

Indigenous Understandings of Volcanos, Earthquakes and Tsunamis in Alaska, the Pacific and South-East Asia

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Audience:

Language Arts Content Area
High School Students (Grades 9-12)

Time Required:

45 – 60 minutes of performance time (homework) + 3 - 45 minute lessons.
Optional add-on: 45 more minutes of presentation/performance of stories.

Overview:

Students will read accounts of indigenous oral traditions of volcanos, earthquakes and tsunamis in various coastal/oceanic cultures. Students will be broken up into groups, with each group assigned an oral tradition/culture around one or more of these natural phenomena. Groups will present: their assigned oral tradition to the class, the original western reception of the story (if known) and the impact the tradition has since had on either the people themselves, or the larger world (if any). Finally each student will create their own written tradition (a story, poem or song) that allegorically or metaphorically references one or more phenomena or feature in their locality (environment/place/community) and also informs the audience about that environment.

Ex. A Sitka, Alaska student could write an allegory about “termination dust” (first winter’s snow in the mountains) actually coming from the fallen feathers of a huge, winter-plumaged ptarmigan and what that portends for the future.

Goal/Outcome:

Students will learn that indigenous oral traditions are based in actual knowledge of the physical world. They will gain an understanding that empirical knowledge can be recorded and delivered outside of the written tradition. They will gain an appreciation for how one’s own cultural “lens” might make it difficult to absorb knowledge that is passed down in unfamiliar ways. Finally, they will think about their own locality and how to pass down knowledge of it through allegory/metaphor.

Objective:

Students will:

1. Read assigned articles (as homework) that reports on these oral traditions and their re-appraisal in the western “scientific” world, as well as any impacts on actual events/cultures.
2. Discuss, evaluate and brainstorm ideas found in pre-reading and in-class multimedia with the teacher, focusing on ways of knowing.
3. Break into groups corresponding to oral tradition/cultural group and discuss essential questions. Have groups present to each other.
4. Individually create their own written tradition that explains the deeper meaning of phenomena in their own locality (environment/place/community), by employing allegory/metaphor (a common practice/device in oral storytelling).
5. *Optionally*, present/perform story orally in front of class. This will help highlight the differences between written and oral narratives based on the same story.

Essential Questions: (Timeless questions)

1. In what ways do indigenous, western/industrialized cultures transmit knowledge? Compare and Contrast each.
2. What does the initial poor/reluctant/lack-of reception of these oral traditions by western or industrialized cultures say about bias or prejudice?

Materials/Resources:

In classroom: internet connected computers needed to view the three multimedia/links on tsunami stories for the Unangax and Suqpiat peoples. Access to two other websites/articles on various oral traditions/cultures will be printed and handed out as pre-reading:

[Volcano, Earthquake and Tsunami Stories of the Unangax and Koniag Sugpiaq Peoples \(Aleut Peoples\)](#)

[Modern Day Tsunami Evacuation Story in Unangum tunuu and Sugpiaq \(Aleut Languages\)](#)

[Chenega Village Tsunami Photos](#)

[Hawaiian, South Pacific and Beyond](#)

[Moken People \(Sea Gypsies, Southeast Asia\)](#)

Alaskan Cultural Standards:

Cultural Standard for Curriculum:

B. A culturally-responsive curriculum recognizes cultural knowledge as part of a living and constantly adapting system that is grounded in the past, but continues to grow through the present and into the future.

1. Recognizes the contemporary validity of much of the traditional cultural knowledge, values and beliefs, and grounds students learning the principles and practices associated with that knowledge;
2. Provides students with an understanding of the dynamics of cultural systems as they change over time, and as they are impacted by external forces;

D. A culturally-responsive curriculum fosters a complementary relationship across knowledge derived from diverse knowledge systems.

1. Draws parallels between knowledge derived from oral traditions and that derived from books;
2. Engages students in the construction of new knowledge and understandings that contribute to an ever-expanding view of the world.

E. A culturally-responsive curriculum situates local knowledge and actions in a global context. A curriculum that meets this cultural standard:

1. Encourages students to consider the inter-relationship between their local circumstances and the global community;
2. Conveys to students that every culture and community contributes to, at the same time that it receives from the global knowledge base; 3. prepares students to “think globally, act locally.”

Instructions:

Pre-Lesson One Homework: (45-60 minutes of pre-reading)

Lesson 1/Day 1: The teacher leads the class in viewing the multimedia links on Unangax and Sugpiat peoples’ tsunami oral traditions and historical accounts online. Next follows a teacher led discussion of oral traditions, referencing the pre-reading, and how these oral traditions differ from and interface with western, industrialized traditions of knowing. Focus on the BBC article’s examples of South Pacific oral traditions (not including Hawaii), as well as the ancient Greek story of Atlantis and the island of Santorini. Explore the recent reconsiderations of the validity of these stories by western science. These oral traditions/cultures will not be assigned to group work the following day and will therefore not be redundant of that work. Finally, present the example of “termination dust” and the mythical ptarmigan as an entry into helping the students begin to think about telling their own story using allegory and metaphor.

Lesson 2/Day 2: Students break into four (4) groups with each group assigned an oral tradition/culture (Unangax, Sugpiat, Hawaiian and Moken). They will then have to present the oral tradition of the natural phenomena, its treatment in western intellectual

traditions (if any) and implementation of this knowledge (or the lack thereof) surrounding the reoccurrence of this phenomena (if any) and how they think allegory/metaphor is used in the story (if at all). If class finishes early, then they can begin on Lesson 3.

Lesson 3/Day 3: Each student writes an oral tradition based on the phenomena associated with an environment//place/community they are familiar with, using allegory and/or metaphor. Each story should further inform the reader about the environment/community/place.

Optional Lesson 4/Day 4: Each student presents/performs their written story, perhaps to an audience invited from outside the classroom.

Assessments:

Students will be graded on their group presentation: 1/3 of their grade.

Students will be graded on their created written tradition (story): 2/3 of their grade.