

Native Beginnings

Enrichment Works

Our Mission

Enrichment Works creates and presents theater to inspire learning.

Classroom Connections

Synopsis

Native Beginnings is a trilogy of Native American legends and myths performed by David Guerra who explains the purpose of storytelling from a Native American point of view. He invites students to join him around an imaginary fire in “the long house,” or winter lodging, for a round of traditional stories. In telling the Pueblo Indian myth about how man was created by The Creator he introduces the trickster, Coyote. Coyote interferes when he finds The Creator preparing to bake a figure in the oven and reshapes the figure into a four-legged creature, Dog. The Creator is not pleased until his baked figure is complete which he calls Man. Dog becomes Man’s best friend. David guides the audience inviting them to help enact the myth by playing characters from the story.

Students have the opportunity to portray different animals as David shares a Lakota Plains Indian story explaining how the sun ended up in the sky. In this story, known as “Grandmother Spider” he shares how characters from the animal kingdom wanted light to be able to see and keep warm. Light from the Sun was only available on the other side of the world, but those enjoying it would not share it. The animals came up with schemes to steal the Sun. Fox decides to steal the sun in his mouth and ends up with a black mouth. Possum ends up with a bare tail after attempting to hide the sun in its’ tail. Grandmother Spider finds a way for everyone to enjoy the sun.

The final story from the Iroquois Indians is a ghost story about a brave young woman who unlike her fearful neighbors stays in her village home awaiting the Flying Head. The Flying Head feeds on human flesh. The young woman sitting near her fireplace, talking to her baby, completely aware that the Flying Head has entered her home, exclaims how delicious the hot coals from the fireplace tastes. She says the hot coals taste better than human flesh. The Flying Head greedy for anything more delicious than human flesh rushes to the fireplace and devours the flaming, hot coals. Burning its’ throat, it flies out the home, out of the village and into the wilderness never to be seen or heard of again.

About the Artists

David Guerra (Actor) attended UC Santa Barbara, receiving a BFA in Theatre. Film and TV credits: Cargo, La Rosa y El Gato, Flor de Naranja, Diagnosis X and Untold Stories of the ER. Theatre credits: The Langston Hughes Project, Leyendas de Duende, 365 Days/365 Plays, and Dibujos de Nuestra Frontera. David has extensive experience working as a teaching artist for many Los Angeles organizations including East LA Classic Theater, The Unusual Suspects and Enrichment Works.

Willard Simms (Playwright) received the first commission ever from the Denver Center Theatre Company to write the State Historical Drama for his home state of Colorado. Mr. Simms has also written two episodes of television mini-series on St. Francis of Assisi and stage biographies of Albert Einstein and Leonardo da Vinci. The founder of Theatre of Will, a local nonprofit organization, he is the author of 11 published plays and the winner of numerous playwriting awards.



David Guerra in Native Beginnings

Discussion and Writing Questions

- Why do you think it was important for elders to share these stories with their people?
- Are there stories that you share with your family, place of worship, or community?
- If you could mold your own improved human being, what features would you choose to add?

Vocabulary Words

Creator
long house
myth
Native American
pueblo
scheme
tradition
trickster

Project Ideas

- Think about the Creator story. There are other creation myths all over the world. Do you know any? Find three different creation stories. You can include “The Creator” story from the play. How are these stories the same? How are they different?
- In the Grandmother Spider story the opossum tries to steal the sun by hiding it in his tail (which gets burnt and is now bare) and the buzzard by putting it on his head (which gets burnt and that is why buzzards are bald.) Think about other animals and how they might try to steal the sun. Write your own animal story that tells how they try to steal the sun and what happens to them.
- The stories in “Native Beginnings” are from three different Native American Nations, the Pueblo, the Lakota Plains Indians, and the Iroquois. Divide the class into three groups and assign each group one of the tribes listed above. Let them work as a group to research (resources listed below) their tribe and design a presentation to the class. . What makes a particular tribe unique? What do they wear? What do they eat? What myths and legends are favorites to each tribe?
- The stories in “Native Beginnings” feature lots of animals. Have members of the class take turns, in small groups, portraying different animals. Begin by being 100% animal and then slowly become part animal/part human until they are 99% human with just a small noticeable animal characteristic left.

Resources

Websites:

The Autry Museum <http://theautry.org>

Native American Culture –stories <http://www.ewebtribe.com/NACulture/stories.htm>

Native American Bedtime Stories <http://www.the-office.com/bedtime-story/indians.htm>

Indian Pueblo Cultural Museum <http://www.indianpueblo.org/>

Lakota Indians/Indians.org <http://www.indians.org/articles/lakota-indians.html>

Iroquois Museum <http://www.iroquoismuseum.org/>

Booklist:

Buffalo Before Breakfast, by Mary Pope Osbourne

Keepers of the Animals: Native American Stories and Wildlife Activities for Children, by Michael J. Craduto and Joseph Brucach

Pushing up the Sky: Seven Native American Plays for Children, by Joseph Brucach

Trickster: Native American Tales: A Graphic Collection, Michael Dembiki, editor

Why Epossumandus Has No Hair on His Tale, by Colleen Salley and Janet Stevens

Contact Us

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Standards and Learning

Enrichment Works is a theater company whose productions are designed to inspire children to learn by creating an emotional connection to educational subjects. “Native Beginnings” uses the Theater Content Standards of California to provide a positive theatrical experience. The performer interacts directly with students and asks them questions about the topic of the play, inviting students onstage to act out specific roles and events in the story.

Visual and Performing Arts Connections

1.0 Artistic Perception

Students process, analyze and respond to sensory information through language and skills unique to theatre. They learn theatrical vocabulary such as playwright, conflict, setting, script, etc. They analyze the elements of “Native Beginnings” by identifying the who, what, when, where and why of the story. Students are engaged through direct address by the actor, scenery, costumes and stylized movement (pantomime).

2.0 Creative Expression

During “Native Beginnings” students help create, perform and participate in the performance through interaction with the actor. Students play multiple characters including the roles of the Creator and his clay, they use physical gestures to shape each other into new creations. The entire audience participates at key points during the play by making animal sounds and creating different moods.

3.0 Historical and Cultural Context

“Native Beginnings” helps students understand the role of theater. They take part as both spectator and participant as each story unfolds. They learn that important lessons were passed on through the tradition of storytelling and that different tribes of Native Americans used similar characters and themes in their stories. The theatre tradition of improvisation is utilized, allowing students to witness and respond to the actor’s guidance as he directs them to participate in the play with dialogue and action.

4.0 Aesthetic Valuing

Audience interaction throughout the play allows students to maintain a high level of emotional connection to the stories as they are told. Following the play, students participate in a Question and Answer session where they can criticize and query the actors/characters about the content of the play or the artistic choices made in this production. Students are given the opportunity to express how they felt as a participating impromptu actor during the performance. Post performance activities provided through study guides, are available to help students understand the characters and events in the play.

5.0 Connections, Relationship, Applications

Activities will be provided through study guides in order to encourage students to connect what is learned in “Native Beginnings” to other subject areas. Through hands-on approaches, including improvisation and dramatization, students can explore concepts in other subject areas (e.g. writing, North American history and geography) to learn how theatre can communicate content from other sources. Activities encourage students to learn more about the role of an actor, director and writer, and to use their imaginations and creativity to create their own stories.