

## AMERICAN INDIAN STORYTELLING - WINTER

Curricular Area/Minnesota State Standards:

Language Arts - 1.1.2.2 - Retelling stories

1.1.3.3 - Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story

Question: Why did Ojibwe and Dakota people tell traditional stories?

Students will understand the concept of oral tradition, that values, humor, truth and history are transmitted through traditional stories. Students will exhibit listening and retelling skills applied to American Indian traditional stories.

Learner Outcomes:

After participating in teacher-led discussion and activities the student will be able to:

1. State that winter is the proper time for storytelling in American Indian Culture.
2. List at least three reasons why traditional stories are told.
3. Know the role elders play in transmitting information.
4. Demonstrate listening skills and retelling skills in repeating a story they have heard.

Teacher Background Information

It is largely through oral traditions that American Indian cultures have been preserved and shared through the generations. These stories express values and beliefs, what it means to be human, our need to know why things are the way they are, and how to conduct ourselves to live in a good way.

These beliefs and traditions connect people to the land, plant life, and all living creatures, and the mysteries of birth, life, death and the spirit world.

Like many events in American Indian culture there is a proper time and place for all activities. Traditional Storytelling is reserved for the winter months for many Tribal Nations. This was a practical choice given the fact that during the other seasons people were busy growing, gathering and hunting food. It was in the winter, with the long dark evenings, the snow and wind blowing outside, that telling stories was a way to entertain and teach the children. Another reason that is sometimes shared deals with the fact that many traditional stories contain animal characters. To be respectful people waited until the winter when animals hibernate or become less active so they cannot hear themselves being talked about.

To have a storyteller tell you a story is like receiving a gift. To be respectful, a gift of tobacco is offered to the storyteller before the story begins. The storyteller will often

take the tobacco outside and place it on the earth or throw it in the fire as an offering to the spirits of the story.

Many Ojibwe stories are about a person with both human and mystical characteristics his name is Way-na-boo-zhoo. Some people refer to him as half man/half spirit. He has many human like characteristics but could also change into different things like a tree or an animal. He makes mistakes at times but learned from those mistakes so he could accomplish things and become better at living in harmony with the Earth. Way-na-boo-zhoo has been looked upon as a hero by the Ojibwe and his stories have been told for many generations.

American Indian oral traditions include personal and family stories, creation stories, tribal history, and stories of explanation. In recent years, some of the stories have been put into written form. Rendered into English, the stories sometimes lose some of the original humor and meaning.

American Indian stories should not be trivialized by referring to them as myths, tall tales or fables. These categories prevent students from fully understanding the vital role played by oral tradition in American Indian cultures.

### Student Activity

Divide class into small groups. Pass out "Story Organization " sheets.

The teacher will tell the traditional story. *Muskrat and Beaver Trade Tails* is provided and is a short story. Learn the elements of the story and tell the story to your students. (Have the students turn their papers over so they are not looking at them during the story.)

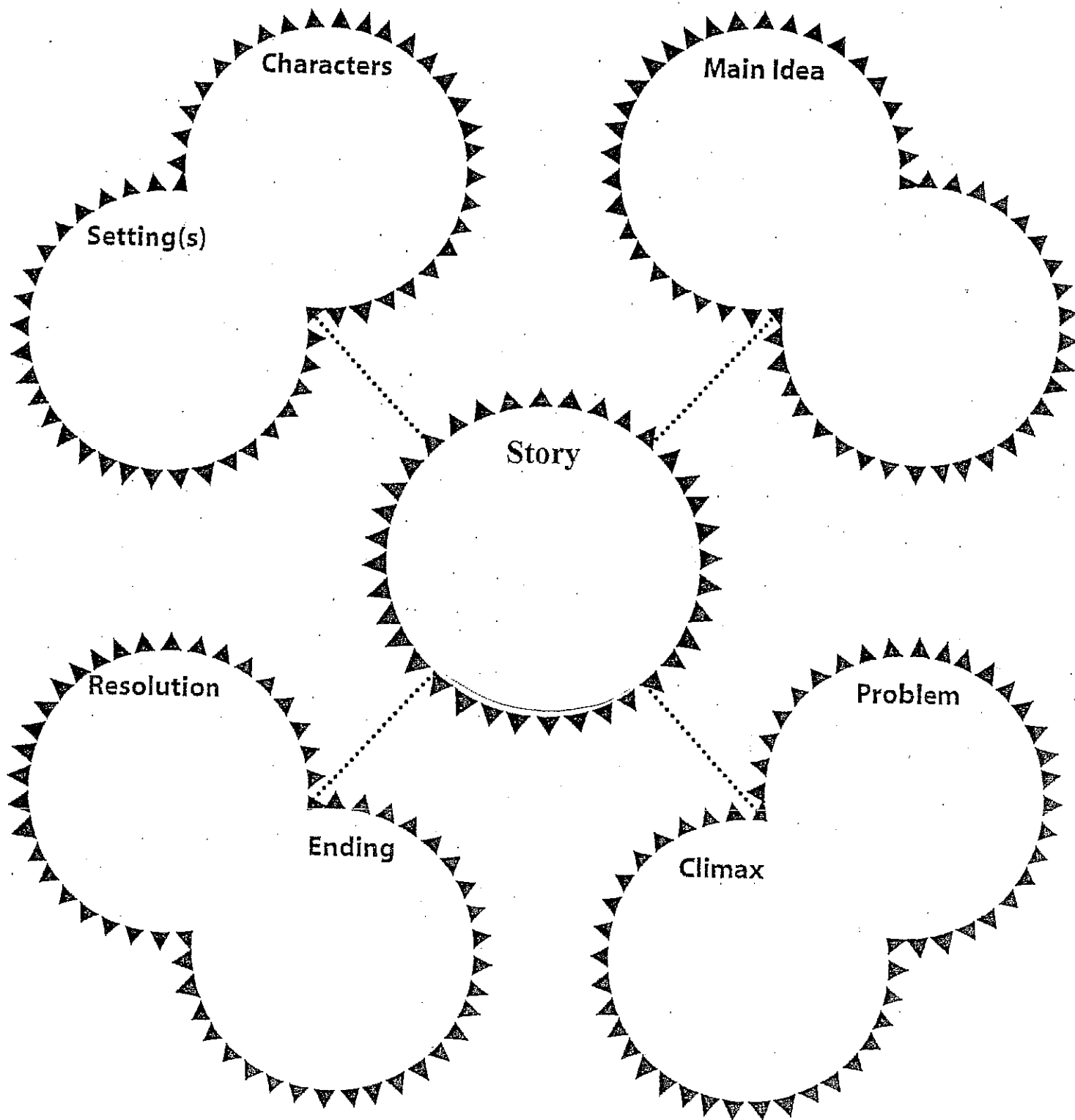
Discuss the key points of this story with the class.

Have students fill out their story organizer to help them remember the key points of the traditional story.

Assign the role of "cuer" and reteller. The "cuer" asks the reteller to tell everything s/he can remember from the story. As the reteller mentions the parts of the story the "cuer" helps keep the story in sequence.

After the allotted time, each group can present their version of the traditional story to the class.

# Story Organization



# MUSKRAT AND BEAVER TRADE TAILS

*An Ojibway Story Told by Collins Oakgrove*

Today I am going to tell you a story about two animals—Oh-shusk, the Muskrat, and Amik, the Beaver.

A long, long time ago, Oh-shusk, the Muskrat, had a great big fat tail, and Amik, the Beaver, had a little funny tail. As you all know, today it is different.

But, as the story goes, Oh-shusk used to get up every morning and go down to the water. On his house, he would dive into the water and swim away. Amik, the Beaver, he would stand there and watch. And he would say "Oh, I wish I had that big beautiful tail. He was really envious of Oh-shusk, the Muskrat.

This is what Oh-shusk would do with his tail. He would splash in the water. Then he would dive. Down he would go swimming under the water. Then he would climb up to the top where Amik was standing, and shake himself off. Oh-shusk would say, "Oh, I just love my tail. Do you love my tail? And Amik would say, "Oh, I wish I had a tail like that! Then Amik said to Oh-shusk, "Can I borrow your tail? And Oh-shusk would say, "No, no. Ga-ween!!. This is the only tail I have and I can't loan it to you. What will I do?"

And Amik would say, "Well, if you can loan me your tail just for one dive I'll give it right back to you. And Oh-shusk would say "I don't know. Maybe. Well, let me think about it. Let me make one more dive. " So Oh-shusk got into the water and splashed his tail. And Amik started chasing him all over the water. Pretty soon he shook himself off and said, "Oh, What a good dive.!" And Amik would say "Please, please can I use your tail? Just once? I'll give it right back to you. And Oh-shusk said, "Well, O.K., I'll give you my tail but you have to give it right back after one dive."

So they traded tails.

And Oh-shusk said, "Now you have to give it right back after you do one dive. I'm only doing you a favor. You can dive and I'll follow you. "

So Amik splashed in the water. He was swimming around and then he came up. He shook himself off and wiped his face.

Oh-shusk said, "Give my tail back to me. And Amik said, "I like your tail. I want to do one more

dive. Then I will give it back. So Amik splashed the water and down he went. And Oh-shusk with Beaver's little tail dove down and chased Amik. He caught up with him and said to Amik, "Give my tail back to me. But Amik replied, "I like your tail. I don't want to give it back." And he swam away.

Today, little old Oh-shusk has a funny tail that belongs to Amik, the Beaver. Amik has a big beautiful tail that belongs to Oh-shusk. That happened a long, long time ago.

You know, you should never give away anything that belongs to you that you use everyday, you may never get it back!!