GRADE 7-8: LANGUAGE

FAMILY STORIES AND ORAL TRADITIONS

**Purpose:** To listen in order to understand and respond appropriately to Canada’s First Nations, Métis and Inuit People, and to value a legacy of oral tradition. Students will reflect on the traditional oral stories of First Nations, Métis and Inuit People in order to identify their strengths as listeners and speakers and then create their own family story.

**Estimated time:** Two 60 minute classes

**Resources required:**
- Chart paper
- Talking Stick—an ornate or substantial piece of wood, sometimes a small staff used by Aboriginal People in discussions. It is a symbol of authority and respect, as only the person holding the stick is allowed to speak. The stick is passed from one speaker to the next and allows everyone the chance to be heard. (See thrasherarts.files.wordpress.com/2007/10/talkingstick.JPG)

**Resources included:**
- Blackline master

**Activity:**
1. Ask students to explain how they have learned about their family's history. Discuss this with the whole class.
   a. In many cases, students will have learned about their family history through oral stories; some assisted by photographs, told by their parents, guardians and other family members. The teacher can briefly share their family story as an example for the class. Students can share their family story as an example, but keep in mind they will be creating their own family story later on in the class.

2. Once sharing is complete, explain to students that in First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures, the oral tradition of storytelling is valued as a means to pass on an account of history and spirituality, as well as lessons on morals, values and life skills to future generations. These stories connect Aboriginal People with their past and future. Explain to students the differences between First Nations, Métis and Inuit People, if they are unaware, as well as myth, fable, legend and folktale.
   a. **First Nations:** The acceptable term used to refer to the collective nations of Canada’s first people. It’s a term that came into common usage in the 1970s to replace the word “Indian,” which many people found offensive. Although the term First Nation is widely used, no legal definition of it exists. Among its uses, the term “First Nations People” refers to the Indian people in Canada, both status and non-Status. Many Indian people have also adopted the term “First Nation” to replace the word “band” in the name of their community.
   b. **Métis:** A distinct group of people with a separate culture and language that grew out of French or Scottish fur trappers marrying Aboriginal women.
   c. **Inuit:** Aboriginal People in northern Canada, who live above the tree line in Nunavut, Northern Quebec and Labrador. The word means “people” in the Inuit language—Inuktitut. The singular of Inuit is Inuk.
   d. **Myth:** Myths are narratives that serve to explain a phenomenon or custom. They take place long ago, before and during the creation of the earth and people. Myths usually have non-human characters as the main characters. Myths are usually sacred to the people.
   e. **Fable:** Fables are fiction. The main purpose of a fable is to teach a lesson or a moral to the audience. The animals can be animals or humans.
   f. **Legend:** Legends are considered to be true. But they take place in a world that we would recognize, the earth as we know it today. The main characters tend to be human and the stories are seen as secular rather than sacred.
   g. **Folktale:** Folktales are considered to be untrue and have human or non-human characters. Most of these stories take place in a symbolic setting.

3. Next, students are going to hear three Aboriginal stories that have been passed down orally through generations. Students will hear these as a preface to writing their own story.
4. The three stories are as follows:
   b. Metis-Cree, “How the People Hunted the Moose,” from The Native Stories from Keepers of the Animals, by Joseph Bruchac
   c. Inuit “The Wolf and the Caribou,” from Never Cry Wolf by F. Mowat (1963)

**Educator’s Note:** Teachers may invite an elder into the classroom to share a traditional oral story with the class. Elders have a wide range of knowledge that can expand students’ insight beyond the perspective of written oral traditions.

The elder develops a positive identity within the classroom with significant wisdom and experience to share.
5. Pre-reading steps:
   a. Break students up into three groups and assign each group a different story. Students will hear the title of the story and predict what they think it is about.
   b. Students will identify and define vocabulary words they are unfamiliar with.

6. Students will read the story. Provide each group with a print-out of the story.
   a. Have students provide a summary of the story. Ensure students understand the series of events.

7. To judge student comprehension, have them answer the following questions on chart paper:
   a. What is the setting of the story?
   b. Who are the characters in the story?
   c. What events take place in the story?
   d. What do the characters learn in the story?

8. In their groups ask students to brainstorm and discuss the meaning of the story. Ask them to determine what valuable lesson they feel the story passes on to future generations. Encourage students to express this information through point form notes on the chart paper.

9. When students have finished their discussions and filled out their chart paper, bring the class back together.

10. Ask groups to stand and explain their chart paper to the class.

11. When presentations are complete, explain to students that they are now going to create individual myths, similar to the Aboriginal stories they heard, about an event in their family's past. Students will have time to work on their family stories in this class. They will present their stories in the following class.

12. Before writing, brainstorm ideas for a family myth as a class. Discuss possible characters, events, settings, etc. Encourage students to be creative.

13. Students can start to create their stories by making point form notes on the who, what, when, where, why and how of their stories.

14. When students have completed their point form notes, ask them to create a good copy of their story in paragraph form.

15. Completed myths will be presented during the next class and handed in to the teacher.

16. During the next class, students will sit in a talking circle to share their stories.
   a. Chairs are arranged for the talkers to sit in a circle, with a space forming a channel that opens to the east.
   b. One of the participants, who will begin the talking circle, carries a talking stick.
   c. Starting south of east, as the stick is passed to the left, the privilege of speech moves from one to the other in a clockwise direction around the circle. The person holding the stick has the right to speak. Time taken may be as long as the person wishes—all others respect the person's right to speak and will not interrupt.
   d. When the speaker has finished, the stick is passed to the next person on the left. After the circle has been completed any member of the circle may request the stick and speak again.

17. Once the students are done sharing, they will hand in their stories to the teacher.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Using First Nations Literature in the Classroom: olc.spsd.sk.ca/de/resources/firstnationsliterature/oraltradition.html
- Learning to Give: learningtogive.org/lessons/unit303/lesson1_attachments/2.html
- Aboriginal Resources: www.scs.sk.ca/cyber/elem/learningcommunity/6/1/curr_content/aboriginal_res/supplem.htm
BLACKFOOT- EARTH DIVER

Long ago there was a time when water covered the entire world. Napi the creator wanted to know what happened below all of this water. He sent a duck, an otter, then a badger, but all came up with nothing. Finally, a muskrat dove beneath the water and was down a very long time. He returned with a ball of mud in his paws. Napi took the lump and blew on it until it dried and was transformed into the earth. He molded the hills, valley, and mountains with his hands. He created groves in the earth for rivers and lakes. The first people were molded from this earth and Napi taught men and women how to hunt and to live. Once Napi felt his work was complete, he climbed up to a mountain peak and disappeared.


THE WOLF AND THE CARIBOU
A STORY ADAPTED FROM THE INIUT OF CANADA

Long ago, there was a man and a woman. There were no other animals on earth. The woman dug a big hole in the ground. In this hole, she started fishing in it. With her fishing pole, she pulled out all the animals of the earth. The last animal she pulled out of the hole was the caribou. The woman set the caribou free but asked for more caribou to come to earth. Soon the land was full of them. The people were happy.

Hunters only killed caribou that were big and strong. Soon, all that was left were caribou that were weak and the sick. And the people began to starve.

The woman had to make magic again. This time she called Amorak, the spirit of the wolf. She asked Amorak to kill the weak and the sick caribou, so that the herd would once again be strong.

The people realized that the caribou and the wolf helped each other. Although the wolf eats the caribou, it is the wolf that keeps the caribou strong.

Source: Inuit “The Wolf and the Caribou”, from Never Cry Wolf by F. Mowat (1963)
HOW THE PEOPLE HUNTED THE MOOSE

One night, a family of moose was sitting in the lodge. As they sat around the fire, a strange thing happened. A pipe came floating in through the door. Sweet-smelling smoke came from the long pipe and it circled the lodge, passing close to each of the Moose People. The old bull moose saw the pipe but said nothing, and it passed him by. The cow moose said nothing, and the pipe passed her by also. So it passed by each of the Moose People until it reached the youngest of the young bull moose near the door of the lodge.

“You have come to me,” he said to the pipe. Then he reached out and took the pipe and started to smoke it.

“My son,” the old moose said, “you have killed us. This is a pipe from the human beings. They are smoking this pipe now and asking for success in their hunt. Now, tomorrow, they will find us. Now, because you smoked their pipe, they will be able to get us.”

“I am not afraid,” said the young bull moose. “I can run faster than any of those people. They cannot catch me.” But the old bull moose said nothing more.

When the morning came, the Moose People left their lodge. They went across the land looking for food. But as soon as they reached the edge of the forest, they caught the scent of the hunters. It was the time of the year when there is a thin crust on the snow and the moose found it hard to move quickly.

“These human hunters will catch us,” said the old cow moose. “Their feet are feathered like those of the grouse. They can walk on top of the snow.”

When the Moose People began to run as the hunters followed them. The young bull moose who had taken the pipe ran off from the others. He was still sure he could outrun the hunters. But the hunters were on snowshoes, and the young moose’s feet sank into the snow. They followed him until he tired, and then they killed him. After they had killed him, they thanked him for smoking their pipe and giving himself to them so they could survive. They treated his body with care, and they soothed his spirit.

That night, the young bull moose woke up in his lodge among his people. Next to his bed was a present given to him by the human hunters. He showed it to all of the others.

“You see,” he said. “It was not a bad thing for me to accept the long pipe the human people sent to us. Those hunters treated me with respect. It is right for us to allow the human beings to catch us.”

And so it is to this day. Those hunters who show respect to the moose are always the ones who are successful when they hunt.

Source: Metis-Cree, “How the People Hunted the Moose”, from The Native Stories from Keepers of the Animals, by Joseph Bruchac