

Classroom Activity—American Indians of Wisconsin

American Indian Storytelling

Objective: Students will examine the complex and rich oral traditions of American Indian storytelling and explore indigenous and American Indian cultures by reading stories and discussing the meaning with their teacher and peers.

Materials:

- *The Three Sisters* story
- *The Three Sisters* worksheet
- *The Invisible Warrior* story
- *The Invisible Warrior* worksheet
- Writing utensil

Backstory:

American Indian oral traditions, which include storytelling, teachings, and family and tribal history, lie at the heart of tribal culture. It is largely through oral traditions that American Indian cultures have been preserved and transmitted through the generations. The stories passed down to American Indians by their ancestors reflect the cultural values and beliefs and help people to understand the meaning of their world and existence, and the existence of other things in the world. From these stories, children learn how people came to be; they receive explanations of why things are the way they are and instructions on how to live properly.

Activity 1- The Invisible Warrior Story

1. Begin by activating students' existing knowledge about stories. The following are examples of questions you can ask
 - a. What is a story? How is a story told?
 - b. Who tells stories?
 - c. What makes a good story?
2. Introduce the term "oral traditions" (a community's cultural & historical traditions passed down by word of mouth or example from one generation to another). Ask students to consider why stories would be spoken vs. written down. Are the stories of their own lives written, spoken or recorded in other ways? Who tells them? Who are they for?
3. Share the information from the Backstory with students.
4. Explain that students will now read the Invisible Warrior Story, one of the oral traditions that have been told and passed down by many tribes.
5. After reading, have the students fill out the Invisible Warrior worksheet (either as a group or individually).
6. Discuss the answers together as a class.

Activity 2 – The Three Sisters Legend:

1. Begin by activating students' existing knowledge about stories. The following are examples of questions you can ask
 - a. What is a story? How is a story told?
 - b. Who tells stories?
 - c. What makes a good story?
2. Introduce the term “oral traditions” (a community’s cultural & historical traditions passed down by word of mouth or example from one generation to another). Ask students to consider why stories would be spoken vs. written down. Are the stories of their own lives written, spoken or recorded in other ways? Who tells them? Who are they for?
3. Share the information from the Backstory section with students
4. Explain that the students will now read The Three Sisters Legend. Almost every tribe has some version of this legend, but it varies from tribe to tribe. The version they will read is one from the Oneida and Iroquois people.
5. Pass out the accompanying worksheet Three Sisters worksheet. Facilitate a class discussion that allows students to share what they know about corns, beans, and squash (examples could be: corn – tall plant, kernels grow on ears, yellow in color, etc.). Instruct students to list the items in the chart.
6. Pass out copies of the story and read the story together as a group or divide the students into groups and have them read the story. While reading through the story have the students record the characteristics of each sister in their chart on the Three Sisters Discussion Worksheet.
7. After the groups have read and discussed, have the groups or individual students share the characteristics of each sister (plant) with the rest of the class. They should also decide which crop each sister in their legend represents.
8. As a class, discuss how the legend relates to how the three sisters can help each other when planted.

The Invisible Warrior Story

Adaptation as retold by Lin Donn

Once upon a time, a long time ago, there lived a great warrior. The people told many stories about this strange and wondrous warrior. One story told of his great power of invisibility. That meant he could wander among the enemies of the tribe and hear all of their war plans! Another story told of his great loneliness. The only person who could see the invisible warrior was his sister. As much as he loved her, he longed for a wife. The invisible warrior wanted a wife who was gentle and truthful. He vowed he would not marry until he found a maiden, someone besides his sister, who could *truly* see him.

He used a trick to weed out the liars. He had his sister lead each maiden towards him as he headed home pulling his sled. As instructed, his sister asked each maiden if she could see the invisible warrior. Oh yes, nearly all replied. And what is he pulling? His sled they answered. Everyone knew that! How is the sled tied she would ask? Here the answers varied. One said with strong rope. Another said with strong vines. Still another said with strong leather. Since none of these answers was correct, the invisible warrior knew that each maiden had lied.

Maiden after maiden attempted to marry the famous warrior but none passed the test. The invisible warrior thought about talking to the chief. The chief had three daughters. Perhaps he could marry one of them. But the warrior had heard that the three sisters were mean. Truthfully, the two oldest sisters were as cruel as the warrior had heard. The youngest, however, was kind and gentle.

Jealous of her beauty, her sisters rubbed her face with hot coals, scarring her face. They cut her long hair. They made her do all the work, theirs as well as her own. If she refused, they told lies about her to their father. The youngest was too gentle, and perhaps too afraid to complain.

Now, although the invisible warrior did not wish to marry any of the chief's daughters, they all wanted to marry him. He was a warrior and magical besides. The two oldest sisters came to the meeting place. One said his sled was tied with a strong braid of human hair. The other said it was tied with mighty branches. Since neither answer was correct, the warrior, with great relief, sent both girls back to their father.

When her work was done for the day, the youngest sister also came to the meeting place, just as the sun was setting. When asked how his sled was tied, her face lit with pleasure. "With a rainbow," she answered softly. Only the invisible warrior could see what he used to pull his sled. It may not, after all, have been a rainbow. But he had looked into the heart of the youngest daughter. With joy, he knew he had found his maiden at last.

He asked her to take her seat in his tent and be his wife. As time passed, the chief's youngest daughter gave birth to a strong son. Her hair grew long. Her scars disappeared. Her life was full and happy.

To her, the warrior was not invisible. As *anyone* could see, if they simply looked, her warrior was the most wonderful man in the world! The invisible warrior and his wife lived happily together for the rest of their lives.

As for the two ugly sisters, they lived together in a tent of their own making – unmarried, unloved and ignored. As the years went on, many stories were told of the ugly sisters. When maidens heard the stories, they vowed never to be mean again.

The Invisible Warrior Worksheet

- 1.) Who are the characters in the story?

- 2.) What is the problem in the story? What does the Invisible Warrior want?

- 3.) What trick did the Invisible Warrior create to weed out the liars, or the people who could not see him?

- 4.) Describe the two older sisters.

- 5.) Describe the youngest sister.

- 6.) What is the outcome or end result of the story?

- 7.) Why was this story a good story to tell?

- 8.) Does this story remind you of another story you know?

The Three Sisters Legend

An oral account by Lois Thomas of Cornwall Island, Canada

Once upon a time very long ago, there were three sisters who lived together in a field. These sisters were quite different from one another in their size and also in their way of dressing. One of the three was a little sister, so young that she could only crawl at first, and she was dressed in green. The second of the three wore a frock of bright yellow, and she had a way of running off by herself when the sun shone and the soft wind blew in her face. The third was the eldest sister, standing always very straight and tall above the other sisters and trying to guard them. She wore a pale green shawl, and she had long, yellow hair that tossed about her head in the breezes.

There was only one way in which the three sisters were alike. They loved one another very dearly, and they were never separated. They were sure that they would not be able to live apart.

After awhile a stranger came to the field of the three sisters, a little Indian boy. He was as straight as an arrow and as fearless as the eagle that circled the sky above his head. He knew the way of talking to the birds and the small brothers of the earth, the shrew, the chipmunk, and the young foxes. And the three sisters, the one who was just able to crawl, the one in the yellow frock, and the one with the flowing hair, were very much interested in the little Indian boy. They watched him fit his arrow in his bow, saw him carve a bowl with his stone knife, and wondered where he went at night.

Late in the summer of the first coming of the Indian boy to their field, one of the three sisters disappeared. This was the youngest sister in green, the sister who could only creep. She was scarcely able to stand alone in the field unless she had a stick to which she clung. Her sisters mourned for her until the fall, but she did not return.

Once more the Indian boy came to the field of the three sisters. He came to gather reeds at the edge of a stream nearby to make arrow shafts. The two sisters who were left watched him and gazed with wonder at the prints of his moccasins in the earth that marked his trail.

That night the second of the sisters left, the one who was dressed in yellow and who always wanted to run away. She left no mark of her going, but it may have been that she set her feet in the moccasin tracks of the little Indian boy. Now there was but one of the sisters left. Tall and straight she stood in the field not once bowing her head with sorrow, but it seemed to her that she could not live there alone. The days grew shorter and the nights were colder. Her green shawl faded and grew thin and old. Her hair, once long and golden, was tangled by the wind. Day and night she sighed for her sisters to return to her, but they did not hear her. Her voice when she tried to call to them was low and plaintive like the wind.

But one day when it was the season of the harvest, the little Indian boy heard the crying of the third sister who had been left to mourn there in the field. He felt sorry for her, and he took her in his arms and carried her to the lodge of his father and mother. Oh what a surprise awaited here there! Her two lost sisters were there in the lodge of the little Indian boy, safe and very glad to see her. They had been curious about the Indian boy, and they had gone home with him to see how and where he lived. They had liked his warm cave so well that they had decided now that winter was coming on to stay with him. And they were doing all they could to be useful.

The little sister in green, now quite grown up, was helping to keep the dinner pot full. The sister in yellow sat on the shelf drying herself, for she planned to fill the dinner pot later. The third sister joined them, ready to grind meal for the Indian boy. And the three were never separated again.

The Three Sisters Worksheet

Name: _____

1.) List facts and characteristics or traits about each of the Three Sisters crops.

Corn	Beans	Squash

2.) List characteristics of each of the Three Sisters from the legend you read.

Sister #1	Sister #2	Sister #3

3.) Which crop does each sister in the legend represent?

Sister #1= _____. Explain why you think this.

Sister #2= _____. Explain why you think this.

Sister #3= _____. Explain why you think this.

4.) How do the three sisters support each other?

5.) Why is this a good story to tell? Why do you think it was passed down from generation to generation?