

NEW WORDS:

unexpectedly
underneath
ceremonial
Thunderbird
dangerous
serpent

FIREMAKER

Little Ghost Bull and The Story of Firemaker

Developed by the Northern Cheyenne Tribe

GEOGRAPHICAL AREA: Plains Region

STORY TYPE(S): Indian Values

Summary:

While on a journey to acquire food, Firemaker and his friend cross a river believed to be inhabited by a water serpent. On the return trip the two warriors built a raft and crossed the deep part of the river. When they reached midstream the water began to churn. Fearing for their lives, they called upon the spirit of the Great Thunderbird and his messengers to protect them.

The river became a scene of splashing walls of water until it receded completely from the river bed and all was quiet. Firemaker and his friend walked across the dry river bottom to safety where they turned and saw a huge bird flying away with a serpent in its beak. They also saw the messengers. The two warriors thanked the Thunderbird and returned home safely.

The Thunderbird is considered by many tribes to be one of the most powerful of spiritual beings. The warriors unquestioningly believed that his power would protect them, and their lives were saved. The spirits of Indian religion have tremendous power to protect and guide an individual's life. Whether one believes specifically in these exact spirits or not, at least their important place in other people's lives should be not only recognized but respected as well.

Teacher Guided Activities:



1. Some time should be spent discussing what a Thunderbird is, what it might look like and what its importance might be to the tribe in this story. (See **Count Your Blessings** card, 6-B.) This Thunderbird could be compared to Greek or Roman gods of similar power.

Ask students to speculate on how such a being was created in the mind of Indian people and what type of impact it might have on a people's culture.

Collect as many different designs of Thunderbirds as possible. Have students work on a mural which reproduces these different designs and lists the tribes from which they come. Have students try to create their own.



2. Discuss why Thunderbirds would be viewed as all powerful. Ask students to create beings for such natural phenomena as volcanoes, earthquakes, etc. Perhaps students could write a story about how their being came to be.

Then have students do a report on the scientific causes of thunder and lightning.



3. Take a trip to a museum which has a good collection of Indian artifacts. Particularly point out ceremonial articles and read whatever information is available on them. Draw pictures of these articles. Compare how they differ with everyday articles of the same type.

If a museum is not available there are many good illustrations and photographs available for comparison. Try to locate examples representative of your students' tribes.

Ask your students what ceremonies or rites they have participated in that were of importance to them. Inquire if special clothing or articles were involved. Have students draw a picture of this ceremony and write about it, if that is permissible, and if the student feels comfortable in sharing.



4. Water serpents are usually thought of as protectors of our waterways. Search out information about other water serpents reported to be in your area and have students discuss.

Assign students to study different types of serpents or snakes and make reports.

Student Activity Card(s):

See Count Your Blessings Activity Card (7A-7B).