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**Warm-up 9/16: Read the following article from PBS about Native American oral tradition. Highlight or circle any words or phrases that you think suggest what the Native Americans value(d).**

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| http://www.pbs.org/circleofstories/images/spacer.gif**Honoring All Life**Native American stories are as varied as the trees on the Earth and yet have many common themes, whether told by the Inuit of Alaska or the Seminole of Florida. Traditional Native stories are based on honoring all life, especially the plants and animals we depend on, as well as our human ancestors.Indigenous storytelling is rooted in the earth. Years upon years of a kinship with the land, life, water and sky have produced a variety of narratives about intimate connections to the earth. In a call and response lasting through time, Native peoples have experienced a relationship of give and take with the natural world.In the basket of Native stories, we find legends and history, maps and poems, the teachings of spirit mentors, instructions for ceremony and ritual, observations of worlds, and storehouses of ethno-ecological knowledge. Stories often live in many dimensions, with meanings that reach from the everyday to the divine. Stories imbue places with the power to teach, heal and reflect. Stories are possessed with such power that they have survived for generations despite attempts at repression and assimilation.http://www.pbs.org/circleofstories/images/post_divider.gif**Life Lessons**Most stories talk about the living beings within a specific tribe’s homeland—the raven of the Pacific Northwest, the coyote from the desert, the buffalo of the Plains, the beaver of the Eastern woodlands. Stories explain why and how certain local plants and animals came to be, such as Narragansett storyteller Tchin’s lesson of why rabbits have such long ears. Other stories explain ceremony and ritual, such as Hoskie Benally’s story “The Five Sacred Medicines”.Prayers, songs and dances are all types of stories, which can be offered to honor the earth, or as Western Shoshone elder Corbin Harney describes it, the Nature Way. Some stories provide practical instructions on traditional living, such as Rosella Archdale’s lesson about preparing foods with reverence. Other stories tell about child rearing, friendship and love, hunting routes, bird migrations, family lineage, and prophecies that describe and predict major ecological, celestial and spiritual events.Some Native songs are sung in great cycles, containing over 100 songs for a specific ritual. The Mojave Creation songs, which describe cremation rituals in detail, are a collection of 525 songs and must be performed for the deceased to journey to the next world. These stories can take many days to be shared, and within these longer story-song cycles much information is given to instruct, entertain, and heal.Without our ancestors, we would not have the gift of life. Therefore, one of the most important and common themes among Native stories are creation stories, which are universal among all cultures. Native creation stories explain how life began on Earth and how a particular tribal nation came to be. They talk about spiritual and mythical origins within real, physical landscapes and outline the “original instructions” or natural laws of how to live in balance with creation.Above all, each Native story is a part of a greater whole, a continuum of stories that has neither a beginning nor an end. Each story in its own way fills in a section of the larger narrative, giving us a fuller sense of life. |
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