

Native American Literature

Myths



The purpose of myths is to seek to explain or rationalize one or more aspects of the world or a society.



Myths usually have religious or supernatural elements and have a character that is immortal



Origin myth— a myth that explains how something began

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P3XoYZgvEH8>

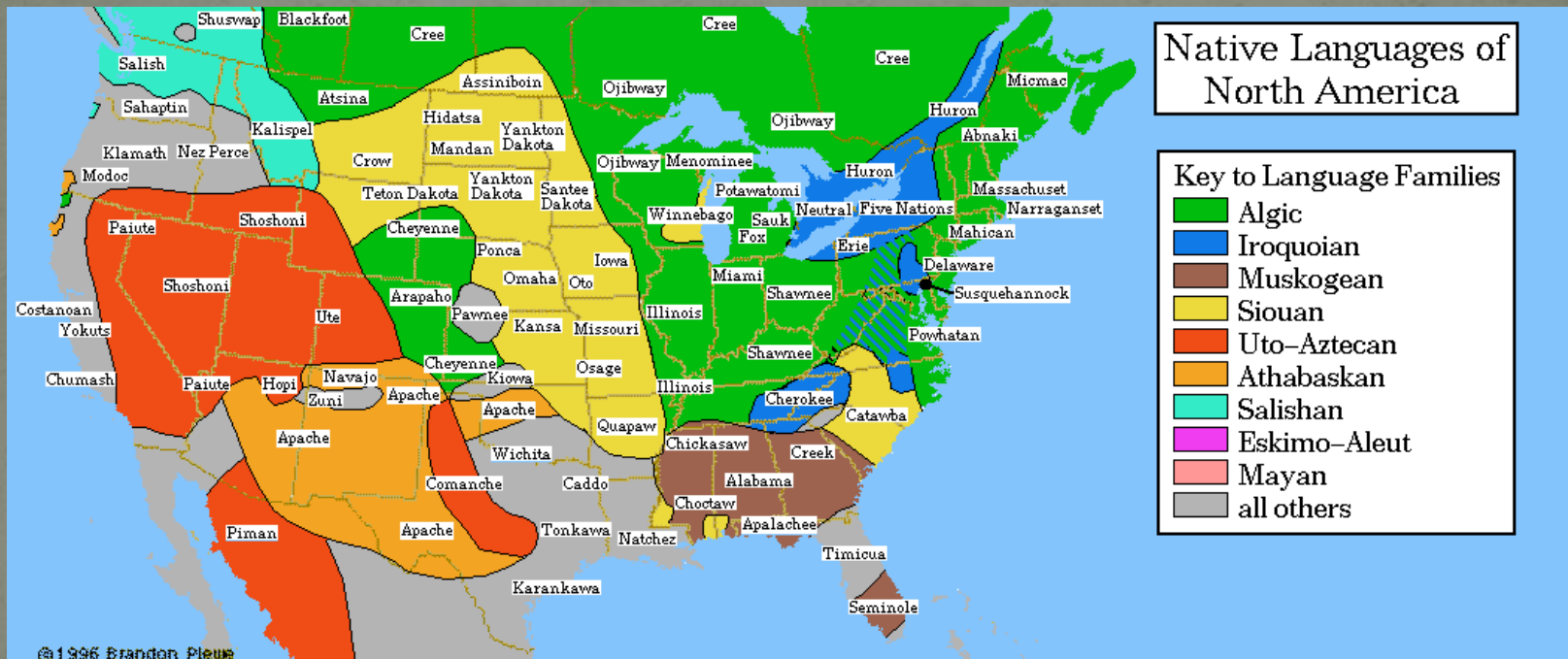
Creation Myths

- Many cultures around the world have stories about creation.
- Three Native American creations myths :
 - *The Earth on Turtle's Back* ~ Onondaga
 - *When Grizzlies Walked Upright* ~ Modoc
 - *Navajo Origin Legend* ~ Navajo

Oral language

- The languages of Native American tribes were never written down before the English arrived from Europe.
- Their stories were passed verbally from generation to generation.

Language of North America



Forgotten Languages



- The population of the native civilizations of the current territory of the United States fell from about 20 million to the present level of less than 2 million.
- Beyond the shrinking size of the ethnic populations, the languages have also suffered due to the prevalence of English among those of Native American ancestry.
- Most Native American languages have ceased to exist, or are spoken only by older speakers, with whom the language will die in the coming decades.

Remaining Speakers

- Only 8 indigenous languages of the area of the continental United States currently have a population of speakers in the U.S. and Canada large enough to populate a medium-sized town. Only Navajo still has a population of greater than 25,000 within the U.S.

Language	Family	Locations	Speakers
Navajo	Athabaskan	AZ, NM, UT	148,530
Cree	Algic	MT, Canada	60,000
Ojibwa	Algic	MN, ND, MT, MI, Canada	51,000
Cherokee	Iroquoian	OK, NC	22,500
Dakota	Siouan	NE, ND, SD, MN, MT, Canada	20,000
Apache	Athabaskan	NM, AZ, OK	15,000
Blackfoot	Algic	MT, Canada	10,000
Choctaw	Muskogean	OK, MS, LA	9,211

Code Talkers in WW II

- During World War II, bilingual Native Americans , mainly Navajo, transmitted messages through codes for the United States Army.
- The codes were never broken by the enemy.
- The Navajos could encode, transmit, and decode a three-line message in 20 seconds. Machines used at that time to perform the same operation took 30 minutes.



The Earth on Turtle's Back



Time period and literary style

- This story is a legend that was written by the Onondaga Tribe.
- It displays the emphases they placed on dreams
- It was most likely written before the Europeans came to America in the late 1400's. There is no exact time period in which it was written.
- This legend was passed down from generation to generation.

Author's purpose


- **Origin myth** which describe the creation of the earth.
- Shows that weaker and smaller animals can accomplish things that larger and stronger animals have failed to complete
- Teaches that you have determination nothing will stand in your way.

Imagery & Repetition



Imagery—images formed in reader's mind relating to story

example: tree, water world, turtle



Repetition—repeating something over and over
example, when the Muskrat was swimming, the author repeated the idea of swimming deeper to show how much determination the Muskrat had

Modoc



When Grizzlies Walked Upright



Captain Jack

Time period and literary style

- Time period—Before the Europeans came to American in the late 1400's by the Modoc tribe



Origin myth explaining “The Sky Spirit” creates the earth, and the creation of the Native Americans.

Author's purpose

- Explains the creation of Mount Shasta and the land and animals nearby.
- Tells how the daughter of the Sky Spirit marries a bear and their children become the first Native Americans.
- The Native Americans living around the mountain would never kill a grizzly bear because of this story.

Conflict

- The Sky Spirit had cursed the grizzlies by saying, “Get down on your hands and knees. You have wronged me, and from this moment all of you will walk on four feet and never talk again.”
- The Sky Spirit Chief behaved like a human when he used anger to punish the grizzlies.



The Navajo Origin Legend



Time Period

- The time period of the story was when the Native Americans lived before the English people came to America.
- The Navajo told the myths verbally, passing them from generation to generation.



Navajo woman with her children

Author's purpose

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- The purpose of the story is to examine how the Navajo people believed the human race was created
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- The Navajo people believed these stories were true.
- It is a **origin myth** telling how marriage began.

Literary techniques & author purpose

- The author used symbolism in the literature.
 - The corn was placed facing east and west, relating to the passage of the sun
 - The man and woman were created from the corn and the buckskin. The corn & deer are basic foods which provide life for the Navajo.
 - The four gods represent the four directions of the wind which gave life to the humans.

The Iroquois Constitution



Time Period



"The Iroquois Constitution" was first thought to have been written in the 1500's, but a newer theory believes it to be between 1090 and 1150 A.D.



- Five Nations that formed the Iroquois Confederation included the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca tribes.



Imagery & Symbolism

- The author uses imagery to help the reader picture what the author is describing.
 - “Tree of the Great Peace” can be picture in your head.
- The author also uses symbolism.
 - The tree symbolism the Iroquois Confederate
 - The roots of that tree symbolized peace and strength.

Government

- The Iroquois Constitution set forth a series of laws, forming a government that any could join if they wished to obey the laws.
- At the beginning of counsel meetings, the Iroquois gave thanks to the Creator for the natural world.

Sources

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<http://beginnings-1750-p5.wikispaces.com/from+The+Navajo+Origin+Legend>

- The Constitution of the Iroquois Nations

<http://www.indigenouspeople.net/iroqcon.htm>

- Native America Languages

<http://www.cogsci.indiana.edu/farg/rehling/nativeAm/ling.html>