

Grade 5 English Language Arts

Week of November 30 – December 4

Lesson 5: First Nations Oral Tradition

The First Nations of Canada have a rich oral tradition.

For centuries, stories have been shared by elders, families, and friends. From ancient times to today, the oral tradition of passing on information through story and song continues.

Stories are told to help younger generations carry on traditions, to share knowledge about the world, and to learn how to be a positive and contributing member of a community.



Oral Traditions: <https://youtu.be/GZQ58pCur2k>

Stories Connect Us

Traditions and culture are shared through many ways such as storytelling, music, dance, art and food. Storytelling is a way to understand yourself, your community, and the world at large. It allows you to understand your heritage and helps us see how our past is still important today. For First Nations, as the original inhabitants of Canada, their stories are often very connected to the land.

They have stories about how to live off the land, how to respect the creatures of the land, and how to interact with each other. You will get to experience First Nations' stories in the upcoming pages in this lesson.

The Three Sisters & The Iroquois



The Iroquois (Hodeneshone) were traditionally agricultural people who lived along the eastern shores of Lake Ontario in Canada, and in northern New York State below the St. Lawrence River. The three sisters garden is a method of farming that the Iroquois used and shared with European settlers.

The three sisters in this story are corn, bean, and squash. See if you can figure out which sister is which when you read the upcoming story.

These plants grow exceptionally well together. The corn stalk grows straight and tall and this gives the bean plants something to wind around. Corn has a high need for nitrogen, and beans produce a high amount of nitrogen. The squash plant grows a lot of leaves and it covers the ground beneath the other two plants. This keeps the moisture locked in while keeping out weeds. The “cooperation” between these plants means that each sister can produce fully. These three vegetables are also very nutritious and continue to be an important part of the Iroquois diet.

The Story of the Three Sisters

Once upon a time, there were three sisters who lived together in a field. These sisters were quite different from one another in their size, shape, and way of dressing.

One of the three was a little sister, so young that she could only crawl at first, and if she wanted to stand up, she had to twine herself around her eldest sister. This sister wore velvet green with delicate tendril ribbons.

The second of the three sisters wore a frock of bright yellow and had a way of running off across the field when the sun shone and the soft wind blew in her face.

The third sister was the eldest. She was always standing very straight and tall above the other sisters trying to guard them.

There was only one way in which the three sisters were alike. They loved one another very much and were never separated. They were sure that they wouldn't be able to live apart.

After a while, a stranger came to the sister's field. It was a little Iroquois boy. He was as straight as an arrow and as fearless as the eagle that circled his head far above in the sky. He knew the way of talking to the birds and the small brothers of the earth, the mouse, the groundhog, the chipmunk, the squirrel, and the fox. The three sisters were very interested in this little Iroquois boy. They watched him fit his arrow in his bow, saw him carve a bowl with his knife, and wondered where he went at night.

Late that summer, the youngest sister in green velvet who couldn't stand up without the help of her big sister, disappeared. Her sisters mourned for her until the fall, but she did not return.

Once again, the little Iroquois boy came to the three sister's field. He came to gather reeds at the edge of the nearby stream to make arrow shafts. The two sisters who were left watched him and gazed at him with wonder at the prints of his moccasins marking his trail to the field.

That night, the second of the sisters disappeared. This time it was the sister who dressed in brilliant yellow and always wanted to run off across the field. She left no mark of her going but it may have been that she set her feet in the moccasin tracks of the little Iroquois boy.

Now, there was only one sister left. Tall and straight she stood in the field not once bowing her head with sorrow, but it seemed to her that she could not bear to live in her field alone. The days grew shorter and the night grew colder. Her green shawl faded and grew thin and old. Her hair once long and golden was now brown and tangled by the wind. Day and night, she sighed for her sisters to return to her, but they did not hear her. Her voice when she tried to call them was low and sad like the wind.

But one day when it was the season of the final harvest, the little Iroquois boy heard the crying of the third sister. He felt sorry for her so he took her in his arms and carried her to the lodge of his father and mother. Oh, what a surprise awaited her! Her two lost sisters were there in the lodge of the little Iroquois boy, safe, and very glad to see her.

They had been curious about the boy and they had gone home with him to see how and where he lived. They had liked his warm longhouse so well that they decided to stay there for the cold winter. And they were doing all they could to be useful.

The little sister in green, now quite grown up, was helping to keep the dinner pot full. The sister in yellow sat on the shelf drying herself for she planned to fill the dinner pot later. The third sister joined them, ready to grind some meal for the Iroquois family's bread.

Ever since then, the three sisters spend their spring and summers in the field together, and their winters in the longhouse, helping to feed the family of the little Iroquois boy. And the three have never been separated since.

Every child of today should know these three sisters and need them just as much as the little Iroquois boy did. The little sister is the bean who needs the eldest sister to keep her from crawling along the ground. The second sister is the squash, who has bright yellow flowers and tends to run away across the field. The eldest sister is the corn. Her kernels can be dried and ground up to make flour for bread. When the corn, beans, and squash are eaten, they provide a very nutritious meal with everything a person needs to be healthy.

Probable Source:

"The Native American story of the Three Sisters varies from tribe to tribe. This version of the story most likely stems from an oral account by Lois Thomas of Cornwall Island, compiled by students at Centennial College and found in *Indian Legends of Eastern Canada*."

Three Sisters Garden



The Three Sisters gardening technique is still popular today. Watch this video for details:

<https://youtu.be/1TA1QdQUEBE>

Your Turn!

You have read *The Three Sisters* once to get the gist of it. You are ready to complete questions and responses as you complete the second read.

The Three Sisters of a Story

Directions: Write down the answers to the following questions. Answer in full sentences.

1. What is the setting?

2. Describe the basic plot of the story

3. What is the conflict in the story?

4. What is theme of the story?

The Three Sisters Questions

Directions: Use this page to draw and colour a picture of the three sisters.
(Optional)

The Three Sisters Questions

Directions: Answer the questions below in full sentences. Use examples and evidence from the story to back your points. Also proofread your writing after you finish.

1. How would you describe the sisters' relationship? What evidence from the text tells you this?

2. When the sisters see the boy, do they have a good or bad impression of him? How do you know? What evidence is there in the story of this?

3. When you first read about the youngest sister disappearing, what did you think happen to her? How did you feel at this point of the story?

4. How does the oldest sister change as she stands alone?

5. Why do you think the Iroquois boy did not bring the oldest sister in earlier?
