dry land. Why do you suppose this is?

-Why is the Chief's (Tharonhiawakon) dream so important?

-it tells him what he must do to get healthy again

-it tells him that the young woman must go into the world below.

-Why is the Tree of Standing Light uprooted?

-so the hole is created for Skywoman to fall through

-In what ways do the animals help Skywoman?

-the ducks and geese catch her and carry her safely

-the turtle gives his back as a place for Skywoman to live

-the muskrat risks her life to dive down to the bottom of the ocean and bring back mud so that she may have land

-why does the muskrat succeed when others have failed?

-persistent; kept trying until she finally succeeded

-Do you know any other stories of creation?

-from the bible

-endless stories from all over the world

-What does Skywoman need to survive on Earth?

-tobacco, corn, strawberries.

-Have students ask any questions they may have about the story and record them on the board. Answer the questions orally within the group (within the circle).

-Have students retell their version of the story orally.

-Send students to their desks, or have them use the circle area to write in their journal what they remembered of the story. Emphasize that their retelling of the story must have a beginning, middle and end.

-Bring the students back to the circle. Ask them what they have learned about the Haudenosaunee/Six Nations/Iroquois. Is it different from the cultures in the class, or the same? In what ways is it different/the same? It is important to note here that Iroquois and other First Nations peoples in Canada (and North America) were here before Europeans and all other Nations of peoples. They lived here for tens of thousands of years while taking care of each other, their families, communities, nations and Mother Earth. They had their own forms of government, checks and balances, discipline, learning, fun and games, just like other cultures have had throughout history.

-Have students write a story about their own culture. Things they could write about could include what they think it would be like to live in their originating country today or in the past, they could draw on a story, symbol, or facet of their own culture. The important things to remind students is that their story must have a beginning, middle, and end, and they must draw on their own personal experiences.

-If you would like a more detailed example of the Creation Story and the Haudenosaunee people, see the site, **7 Generations** by the Kahnawake Survival School in Quebec. www.schoolnet.ca/autochtone/7gen/intro-e.html It is an excellent site, and has much information on Mohawk or Kanienkeha culture and traditions. Its Creation Story also includes what happens to Skywoman and her family on Turtle Island. Most would say that all of this information creates the complete Creation Story; I have left this part out for purposes of length and focus for younger students. Older students can definitely read on at this point and do more detailed work on the subject.

Word Origins and Pronunciation

The word I used most often is Haudenosaunee. That is the accepted ENGLISH (phonetic) spelling of the word meaning the Iroquois of the Confederacy. To spell it in the language is to spell it Hotinon:shonni - I chose not to use it because it would be difficult for some people to pronounce. In the Mohawk language it is spelled and pronounced as Rotinon:shonni. These three words all mean the same thing. The first use of the word, Haudenosaunee, is pronounced as it is spelled.

I also made use of the word Kanienkehaka - that means people of the flint, or Mohawk. I have only seen it spelled in Mohawk - I have never seen an English (phonetic) version of the word. Although, if I were to do so, I would spell it, Ganiengehaga.

Now, Kanienkeha, a shorter word, means the place of the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte or Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory (same place). If spelled according to English sounds, it would look like this: Ganiengeha.

Iroquois is arguably a French word meaning something approximate to snake people, or snake eaters. It is a word chosen by other people long ago to describe us. I have used Mohawk and Confederacy words in this unit, as they are accurate and relevant, and are how we are referred to day. However, the difference must be shown between the English words that have been used to describe us in the past (and present), and our own words for our own people. These were the words used before contact, and have survived since contact with Europeans. Students need to know the difference as any research they may do now or in the future will depend on the various names they know for the Haudenosaunee.

THREE SISTERS Lesson Plan

Topic: Health/Social Studies, History

Time frame: 3 days

Activity:

-Read the story of Creation again to the class. Ask questions along the way to see how much of the story the students remember. Ask them why something is happening or going to happen. This can be done during the story or after it is finished. It is important to read the story numerous times, as that is how knowledge has been passed on for centuries in this culture. Emphasize the importance of oral history. That is how we remember: by telling lessons numerous times until listeners have internalized it. Once it is remembered and even somewhat understood, that becomes knowledge that belongs to and is owned by the listener.

-Talk about the plants in the story. Strawberries, tobacco, corn, beans, and squash are all mentioned. It would be an excellent idea to bring a First Nations (Haudenosaunee) person in from your area and have them explain the importance of strawberries and tobacco. Older students could use this as a research project; to find the historical, social, and contemporary of such things in Iroquois culture.

-Talk about corn, beans, and squash. Do the students know what all three look like? Are they aware that there are hundreds of kinds of each in existence today? I have found it excellent to bring in at least 5-10 examples of each, have the students sit in a circle, and introduce each kind. It is an excellent hands on exercise, and the children remember better this way. Also, it breaks up the monotony of writing, reading, and listening.

-I also brought in a number of corn products such as cereals, breads, pastas, etc. to show students that these plants do not exist on their own - they are in the things we see and eat every day. Look to the Web site, **Iroquois Stories**; there is an illustrated story on the Three Sisters which the students would enjoy. Also, there are three lesson plans included therein in Language, Art, and Math that will give you a better background on the plants. The first lesson is a hands on example. The site address is www.angelfire.com/ok/IroquoisStories.

-Give the students a number of opportunities to present their knowledge on this one. They can do a drama skit based on the Creation Story or the Three Sisters Story; they can use play dough or paper and markers/crayons/pencil crayons to draw pictures, or they can write a story on what they have remembered about corn, beans and squash.

-Create a board, or add to one already existing, of the various projects. The hallway would be an excellent place for other members of the school to learn a little about the unit you are working on.

-Have students write in their journals. How have their attitudes about themselves and the Haudenosaunee changed since the start of their lesson? Let them write and reflect on this. Then, revisit what you talked about at the beginning of the lesson to show students that their attitudes have changed (indeed, they will!)

Yaw^ko (thank you)



Curriculum Author: Dawn T. Maracle ionkiats. Konkwehon:we Kanienkaha. **Mohawk from Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory near Belleville, Ontario**

M.Ed. studies in Iroquois Storytelling University of Toronto-