

Nez Perce Legends

Code: EL1: LA, LS, SS, VA

Three Nez Perce legends – *Finding The Trail Through The Mountains*, *Snowshoe And Cottontail Rabbit*, and *East Country Boy* – are attached following the directions for these activities.

Finding The Trail Through The Mountains

Rationale:

This activity provides an opportunity for students to learn what a legend is and to think about how legends can teach lessons and transfer culture identity.

Vocabulary:

Nez Perce
Legend

Objective:

During this exercise students will listen to Nez Perce legends and discuss the story told.

Directions:

1. Read the legend to the group.
2. Discuss how the topics chosen for the legend demonstrate things that are important to the Nez Perce people (i.e., the animals, seasonal rounds and use of the trail to get to hunting, fishing, gathering locations). Natural themes dominate Indian legends revealing the vital link between aboriginal people and their natural environment. How does this relate to the Flight Trail?
3. Ask the students to dictate a legend that tells a story of their own. Students can draw pictures to help illustrate their story.

Teacher's note: Many groups of native people rely heavily on oral history to convey life's lessons. Legends become the vehicle for teaching children a whole range of lessons. They serve to teach them about their heritage, how to conduct routine daily activities, and to instill spiritual values. Reading these legends can also help non-native people better understand Nez Perce culture.

Snowshoe And Cottontail Rabbit

Rationale:

This legend introduces environments and the interaction of living things with these environments.

Directions:

1. Identify the major environments of the Columbia Plateau/mountain region, and list some of the resources found in each environment.
2. Identify the traditional Nez Perce homeland and develop an understanding of seasonal cycle of the Nez Perce. How does this relate to the Nez Perce using the trail to go on seasonal rounds and into buffalo country? How does this relate to use of the Flight Trail?
3. Identify the four basic life needs.
4. Identify examples of how the Nez Perce adapted to the environment to survive.
5. Identify examples of how plants and animals adapt to their environment, discuss the importance of biological diversity.
6. Discuss the cultural values, morals of the story.

Moral: It is possible to have friends and to remain friends with people that live in different places and have different life styles.

Activities:

1. Using a map of the Pacific Northwest, students will select a symbol and use it to outline the traditional Nez Perce homeland. They will make a key for the map and include the symbol in it.
2. Basic life needs: food, water, shelter, and space. These must occur in the quantity and quality required by a particular animal. Put three words on the chalkboard, (this could also be done in small groups) so that a column of words can be listed under each: people, pets, and wildlife. Ask the students what each of these need in order to live. Be sure students know the difference between pets and wildlife. After the lists are made, ask the students to look to see which ideas seem to go together into large ideas. For example, warmth might be combined with physical comfort and both might fit within the concept of shelter. Narrow down the list and come up with the essential survival needs of people, pets and wildlife. All organisms: food, water, shelter, space, arrangements, sunlight, soil, and air.
3. Discuss with the students the ways that the Nez Perce adapted to their environment in order to survive. For example, seasonal migrations for food following the trail, the tipi, the use of certain plants for medicines, foods, rivers for food and transportation, complete use of an animal (bones, hide, meat, etc.). This could extend to ways we adapt to our environment (logging, mining, farming, grazing).

East Country Boy

Rationale:

To show the dynamics of change and those elements that produce it, in relation to culture.

Directions:

1. Using a timeline, list five major changes that greatly influenced the Nez Perce culture.
 - (1.) Introduction of the horse, ca. 1730
 - (2.) Nez Perce first experienced diseases from the Anglo culture, 1781-1782
 - (3.) Influence felt from other tribes about the White man's religion, 1825
 - (4.) Lewis and Clark Expedition, 1805-06
 - (5.) European and American traders, 1807
 - (6.) Missionaries, 1836, in Lapwai
 - (7.) Nez Perce sign their first Treaty, 1855
 - (8.) Gold discovered, 1860
 - (9.) Nez Perce War, 1877.
2. Identify five major changes in the world in the last fifty years and how these changes have influenced the world.
3. Have an understanding of the changes in the life of the Nez Perce after the introduction of the horse. Identify four examples (means of travel, mobility, increased status through ownership, use as trade item, increased status through stealing horses from other tribes, hunting bison on the east plains, enhanced cultural contact with other tribes through trade. How many of these are related to their use of the Nez Perce Trail?
4. Understand the interaction between man and bison.
5. Be able to compare and contrast how the life style of the Nez Perce is different/same today from the traditional culture.
6. Be able to understand why the story was told and why it was considered important.

Moral: Beware of curiosity and the consequences of disobeying elders.

Activities:

1. As a class, make a time line on long narrow paper that will show at least five major changes that greatly influenced the Nez Perce culture. Spaces should be left between events so that in small groups students can illustrate these changes. This could be followed with a writing exercise on why the student thinks this was a big change. Discuss how both the Nez Perce and the groups causing the changes could have been handled things differently.

Lesson excerpted from:

And It Is Still That Way

Nez Perce National Historical Park Service

Alyze Cadez

Rt. 1 Box 100

Spalding, ID 83540

Finding The Trail Through The Mountains

At the time The People were coming to take the place of animals on earth, a boy was lost in the mountains. He wandered around trying to find his way back to his father and mother when he met Hah-hahts, the grizzly bear.

Now Itsi-yai-yai, the Coyote, had told the Bear that The People were coming to take possession of his territory. Bear was furious because he did not want to give up the land he loved.

When he saw the boy, the grizzly's eyes filled with hatred. He reared up on his hind legs. His teeth chomped together so that flecks of foam dribbled from his snarling lips as he lunged forward with his claws extended to shred the boy to pieces.

"So! A child of the Nee-Me-Poo has come to rob me of the land I love! With one blow of my paw I will kill him, and him I will devour." Bear growled until the mountains shook and echoed his anger.

The boy just stood there before him. He answered Bear with these calm words, "I can only die. Death is only part of life. I'm not afraid." Bear stopped short in solemn wonder.

"What is that?" he rasped. "You are a different creature from the Animals. They would cower at my words, but you have shown the bravery of Bear, the wisdom of Coyote, and the pride of Eagles. You are of a superior race, deserving these lands. My time has come. I must show you the provisions and secrets of your new home, and I will do so gladly."

In admiration now, the Bear flipped the boy onto his furry back and started into the higher mountains. Here he showed him pools and streams full of fish. He showed the boy the home of the Beavers, the Little People, who cut down trees and dammed the streams so fish could be caught more easily. He showed him the home of the Moose, the Elk, and the Deer.

Bear climbed the backbone of the highest mountains to show the boy the way to the other side where buffalo lived on the Plains toward the rising sun. Sometimes Bear would stand up on his hind legs to scratch a mark on the trunk of a tree so that all who came afterwards would know that he had been that way. Often the Bear and the boy could hear the voice of Itsi-yai-yai, the Coyote, urging them on, for Coyote liked to use his loud voice, while Bear had not been given a loud-talk tongue.

After the boy had seen the home of the buffalo, Bear brought him back along the trail through the mountains to the camas meadows of Oyiap (Weippe). He showed him the huckleberry, the chokecherry, and the serviceberry.

The boy thought that all he had seen was good.

After he had done all this, Bear took the boy to the brink of Kamiah Valley.

"Here your people are living," he said. "Go tell them what you have learned about this great land, the food that has been provided for them, and the trail that will take them across the mountains."

Bear disappeared then, and the boy returned to his people.

Snowshoe and Cottontail Rabbit

Once there lived Snowshoe Rabbit and Cottontail Rabbit, who were friends or brothers. Somehow, for some reason, at some time they went around this way, and that way. Then Snowshoe Rabbit got stranded in the mountains because of the weather--it began to snow, and he couldn't get back because it was quit deep. And that's how they spent the winter: Cottontail Rabbit was in the valley, and Snowshoe Rabbit was in the mountains.

That spring they met again. Snowshoe Rabbit said, "Well, my friend, you have gone through the winter. When I looked out this way toward the valley, it would be dark over there, it might be raining, and I used to say to myself, "I wonder how my friend is passing his time, and where he is." Cottontail Rabbit said, "That's the same thing I would do. I would look toward the mountain and watch; it was dark with storms, and the rain poured down. I wondered how you were living."

Snowshoe told him, "You, my friend, were thinking the wrong thing. I have a good home, and I would throw good wood into the fire and burn it. I lay with my back toward the fire, until the fire crumbled to charcoal and made the house warm and comfortable. That's the way I was living. And I would gather lots of food. That's how the living was--it was very pleasant throughout the mountains. But I wondered about you, and how you were spending your time."

Cottontail said, "Friend, you worried for nothing. As you might have seen from there, I had a good house where there are loose rocks. I would throw hackberry wood into the fire, and it would burn to charcoal. Then I would lie down with my back toward it and got warm. I lived well there."

Snowshoe said, "Yes, my friend, that's the way it will be with you. You, Cottontail, will live here in the lower country, and I will live in the mountains. We have learned that the best life for me is in the mountains, and on the other hand for you it is in the low country. From now on I will change my clothing. When it snows, I will put on the same color white so that nothing can see or find me. On the other hand, when spring comes I will put on new gray clothing so that nothing can find me easily. In this way I will live in the mountains, and in the same way you will spend time in the lowlands.

Snowshoe Rabbit has never come here since then. On the other hand, Cottontail Rabbit is right around here in the low country.

That's all.

Source: Narrated by Samuel M. Watters, recorded by Haruo Aoki and Deward Walker Jr. in Nez Perce Oral Narrative published in *Linguistics*: Vol. 104, The Regents of the University of California, 1989.

East Country Boy

There were two brothers. The elder took for his wife an eastern maiden, and they lived in the east country. They were four, the husband and wife, the younger brother and the wife's father. It developed that the younger brother became homesick. He would say to himself, "Ah me! I wish I could arrive in the west country now." The woman overheard him and she told her father, "My husband's brother is homesick. Just know I overheard him say, 'Ah me! I wish I could arrive in the west country now.'" Her father said to her, "Then wherefore do you let him pine for his homeland? Take him!" The woman then told her husband, "This is what my father said to me." The husband replied, "it is for us, then, to take him." Now they wrapped him in elk hide and mounted him or rather, packed him on an elk. They told him, "You must positively not struggle to free yourself even though you will hear a great din. You must not peek from the hide." He replied to them, "That I certainly will not do." Then the father told them, "You are to cross over five mountains and only there he may look about, but not on this side. Wild sheep, elk, buffaloes, and moose you are to take." Then they wrapped him in the hide and mounted him. They went. Now the younger brother heard, from within, the constant thundering of the herd all along the way. It was particularly noisy at the crossings because there the buffaloes and others would lose one another in the crowding. It was very, very noisy. There he said to himself as they went along, "Oh how I wish, oh, how I wish that I could see them even once." And now he gnawed a hole.

Here at home the old man kept count of their days spent in travel. "They must have reached there by this time." Now they crossed three mountains and were at the fourth. There, again, he heard them. Oh, the thundering of the herd! There he gnawed his way through- and saw them. Oh! Just in droves there were the buffaloes, wild sheep, moose, and elk. There, by his having seen them, they ran homeward pell-mell. They ran wildly and arrived back whence they had started. The old man said to himself, "I told them, 'positively do not let him see them; positively he must not peep,' and now he has disobeyed." They all returned and they stayed there for a long time. One day the woman overheard him again, "Ah me! I wish I could arrive in the west country now." The woman went to her father and said to him, "He is longing for his homeland very deeply again." The old man said to her, "It is only that if you wish to take him again then mount him on a buffalo bull. That which has tough and very thick skin between the shoulder blades. He will not bite through that easily." The woman told this to her husband and again they said to him, "We are taking you only once more, and you know already what will happen if you see the herd even once." He said to them now, "Positively not again will I become impatient; even if I want to see them I will absolutely not struggle." "Yes," the old man replied, "Yes, you speak good words. You are to go now." They wrapped him in a buffalo hide and mounted him on a bull. Thus they went again. Now he heard from within the thundering of the herd of buffaloes, wild sheep, and others as they traveled along. Again he thought, "I wish I could only see them. I wish I could only see them." There, again, going along he began to gnaw a hole. The hide was thick and tough.

Here the old man kept calculating the time that they had been gone. "They have reached there," he thought. "I wish they would cross the last mountain because then they could have those buffaloes, wild sheep, elk, and moose for all time. They have gone for the last time absolutely. If he returns never again will I send them, even if he pines for home. Now they arrived at the last mountain, and as they crossed he heard the thundering of the herd behind him. He exerted himself to the utmost and gnawed his way through. And he saw them. They were crossing in this direction, but oh! They came to a sudden halt, turned around at once, and ran never again to be brought back. All the elk, wild sheep, moose, and buffalo stayed there in the east country. Had they crossed the fifth mountain they

would have remained in the west country for all time. That is the reason why there have never been moose, wild sheep, buffalo and elk west of the mountain divide.

Source: Narrated by Wayi'latpu, recorded by Archie Phinney, in Nez Perce Texts, Columbia University Press, 1934, New York.