

Potawatomi Creation Story Lesson (Compare and Contrast, American Cultural Identity)

Objectives and outcomes:

- To familiarize students with traditions of a Native American tribe to further their understanding of various cultures
- To work on dramatic skills, especially use of voice and body to express emotions and convey character
- To bolster comparison skills

Grade level: 2nd to 4th

Duration: 30 minutes

I. Introduction (five minutes)

- A. Provide context as to who the Potawatomi tribe is (e.g. history of the tribe, geographic location, etc)
- B. Gather students in a circle sitting on the floor.

II. “Woosh” of Potawatomi creation story (twenty minutes)

- A. Instructor has students sit in a circle, and narrates a story. Instructor will call individual students into the center of the circle to perform roles in the story. Instructor will feed lines and actions of the characters to the students, and the students will act out what has been narrated. When the instructor says “woosh”, the students in the center of the circle go back to their spots on the edge of the circle, and the instructor will continue narrating the story with new students playing the characters in the next part. An example of what the woosh narration may look like is at the bottom of this lesson plan.

III. Conclusion (five minutes)

- A. Hold a discussion with the students
 1. Ask students to provide details and a summary of the story to gauge their retention of the events in the story
 2. Ask students to compare and contrast the creation story to one that they may know

Modification and Differentiation

This example lesson is more of a simple structure that can be used to understand the technique of a woosh and how it can be applied in class. The structure of this lesson can be applied to stories of other tribes or cultures. The aim here was to take a story from a culture that the students are studying but have little hands-on familiarity with and make it less abstract.

Woosh example of Potawatomi Creation Story

Earthmaker made the world, and said “I’m going to put some trees here, and some fields here, and put some rivers, and lakes and springs. And, I’m gonna put in some hills and valleys.” It was beautiful. The Earthmaker said, “But wait, there’s no humans here. I know! I’ll make some humans.”

Woosh

He scooped out a hole in a stream bank and lined the hole with stones to make a hearth, and he built a fire there. “I’m gonna take some clay, and put it into the shape of a person. Then, I’ll bake it in the fire.” While it baked, he took some twigs and made tongs. When he pulled the figure out of the fire and had let it cool, he moved its limbs and breathed life into it. The person smiled, said “Hello!” and then walked away. Earthmaker said, “hmmm, this figure is only half-baked. I need to try again.”

Woosh

Earthmaker made another figure and put it on the hearth. He was really tired from all of the creating he had been doing, and said “wow! I am tired! I’m gonna take a nap under this tree.” However, he slept longer than he intended. When he pulled the second figure out of the fire and had let it cool, he moved its limbs and breathed life into it. The person smiled, said “Hello!” and then walked away. Earthmaker said, “oops, this figure is over-baked. I need to try this again.”

Woosh

Earthmaker said, “okay, I’m gonna try this one more time.”. He cleaned the ashes out of the hearth and built a new fire. Then he scooped up some clay and said “I’m gonna make this pure by cleaning it of any twigs and stones in it”. He made a little figure and put it on the hearth, and this time he sat by the hearth and watched carefully as the figure baked. When this figure was done, he pulled it out of the fire and let it cool. Then he moved its limbs and breathed life into it. The person smiled, said “Hello!” and then walked away. Earthmaker said, “this one is baked just right!”

Woosh

The people became many tribes, and they spread across the land. Among these tribes were the Ojibwe, the Ottawa, and the Potawatomi. These three tribes were enemies and fought many battles. There was a Potawatomi man, and he had three sons. There was also an Ojibwe man with three sons, and an Ottawa man with three sons. All of the families went into battle, though they didn’t know each other at all. The Potawatomi man’s sons were all killed in battle. The Potawatomi man said, “Oh no! All of my sons are dead! I’m going to run away”. The Ojibwe man also had lost three sons in these battles, and he ran away in mourning as well. Lastly, the Ottawa man had likewise lost three sons, and he ran away in mourning.

Woosh

The Ojibwe man walked and walked into a forest, and eventually he came to a huge tree. It had four long roots and four huge branches going in all different directions. The tree also had one huge root that ran straight toward the center of the earth, and its center limb ran straight up into the sky. The Ojibwe man said, "wow, this tree is so beautiful, and it's so peaceful here. The view is amazing too! I can barely remember why I was sad."

Woosh

As the Ojibwe man sat under the tree, he saw another man approaching in the distance. This newcomer was crying as he walked toward the tree, but eventually he saw the tree's beauty and stopped under it. The Ojibwe man said, "I lost three sons in war and was so heartbroken that I wandered away to die, until I came to this tree. Why have you come here?" The newcomer, an Ottawa, said, "I too lost ten sons in war, and I lost myself in grief until I came to this place". The two men sat and talked of their troubles. As the two men talked, a third approached weeping. The first two watched as this third came to the tree. When they asked, the third man, a Potawatomi, told how he had lost three sons in war and had walked in grief until he came to this beautiful place.

Woosh

The three men talked and realized that their sons had died fighting in the same wars. They concluded that the Great Spirit had brought them together to this tranquil place, where they could hear the spirits speak. They agreed that there had been too much fighting between their tribes, and too much grief. They resolved to go back to their tribes and get them to live in peace. They made three pipes, and each took a pipe of tobacco home to his people as a symbol of peace.

Woosh

Ten days later, the three old men led their people to the great tree. Each man brought wood from which they built a fire together, and they cooked food from each tribe. They filled a pipe and offered its smoke to the Great Spirit above, to the spirits of the four directions, and then downward to the spirit that keeps the earth from sinking into the water. The tribes each smoked from the pipe of peace and ate of the common meal, and their chiefs agreed that they should live in peace. The three old men agreed to a set of rules to preserve the peace and to guide their peoples. This is how the Potawatomi, the Ojibwe, and Ottawa came to live in peace and to intermarry, as one people.