



Lesson 2.3 “Oral Tradition in the Abenaki Community”

Unit 2: The Abenaki Before 1600

Lesson Objectives

- Students will examine the lessons found in the oral traditions of the Abenaki people.
- Students will tell a prepared personal story to an audience.
- Students will compare the experience of oral and written storytelling.

Lesson Competencies

- I can determine the central message/lesson/theme of a text and support my interpretation (saying why my evidence is accurate and convincing). (ELA 2)
- I can gather and organize information, and orally deliver short and longer presentations for different purposes and audiences, adding visual/graphic/audio enhancements when appropriate for clarifying the message. (ELA 7)
- I can integrate information, distinguish relevant-irrelevant information (e.g., fact/opinion), and (visually, orally, in writing) present what was learned. (ELA 8)

Essential Questions

How has New Hampshire been shaped by many voices?

Focus Questions

How did Abenaki traditions reflect their way of life and beliefs?

Estimated Time Two 40-minute class sessions

Materials & Equipment

“Abenaki Stories” worksheet
“[Gluskabe Creates Companions](#)” story recording from the “Moose on the Loose” website, Unit 2 [Find It!](#) page.
“Storytelling in Native American Communities” quote for projection
“Storytellers’ Helpful Hints” worksheet with “Storytellers’ Helpful Hints: Your Story” worksheet on the reverse
Class set of “Oral and Written Tradition Venn Diagram” worksheet



Educator Introduction & Rationale

The Abenaki use an oral tradition to educate their people and to retain their history and culture. Many of these stories originated before written language and have persevered through generations. Modern storytellers are sharing the legends and lessons more widely, allowing children across the world access to tales that encourage a respect and reverence for nature, for community, and for family. These tales contain wisdom meant to teach essential survival skills, to introduce problem-solving strategies, and to carry a message of an identity before later arrivals, like Europeans, to North America. Despite the challenges of having no written record for thousands of years, many stories remain, as vibrant and relevant as ever. Reference the [Educator Overview](#) for more information.

This is the third lesson in Unit 2: The Abenaki Before 1600. It is designed to be completed in two 40-minute class sessions. The lesson can stand alone from the unit; however, completion of the learning objectives in lesson 2.1 “People of the Dawn” is recommended before students move through the activities in this lesson so that students are familiar with the basic aspects of the Abenaki people. Please note, unit vocabulary and definitions are at the end of this document. You may wish to preview them with your students.

In this lesson, students consider what storytelling means to a culture and how the Abenaki use oral tradition as a way of preserving history, governing morality, and solving problems through stories passed down through generations. Students discuss lessons they see in an Abenaki story and prepare a personal story to tell to an audience. After they perform their story for the class, they compare and contrast the experience of written and oral storytelling.

A reinforcement activity is suggested for students who will benefit from more time with the concepts and skills in the lesson. Two extension activities are suggested for students who are ready to learn more about Abenaki oral tradition or would like to practice storytelling techniques. Please adapt all materials in this lesson, as necessary, to meet the needs of the students in your classroom.

Learning Activity

Activation

An Abenaki story. Distribute the “Abenaki Stories” worksheet and instruct students to listen for lessons that the story teaches. Play the recording of “[Gluskabe Creates Companions](#).” Find the story on the “Moose on the Loose” website on the Unit 2 [Find It!](#) page. What lessons did students identify while listening to the story? Discuss as best for your class.

Discussion

Winter storytelling. Project the quote “Storytelling in Native American Communities.” Read together and discuss. Inform students:

- During storytelling, the history of a people and their genealogy would be passed along from one generation to the next, word for word.
- Some of these stories were first passed along thousands of years ago, and they endure in everyone who hears and shares the tales today.
- The Abenaki are one of many cultures around the world who use oral traditions and crafting to communicate their culture more than written tradition.

Why is storytelling used? Ask students to use the quote, the story, and any personal knowledge they have to brainstorm for one minute with a partner why the Abenaki might use storytelling in their culture. Discuss together, writing ideas on the board.

Possible outcomes:

- preserve oral history and culture
- entertainment
- share survival tips
- give nature lessons
- teach values and encourage morality
- connect together through shared experiences
- help create identity

Listen to “Gluskabe Creates Companions” again to reflect on the purpose of storytelling with this now-familiar example. As they listen, ask students to think about how oral traditions and written traditions are different and the same.

Student Reading

Storytelling in Abenaki culture. Supplement the Direct Instruction by having students read Unit 2: Learn It! “[Abenaki Culture](#),” page 5.

Guided Practice

Become a storyteller. To deepen their understanding of the art of storytelling and the role it plays in cultures that use oral history, students will select, practice, and tell a personal story of their own. Have them think of a personal or family story they might tell the class. Guide their thinking by sharing the following list of story starters, although emphasize this is not a complete list—just a brainstorm starter. They can tell whatever appropriate story they would like.

- What was the most surprising gift you ever received?
- What is the best gift you ever gave someone else?
- What is the scariest/most difficult/most dangerous thing you ever tried to do?
- What is something you lost that either you never found or that you found a long time later?
- What is your most embarrassing moment?

Give students the “Storytellers’ Helpful Hints” worksheet and model telling a personal story for them. If this is not possible, search on the internet for Joseph or James Bruchac and Abenaki storytelling and share one of these stories with students. There are many videos of this father and son telling traditional Abenaki stories.

Teaching Tip: This is a good spot to pause if you will divide the lesson between teaching periods.

Create pairs of students. Have them choose their personal stories and work through the back part of the “Storytellers’ Helpful Hints: Your Story” worksheet. When they are ready, they should tell each other their stories. Reinforce that although it may feel uncomfortable at first, the more practice they have in telling their story, the more comfortable they will be. Circulate to assist students and ensure their personal stories are appropriate for the classroom.

Independent Practice

Roles of the listener and the storyteller. Remind students of the role of the storyteller and the role of the listener. The listening student can give feedback and ask questions which may prompt the teller to add some details and do some additional remembering about what happened. The listener might ask:

- What were you thinking when you decided to climb the big tree?
- What could you see or hear or smell when you realized the problem?
- How did you feel when you realized you lost your grandfather’s watch?
- What exactly happened that made you fall off your bike?
- How did you decide to get that particular gift for your sister?

The listener should identify the storyteller skills they see in the speaker's story. If students would like help remembering their story, they can draw a series of simple pictures or jot a series of words for the sequence of events that they can use as prompts as they tell the story. If possible, give homework for students to practice their story with different audiences and prepare them for a performance for the whole class.

Formative Assessment

Showtime. Get students ready to perform their personal story for small groups, the whole class, or the teacher, as is best for your class. If appropriate, record the performances. Have as many students tell their stories to the entire class as you have time for or spread the stories out over a series of days. Audience members' comments should reflect the storytelling techniques learned.

Reflection

The experience of writing and telling. Provide students with "Oral and Written Traditions Venn Diagram" worksheet. Ask them to think about their experiences planning and writing their stories and the experience of telling the story to an audience. Consider posting these prompt questions to guide their reflections as they complete the worksheet:

- What did the experiences have in common?
- What changed between the writing and telling?
- What would have been different if the audience had only been given the written version?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of each method?

Reinforcement

1. **Comparing written and oral storytelling.** List some of students' favorite picture books. Are there stories most students know without having read them in a book? Distribute the "Oral and Written Traditions Venn Diagram" worksheet. What purposes has storytelling served in their lives? How does oral tradition differ from the written tradition? Which do they prefer? Have students work in groups to complete the Venn diagram. Share as best for your class.

Extension

1. **Our story.** Students contact a local historical society or other community organization to seek out community stories. They then record or retell the story in an oral, written, and/or visual presentation.
2. **Traditional storytelling.** Students research and read traditional stories from Abenaki or other cultures. See "Supporting Materials" on page 6 of this Educator Guide for resources.

Supporting Materials

New Hampshire Historical Society

"Gluskabe Creates Companions" story told by Joseph Bruchac, produced by the New Hampshire Historical Society, 1995.

Other Resources

Structure and inspiration for personal storytelling activity courtesy of New Hampshire State Council on the Arts' Heritage and Traditional Arts Program: sites.google.com/view/nhfolklessonplans/home

Storytelling in Native American Communities quote: "The winter solstice begins a season of storytelling and ceremony," Dennis Zotigh. "Smithsonian Voices, December 19, 2017, www.smithsonianmag.com/blogs/national-museum-american-indian/2017/12/20/american-indian-winter-solstice/

Storytelling resources and stories:

- "James Bruchac Discusses Storytelling," www.youtube.com/watch?v=XswQVncWLdE
- Live Storytelling: James Bruchac "How the Chipmunk Got His Stripes," from the Folklife Center at Crandall Public Library, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYB1XtIc4ck>
- Bruchac, Joseph, *Flying with the Eagle, Racing the Great Bear: Stories from Native North America* (1993)
- Bruchac, Joseph and James Bruchac, *How Chipmunk Got His Stripes* (2001)
- Bruchac, Joseph, *The Faithful Hunter: Abenaki Stories As Told By Joseph Bruchac* (1988)
- Abenaki Legends, Myths, and Stories, <https://www.native-languages.org/abenaki-legends.htm>

Standards

“Moose on the Loose” Content:

- ✓ Students will understand that the Abenaki had a unique way of life characterized by customs, beliefs, and values. (3-5.T1.3)

“Moose on the Loose” Skills:

- ✓ Gathering, Interpreting, and Using Evidence (3-5.S1.2)
- ✓ Effective Historical Thinking (3-5.S3.1)

New Hampshire Social Studies Frameworks:

- ✓ US / NH History: World Views and Value systems and their Intellectual and Artistic Expressions (SS:HI:4:3.2, SS:HI:4:3.3)
- ✓ US / NH History: Social/Cultural (SS:HI:4:5.1)
- ✓ World History: Political Foundations and Developments (SS:WH:4:1.1)
- ✓ World History: World Views and Value Systems and their Intellectual and Artistic Expressions (SS:WH:4:3.1)
- ✓ World History: Social/Cultural (SS:WH:4:5.1)

NCSS Themes:

- ✓ Theme 1: Culture
- ✓ Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change
- ✓ Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

C3 Frameworks:

- ✓ Participation and Deliberation (D2.Civ.10.3-5)
- ✓ Processes, Rules, and Laws (D2.Civ.11.3-5)
- ✓ Human-Environment Interaction: Place, Regions, and Culture (D2.Geo.4.3-5)
- ✓ Change, Continuity, and Context (D2.His.2.3-5)
- ✓ Historical Sources and Evidence (D2.His.9.3-5, D2.His.11.3-5)
- ✓ Developing Claims and Using Evidence (D3.3.3-5, D3.4.3-5)

Common Core ELA Grade 3:

- ✓ Key Ideas and Details in Reading Literature (RL.3.2)
- ✓ Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity in Reading Literature (RL.3.10)
- ✓ Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas in Speaking and Listening (SL.3.4)
- ✓ Knowledge of Language (L.3.3, L.3.3a)
- ✓ Vocabulary Acquisition and Use (L.3.6)

Common Core ELA Grade 4:

- ✓ Key Ideas and Details in Reading Literature (RL.4.2)
- ✓ Craft and Structure in Reading Literature (RL.4.4)
- ✓ Integration of Knowledge and Ideas in Reading Literature (RL.4.9)
- ✓ Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity in Reading Literature (RL.4.10)
- ✓ Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas in Speaking and Listening (SL.4.4)
- ✓ Knowledge of Language (L.4.3a)
- ✓ Vocabulary Acquisition and Use (L.4.6)

Common Core ELA Grade 5:

- ✓ Key Ideas and Details in Reading Literature (RL.5.2)
- ✓ Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity in Reading Literature (RL.5.10)
- ✓ Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas in Speaking and Listening (SL.5.4)
- ✓ Knowledge of Language (L.5.3a)
- ✓ Vocabulary Acquisition and Use (L.5.6)

Lesson Vocabulary

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| Abenaki | (noun) Name used to refer to the indigenous people of the land now called New Hampshire |
| enunciation | (noun) Saying words or parts of words clearly |
| gestures | (noun) Hand or body movements that show ideas |
| Gluskabe | (noun) The central figure in many Abenaki legends; a kind and helpful figure with magical powers |
| morality | (noun) Words and actions that reflect good and honorable human conduct |
| N'dakinna | (noun) The word the Abenaki use to refer to their homeland |
| oral tradition | (noun) The practice of sharing knowledge through word of mouth and storytelling |
| pacing | (noun) How quickly one moves or speaks |
| tone | (noun) Speaking in a way to show a particular emotion |
| tradition | (noun) A well-known belief or custom shared by a group of people over many years |