

Exploring Origins

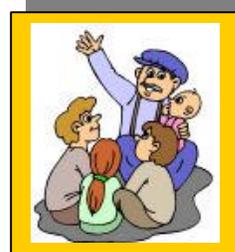
Exploring Stories of Origins

STUDENT TEXT and AUDIO

Storytelling Then and Now
Think back. Do you have early memories of stories told to you by a family member or a friend? If so, what memories do you have about these stories? Were they read to you from a book, or told aloud from memory?

Oral Storytelling

Stories come in all shapes and sizes. Some stories are meant to be told, not read. These stories come alive in the face, hands, and body movement of the storyteller. Many of these stories do not get written down. They are pieces of history, culture, and tradition that are passed from one generation to the next.



Stories and storytelling have a rich history. No one knows exactly where or when the practice of storytelling began. Many cultures like the Greeks, Romans, African Americans, and Native Americans have used stories to connect one generation to the next. Early mythological stories attempted to explain the origin of the universe or the origin of life. These myths were often about gods or other supernatural beings. The mythology of origins focused on the world and how everything in the world came to be. Later, stories often centered around humans, their relationship to nature, and their interaction with the cultural world around them.

Deanna Johnson-McGraw is a high school science teacher in Denver, Colorado. She is a member of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. Listen while Deanna shares two Native American Cherokee creation stories.

To hear the stories, click here



The first story is about how the Milky Way came to be.



The second story is about how the Pleiades were formed.



The above stories may be heard with RealPlayer audio. To download RealPlayer, visit the following Web site: http://www.real.com/products/player/index.html?src=macbeta

The Story: Is it a Myth, a Legend, or Folklore? Myths, legends, and folktales are all stories. Each has its own identity.

Myths

In today's common language, a myth is perceived as fiction and is regarded as something that is untrue. However, if you were someone who made the study of mythology your life's work, you would have a different definition. You would say that a **myth** is a special kind of story from the past that interprets some aspect of the world around us. Myths offer an explanation, interpretation, or meaning. This is different from legends and folklore.



To hear a Siberian creation myth that explains why the Earth has muddy, boggy places titled "Made from Mud" as told by Greg Rawls, [<click here>](#).



Legends

Legends are stories from the past about someone, some place, or something that is believed to have been historical. They attempt to offer factual information. One example of a North American legend is the "Legend of Sleepy Hollow" by Washington Irving.



To hear a storyteller's version of the Legend of Sleepy Hollow as told by Greg Rawls, [<click here>](#).



Folktales

Folktales are stories that are fiction and concern themselves exclusively with people or animals that act like people. These stories generally explore how folks or animals adapt to and cope with the world in which they live. A collection of folktales would be considered **folklore**.



To hear a Chinese folk tale that explains why cats and dogs are "Natural Enemies" as told by Jacinta Behne, [<click here>](#).



Living History

Before world cultures recorded their history in writing, oral story telling served as the primary means of preserving history and passing down knowledge. Anxious not to lose their rich heritage, most collective groups of people assigned one person to serve as a historian. This was a highly regarded social position that brought great responsibility. For these storytellers, truth in history was the goal. Their audience would accept no less.

Make it Personal

While capturing history is the goal of some storytellers, other storytellers rely on adapting each story to the time, place, and people to whom the story is being told. For them, storytelling is the art and creativity is their goal. Whatever the aim, most storytellers agree stories change with every telling. These changes, even if very slight, are what make the story personal.