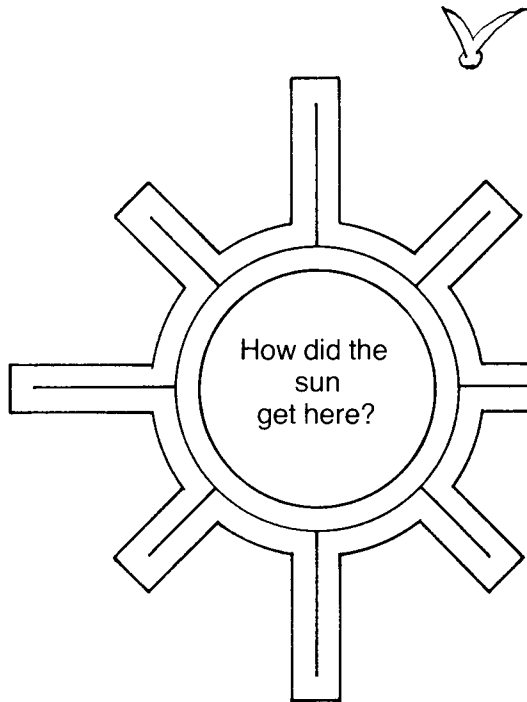


## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

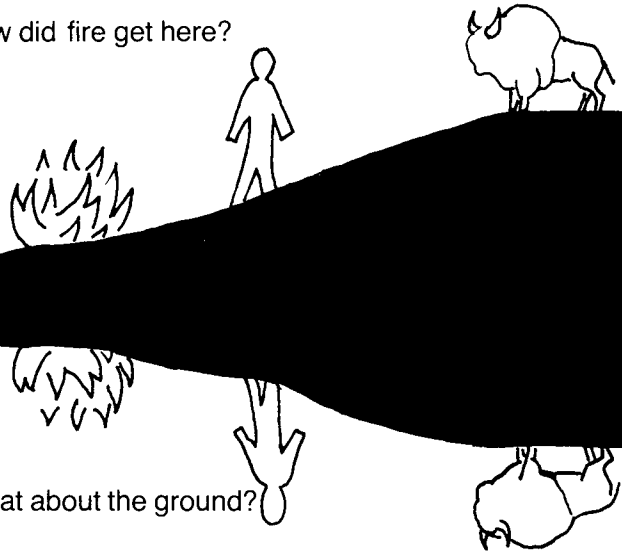
What do you know for sure?

How did the world get here?

How did the stars  and moon  get there?




How did fire get here?



What about the ground?

How did man and animals get here?

Why did the world get here?

How did the birds  get here?



What do you know for sure?

Yes, asking questions is how we learn and begin to understand.

Children have been asking these questions for as long as there have been people. The Indians answer these questions in stories to show children how to live and to teach them of the world.

The Blackfeet say that Old Man Napi made the world. A spark jumped out of the fire and made the stars for the Paiute. The Skokomish say Raven gave the sun, moon, stars, fire and water to the people.

***What do you know for sure?***

Some people say man used to be a monkey. Another group of people say the monkey is the offspring of a marriage between a man and a cat. Other people say man was made from mud, breathed upon and given life.

Some people say woman was created from a man's rib. But could it have been the other way around?

Some say this is right and that is wrong.

Some say nothing is right and nothing is wrong.

***What do you know sure?***

Scientists, too, propose conflicting theories on how man and the world were formed. Did man evolve from apes? Or from fish, as others have suggested?

Most scientists propose that modern man has been on the North American continent for 10,000 years. Yet the oldest Indian site in the Northwest is thought to be 13,000 years old. Are the estimates off by 3,000 years, or 15,000 years? One hundred and fifty generations of people, or 750 generations of people? The difference is important; we are not like our parents, or our grandparents.

***What do you know for sure?***

Did Noah's Flood really happen? Or is it myth? Some might dismiss it as myth, or legend, yet the Skokomish Indians have a similar legend about a great flood.

***Because of the wickedness of some people, the Changer sent a great flood to cover the land. But the good people were told how to prepare for the flood.***

***They tied their canoes to a mountain near the Seattle area. As the waters rose and the land disappeared, they remained safe.***

***During the flood, the ropes broke and some of the canoes drifted away. When the ground appeared again, the canoes that remained tied to the mountain were many miles apart from the canoes that had drifted away.***

***Many winters after the flood, some Skokomish Indians traveled east across the mountains and plateaus. There they met some people who spoke the same language. These were the Salish Indians.***

The Skokomish are still near the Seattle area and the Salish are in Montana. There are many miles and mountains between these two people, yet even today, they speak the same language.

Is the Skokomish legend myth? Is the Bible legend? Was there really a great flood? How long were people here before the great flood?

***Nothing is right and nothing is wrong.  
What do you know for sure?***

“The ones that are on time and became people” is the word for “Indian” in one tribe’s language.

***But how did Indian people come about?  
Where did Indian people come from?  
When did Indian people get on the ground?***

There are as many unanswered questions as there are stars in the black sky. Each tribe has its own language and its own social system or tribal operation. Each tribe has its own explanation of how the world came to be.

The different tribes do not argue about their answers. They simply say:

***The way I have heard it is this way.  
They say that this is how it is.***

There are as many answers and explanations to these questions as there are stars in the black sky.

***Nothing is right and nothing is wrong.  
What do you know for sure?***

Through legends, or stories, Indians have attempted to explain the world around them and to teach one another how to live. The stories teach children how to become *real people*; that they have to feel love, respect and trust, know the joy of caring and sharing, and be willing to help one another. When these feelings become an integral part of a person, he or she can then understand his or her purpose for being here and become a real person.

One of the stories in our curriculum, *A Little Boy's Big Moment*, is a story of giving. Because a family is happy that their child will be dancing in public for the first time, they have a giveaway. Children thus learn that when you are happy, or do something outstanding, you give to others.

The stories tell about the world and why certain animals are the way they are; how the skunk got its stripes, why the codfish has a red face and how daylight came to be.

Although the stories are often amusing and fun for children, they also usually teach a preferred behavior. For example, *Chipmunk Meets Old Witch* tells why a chipmunk has stripes down its back, yet also clearly shows that it is wrong to wander away from home and disobey one's elders. *How Cottontail Lost His Fingers* not only explains why rabbits have paws instead of hands, but also teaches it is wrong to cheat.

Most of the stories have a purpose and a message. This character acted this way, and this is what happened. *How do you want to be?*

In different stories, the same character often assumes different roles. For example, although Coyote is seen as the Creator's helper by many tribes, he also is often represented as a coniving trickster, whose attempts to gain something for nothing usually backfire. The Thunderbird also plays dual roles. In *The Time a Whale Came to Jackson's Bay* (a Skokomish legend), the Thunderbird saves the people from disaster; yet in *Thunder and the Mosquito* (a Muckleshoot Legend), he is responsible for sending the mosquito to get man's blood.

***Nothing is right and nothing is wrong.***

All of this happened in an oral culture, when the Indians knew many, many songs without the aid of a tape recorder. They could go from Colorado to the headwaters of the Yellowstone, or from the Columbia Basin country to the Rocky Mountains, without the aid of a map. They talked to each other and were concerned. They helped one another and showed each other how to live. Children listened to their elders because they enjoyed the stories and learned from them. They didn't listen to argue. How can one argue about what no one knows?

Then the sun set, and people who talked differently came to the land. They wanted to change everything and wanted you to listen and argue about things that didn't have a purpose or meaning.

***Dick's ball bounced three times.  
How many times did Dick's ball bounce?***

***It doesn't make sense.  
No more feelings... no more thinking...  
by the book...just memorizing...***

This approach has lost a lot of Indians. Many now hate being Indian. They change their names, quit speaking Indian and want to be "civilized."

But we haven't lost everything. And this is why we have these stories, once again, for some of the children, and for you, the teacher.