

UNIT 1 Shaping the New World
Origins of the American Tradition to 1800

A STEM school
FROEBEL
BILINGUAL SCHOOL
Home of the Space Generation

A vibrant, warm-toned painting depicting a group of Native Americans in traditional dress dancing in a field. The scene is filled with energy, with many figures having their arms raised and bodies in motion. The background is a hazy, golden light, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The overall mood is celebratory and communal.

ORAL TRADITIONS

WITH
JIM SOTO

SPEAK YOUR MIND

Since the dawn of time, our ancestors have been storytellers. It's part of our collective humanity. We sing songs, tell jokes, we share stories. Did you learn any song, joke or story without reading them? List a few and categorize them. Explain how you acquired this knowledge.

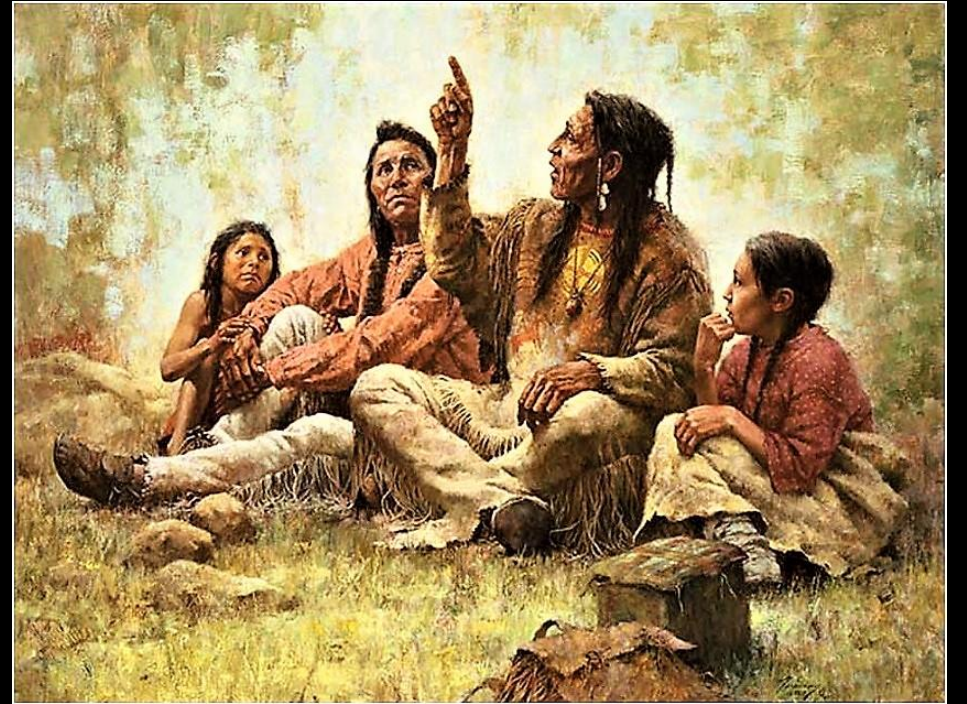


THE ORAL TRADITION DEFINED

Myths, folk tales, legends, and songs are all forms of oral literature, or what is called the oral tradition.

The narratives in this form were handed down through many generations by word of mouth and only recorded in detail within the last hundred years.

Although long familiar to the specific cultures that produced them, these tales did not yet belong to world literature.



The 37,000 year old Australian aboriginal creation myth of *Budj Bim*, or “Dreamtime,” may possibly be the longest surviving oral history still being passed on from generation to generation.

Oral traditions have been a very effective way of preserving and disseminating information throughout history. According to science, orally shared knowledge can demonstrably endure more than 7,000 years, quite possibly 10,000.

Despite widespread literacy and modern electronic recordkeeping, oral tradition (word of mouth) is still the most widely used form of communication in the world.



TYPES OF ORAL LITERATURE

Oral literature is a literature that has been spoken or sung for millennia. Pre-literate societies, by definition, have no written literature, but may possess rich and varied oral traditions—such as folk epics, folk narratives (including fairy tales and fables), jokes, proverbs and folksongs—that effectively constitute an oral literature. Even when these are collected and published by scholars the result is still often referred to as "oral literature".

Lets see some of them.



Myths

Refers to a traditional story, rooted in a particular culture, that deals with gods, goddesses, and other supernatural beings, as well as human heroes. Myths often embody religious beliefs and values and attempt to explain reality, its origin and its purpose.



Folk Tales

A tale or legend originating and traditional among a people or folk, especially one forming part of the oral tradition of the common people usually with a didactic purpose, occasionally communicating a moral teaching or belief.



Legends

Are a story that gets passed down from one generation to the next: one popularly regarded as historical although not verifiable. Legends are designed to teach a lesson about a real person or event in history, in spite of any embellishments added to the narrative.



Songs

Songs have always been an important cultural and social factor throughout human history. It helped people form tribal bonds and often served religious and spiritual needs by enabling worship and celebration. Songs have stood the test of time from the prehistoric age till this day.

All of these, as you'll later see, are also part of the literature of America.

ELEMENTS OF ORAL LITERATURE

Important elements of oral literature/traditions you will explore today include:

- **Performance and Audience** – Respect and attentiveness were an important component of oral transmission. Without this, it would be rendered useless.
- **Narrative Voice** – Chronological order was the most common narrative sequence used and a tribal elder was usually the narrator.
- **Theme/Motif** – There are recurring thematic elements shared in many oral traditions. The creation of the world is a common one in many cultures.

ASSESSMENT

After reading pages 7- 8 in your book, complete the following activities:

1. Name a narrative transmitted to you as part of an oral tradition.
2. Do you think cultural relativism has played a role in what has or hasn't been recognized as part of American Literature? Explain.
3. What is the trickster archetype? Which are common ones found in Native American traditions?
4. There are recurring thematic elements shared in many culture around the world. Mention the motif and any story associated to it.



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