



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2022 Volume I: Writing about Nature

From the Beginning: Understanding & Creating Origin Stories

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Introduction

As an urban teacher, the idea of nature seems theoretical as the city is not the first place one visualizes when visualizing this concept. My students would agree with that. To my students, nature is not a tangible concept but something that is not available to them. In my school, the opportunities for experiences in the outdoors seem increasingly limited once students complete fifth grade, the last year by law they are required to have recess. Students enjoy being outdoors so it would seem important to provide them with opportunities to experience nature and consider what role nature can play in their learning as part of their educational experience.

Because of this, I have developed a unit around Matt Dembicki's book, *Trickster: Native American Tales: a Graphic Novel*, a collection of short origin stories presented to the reader in graphic novel form. This book allows the opportunity to explore several different aspects of nature. Specifically, this text was chosen as the subject of the unit because of the increasing demand and acceptance of graphic novels in the classroom. Among my students, this genre is incredibly popular, with many drawn to Jeff Kinney's "Diary of a Wimpy Kid." The use of illustrations allows struggling readers the opportunities to engage in texts in a way that is more comfortable to them and allows them to dig deeper into a text comfortably. I see this as an opportunity to re-engage reluctant readers into the literacy process. To build on the visual aspect of the text, students will be asked to do visual notetaking described in detail below. While engaging with the graphic novel, students will be asked to complete some assignments outdoors as a source of inspiration and calming. As part of their demonstration of understanding, students will be asked to draft their own story using details from the natural world.

Audience

I teach middle school language arts. It is my plan to use this as an introductory unit with both grade levels (seventh and eighth) as an opportunity to jump start the year after the summer reading slump and quickly get them engaged in reading. My incoming eighth-grade class will be the students I currently teach as seventh

graders so I am aware of their ability levels, their strengths, and their areas of improvement. My incoming seventh-grade class will be mostly comprised of students in our sixth-grade class so my understanding of this population will not be as experiential.

Reviewing the data for my incoming seventh graders, a quarter of the students are identified as multilingual learners. My school is developing a newcomer center to help students arriving in the country with limited English language skills adapt to school before being transitioned into classrooms. I suspect this number will slightly increase. With this in mind, I think offering an introductory text that is visually rich and less language dependent will make that transition smoother than it would be by jumping into a language-heavy work. There is a history of using graphic novels to teach English language learners. Prior to 1959, the United States Army used comics to teach non-native speakers the English language.¹ In a 2004 study, Crawford determined that independent reading was important to English language development and many students in the study chose graphic novels.²

In terms of cultural backgrounds, my population is mostly students of color with most learners identifying as either African American or Latinx with a growing Middle Eastern population. I think utilizing Native American origin tales will also allow for future opportunities, not detailed specifically in this unit, to explore origin stories of other cultures based on the makeup of the students in the classroom.

The understanding of nature will naturally lend itself to cross curricular studies in other academic classrooms. My school is an environmental science magnet school so this unit will easily embed itself into the school's magnet theme by providing opportunities to explore the natural world in the classroom. Also, the use of science in the stories will allow my students the opportunities to examine and compare informational and literary texts like in lesson four. Furthermore, there are opportunities for expansion within the social studies curriculum with mapping activities like in lesson five as well exploring Native American culture and history. Because the book not only provides stories from different writers, but it is also illustrated by different artists, there is an opportunity to explore cross-curricular work with the arts department.

Rationale

As a middle school language arts teacher, trying to keep students engaged in longer reading assignments has become increasingly difficult and even more so since COVID has changed the way we have taught. My students spent an entire year online learning before returning last spring for a brief spell as hybrid learners. Returning to school this fall, it has become increasingly clear that things need to be adapted for students who are struggling to adjust back into life in the traditional classroom space while also acknowledging the different learning environments students have experienced over the last couple years. Not all students found online learning frustrating and this was something that seems to be overlooked.

One thing I have noticed was student (and staff) mental health suffered immensely for a number of people during the start of the pandemic. Students and staff in my district spent the better part of a year at home, rarely leaving their homes. Studies have shown that being inside for such extended periods of time does have a detrimental impact on mental health.³ Something that has been particularly important to me in the past year has been to get my students back outside. Typically, this has been through a sort of activity break, but I wanted the opportunity to embed activities in nature in the classroom so that my students could spend more

time outdoors.

A second thing I noticed during COVID was students hadn't been taught how to create their own academic learning space. As a part of this unit, students will be asked to consider the role place plays in their academic development and pushed to consider learning spaces beyond the classroom. Students will come with significant background knowledge from their experiences online, during hybrid learning, and from in-person instruction. To achieve this end, students will be offered the opportunity to work in the classroom as well as natural settings both on and off campus to determine how they learn best.

Furthermore, I have noticed over the last year that my students are devouring graphic novels at a pleasantly insane rate. I am surprised by how many of my middle school students are bringing in their own texts or taking out and reserving the graphic texts on the school's digital library. I want to be able to capitalize on the students' passion for text to increase their literacy. When I speak of literacy, I am not speaking solely about a student's ability to understand language-rich text. I want my students to be able to engage in visual literacy as well. Graphic novels provide students with the opportunity to do both. Also, with a visually rich text, all my students are provided with the opportunity to access skills that are not always accessible in language-rich texts. Observation and graphic note-taking activities will also provide my multi-lingual students with another access point in the classroom.

Subsequently, graphic novels allow a teacher to explore multiliteracies in the classroom. As described by the New London group, multiliteracies is "the shift in the conception of literacy and literacy pedagogy from that of a page-bound practice restricted to an official ... language to a critical and dynamic understanding of literacy as a multiplicity of discourses." ⁴ In this definition, teachers in classrooms through the United States are asked to think of the definition of text beyond those printed and printed in English. It asks teachers to consider the intersection of words and images and the diversity of languages out there. Given the high number of developing readers in my population (both multilingual and English only learners) this is a concept of value. The intersection also increases the students critical thinking as more than one conversation is going on at once.⁵

What I have found in general is students have struggled with remembering literary texts without the aid of note taking. Traditionally, I have had my students take notes using a graphic organizer, but, in my rising eighth-grade class, I have several students who are artistic. I would like to explore note taking in terms of visual representations. I believe this will allow different learners the opportunity to engage in learning with their ability levels in mind.

Also, in education in general, there is an ongoing focus on test practice. For my district, that means preparing students for the Smarter Balance assessment. In the middle school curriculum, there is a brief unit on mythology and folk tales that I have wanted to expand upon and discussed above briefly with idea of intersecting cultural mythologies. I have felt that expanding this unit would be important because it would be beneficial to embed assessment-based activities into a more expansive unit without it feeling like constant test preparation. For this work, I have chosen to use Matt Dembicki's book *Trickster: Native American Tales: a Graphic Collection*.

Trickster would be a lengthier book for my students, but the structure of the text makes it an easy read, which makes completion attainable. So many times, students are intimidated by texts over 150 pages; however, with a graphic novel, the relative amount of language on a page will provide students the opportunity to build confidence while also maintaining interest. While being high interest is important to me, building reading

confidence is also a significant part of my educational philosophy.

Unit Objectives

In this unit, students will be asked to understand the role nature play in both Native American origin stories as well as in their learning process. As a part of developing their own mindset regarding nature, students will explore multiple viewpoints on nature (Euro-centric and Native American) to consider their own views on nature. This understanding will be beneficial when the students examine the stories to reflect on the science of nature as it relates to land formation and how elements of the natural world came to be the way they are. Also, students will reflect on what role nature plays in their own learning by considering the impact setting has on their comprehension of new information.

Secondly, a chief learning strategy that will be used in this unit will be visual note-taking. Students will learn how to make sketch notes that use both words and pictures to develop an understanding of nature. Students will consider what role sketch-notes could play in their learning process as thinking about learning is already an embedded concept with their reflection on the role of place.

Finally, a central goal to this unit is the creation of a student-generated origin story. To achieve this goal, students will study the Trickster archetype and use stories within the text *Trickster* to develop modern day retellings of the text. By the end of the unit students will also be expected to develop an origin story using all that they have learned in the unit. As part of their final presentation, students will be expected to read their stories to students in a younger grade after having first practiced this with a story or two from the core text.

Teaching Strategies

For this unit, I've considered three significant teaching strategies: (a) visual notetaking, (b) the use of oral storytelling, and (c) metacognitive practices. These three concepts are all connected to the unit in multiple ways. To start with, students will be already reading a graphic novel with the understanding that examining the visuals will be critical to some students' understanding of the process. As a result, it would only make sense to consider creating their own visuals in order to demonstrate their understanding to someone else. In terms of oral storytelling, the oral tradition is very important to the Native American culture as well as being a beneficial literacy practice. For my students, the ability to practice reading a text and even telling their story without a text in front of them would be a significant experience. Finally, metacognition, thinking about thinking, leads to better understanding of the academic processes. Not only would students consider the role place plays in their learning but also how the visuals and oral practices contribute to building comprehension.

Visual Notetaking

There are many forms of visual notetaking. One specific way is sketch notes where students add small pictorial representation of the information they are synthesizing in order to build connections between material. This process has been shown in studies to increase a student's ability to retain information.⁶ This is

due in part because the combination of words and visuals activates multiple parts of your brain.⁷

When considering sketch notes, there are several things to keep in mind according to the editors at Edutopia. A key concept is to reconsider what you are using for paper and encourage to students to use something non-traditional if lined paper doesn't fit their needs. Another suggestion made is to start small and build a common visual language by creating several key images to represent concepts and ideas that recur in the work the students are doing.⁸

To develop this process with students, Doug Neill suggests building upon the notetaking processes that kids are already using. For example, taking Cornell Notes and starting by adding an image at the top of the page to represent to topic and adding dividers and small images while taking notes. From there, it is possible to have students explore further with larger ideas, bullet lists, and numbered lists. Initially, this should be very basic. When students get to the key ideas section, it would be at that point that they would further add representative images to help remember the key ideas. Finally, in the summary section, students should try create a diagram or mind map to represent the big ideas of their notes.⁹

Oral Storytelling

Oral storytelling is a method of presenting information that is passed down through the generations in a narrative form that is spoken rather than written. In this form, traditions are maintained and cultural identities are shared by storytellers to those who are intended to hear them. Besides stories, beliefs and language are also part of the oral tradition.¹⁰

A significant part of this unit ask the students to explore different ways of learning (in the classroom vs. in nature / Native environmental viewpoints vs. European centric viewpoints). As such, oral storytelling also allows students to consider other types of learning. Traditionally in the Western classroom, written language is given more weight over oral language. Historically, governments have weighed in on whether or not they will consider oral histories as acceptable evidence in significant legal cases. The idea is that oral histories are inherently biased and altered by the storyteller, while there is no consideration of the bias of someone who writes a text.¹¹ Bringing oral storytelling into the classroom asks the students to big deeper into metacognition.

In the classroom, oral storytelling offers several benefits. First of all, oral myths offer the opportunity for critical thinking and inquiry.¹² By presenting stories in a form that is less written language focused, students with limited written language skills have more accessible to the work being done in class. Secondly, oral storytelling has been used as a social-emotional learning activity in classrooms in the United States. By allowing students to share their stories, they are invited to bring what they know and what they respect into the classroom learning environment.¹³

Metacognition

Metacognition is a process where students become more self-aware of their learning by thinking about thinking. By reflecting, judging, and recording their learning, students have a better understanding of how they think which leads to students being more independent and adaptive. Students ages twelve to fifteen benefit most from metacognitive reflection based on research. The outcomes not only benefit academic success, but social-emotional success. Metacognition helps students to think thoroughly about their actions and the consequences of their decisions. ¹⁴

A teacher who is thinking about engaging in metacognition can do numerous strategies. One of those techniques is to have students reflect on what they have learned by considering what new knowledge they have developed. Also, teachers can have students maintain learning journals where they consider successes, challenges, and productive practices.¹⁵ Adding a reflective aspect to lessons has shown that students make more academic growth as making learning visible helps those to understand what they are doing right and wrong.¹⁶

Native American Origin Stories and Environmental Stewardship

Studying cultural differences is a critical part of education. In terms of Language Arts standards, being able to compare and evaluate different points of view is particularly important. In developing this unit, it is important to understand the different life views of Native Americans and European-Americans particularly in regards to environmental stewardship and conservationism as is demonstrated in lesson one in this unit.

In his article, “What Other Americans Can and Cannot Learn from Native American Environmental Ethics,” Dave Aftandilian, a European American, describes Native American environmental ethics as “the whole suite of values, practices, and rules for proper behavior toward nature and other being that Native people have developed based on observation, experience, and reflection.”¹⁷ He also reminds us that the current environmental crisis is not a Native American created problem. Aftandilian suggests that both Christianity and capitalism have prioritized people over the land and have created a cultural worldview that has led to the exploitation of the land and its resources. He speaks about how the point of view of many Native American cultures differs in that the people see themselves as a part of nature and, often, see the land as being more important than the people. This belief is part of the Native American lifeway. This is why many Native people don’t identify necessarily as environmentalists; the idea of being one with the land is embedded throughout various aspects of their culture, not just in terms of environmental philosophy. Robin Wall Kimmerer, a Native writer, also speaks about this in her work *Braiding Sweetgrass*. When discussing the title, Kimmerer speaks about how braiding hair is an act of love and that when her people are braiding sweetgrass it is connecting with the earth that was there before people were.

In exploring this viewpoint, it is important to understand how the Native American communities have developed this cultural stance. One of the important aspects of this ideology has been through the use of storytelling. Native people have spread their beliefs through orally told Distant Time stories that are infused with an ideology that explains how people should treat the land and its creatures as well as why they should treat all living things peacefully. These stories often bestow the same spirit on humans as is does on animals and other natural elements. Through this process, empathy and concern for the natural world is brought to the surface.¹⁸ Kimmerer also speaks about this in her work. She states that creation stories “tell us who we are. We are inevitably shaped by them no matter how distant they may be from our consciousness.”¹⁹

To understand these stories, one must understand the connection to culture. Among Native American cultures, the expression of how nature’s importance in their lifeway differs. For example, the Koyukon people of Alaska see themselves relying on the natural world for their existence and, as such, do not see themselves as having power over the elements of the world around them. In order to develop this belief, the Koyukon people abide by Distant Time stories of Raven and how he developed the world they inhabit. Many of these

stories discuss how to treat animals. These stories are believed to be the reason that Kuyukon people are successful at hunting and farming. The fear of retribution from a higher power also helps to maintain the social order of these stories. This leads to practices that limit the amount of land used for farming and the areas allowed for hunting.

The Hopi people believe in something slightly different. Their belief in the connection to the land arises from the belief that they are borrowing the land from its original farmer, Maasaw. They see themselves as being “born from [the land].” As such, the natural world is embedded into various sections of their culture including family structures. Hopi families have a connection to an individual element of the natural world. As such, a person in this culture feels a very real connection to that element whether it be the sun, coyotes, etc. This also embeds itself into language so that when someone grows up, they are said to have “matured like corn.” For the Hopi, their cultural farming practices also have an environmental piece for them. For example, by using wood rather than metal to till soil they are not causing soil erosion. While the practice is not based on environmental sustainability, there is a positive environmental impact.²⁰

Besides cultural practices, the Distant Time stories are also based on a level of scientific observation. For example, in several tales the beaver and the muskrat are described as being siblings based on the fact that they have a similar form and similar habits. Also, the Hopi people would pray for the Sun to come back towards the earth to bring on spring after the long winter. While these realizations may not have come from the use of modern scientific study, they are clear examples of how scientific observation has found itself embedded in these stories.

In introducing these stories to students, Native American author and storyteller Joseph Bruchac speaks of the importance to “begin any Native American literature... not in the classroom, but in the woods ... to have a sense of the American earth, of the land and the people as one.”²¹ In the teaching of reading, the importance of prior background knowledge is typically cited as a source of success for student achievement in comprehending a text. With this considered, it is important to take students out into the natural world in order to activate their sense of the context and environment in which these origin stories were developed and evolved. By placing them in a different environment, the change of scenery also allows a change of thought in regards to preconceived Western notions of not only Native Americans but traditional educational practices.²² Robin Wall Kimmerer also speaks about the connection between Western and Native ways of understanding comparing the origin story of Skywoman to the story of Adam and Eve expanding on the idea of how both Skywoman and Eve connect to nature are wildly different. Skywoman is embracing a new, foreign land while Eve is cast out.²³ These two stories illustrate in a very simplistic way the differences in the ways of knowing.

Selected Text Synopses

Students will use the text *Trickster* for the reading component of the unit. They will focus on stories that involve the natural world like “Coyote & the Pebbles,” “The Bear that Stole the Chinook,” “Mai and the Cliff Dwelling Birds,” “When Coyote Decided to Marry,” “Moshup’s Bridge,” and “Espun and Grandfather.” What I have noted while reading *Trickster* is that the stories in the book tend to fall into two categories: (1) ones that solely deal with lessons learned from trickster creatures and (2) ones that explain why some natural element came to be the way it is. Students have an opportunity to explore the Trickster archetype in lesson three.

Nearly all stories present a trickster character.

For the second type of stories, below is a brief description of how the natural world plays a significant element in the chosen story:

(1) *Coyote & the Pebbles* by Dayton Edmonds: Set at the beginning of time, the night animals in this story seek out the help of the Great Mystery, their creator,²⁴ in order to light the night skies. The Great Mystery sends them down to the river to fetch pebbles so that they can use the pebbles to draw pictures of themselves in the stars. Coyote, who was late to the party, learns from the Raven about their assignment. Arrogant, Coyote believes he will create the best picture. After collecting the pebbles, Coyote looks for the perfect place to create his portrait when he trips and spills the pebbles everywhere, destroying everyone's art in the process. The Great Mystery informs the other creatures that they must accept this as they cannot go backwards. In terms of a nature teaching point, this is the origin of the stars. In terms of social emotional learning, the lesson is learning to accept what has already happened. (Pages 21-34)

Additional Resources: Dayton Edmond's biography. Encyclopedia entry on Great Mystery.

(2) *Moshup's Bridge* by Jonathan Perry: Set on the island of Noepe, now known as Martha's Vineyard, in an area known as Aquinnah, this is the story of Moshup, a man who lives on the cliffs is known for his ability to hunt whales, which fed his people. A trickster is explained to be the reason that a land bridge was left incomplete. When Moshup wanted to build a bridge to connect the islands, Cheepee, a trickster figure, challenged Moshup to build the bridge in one night with completion needing to be achieved by the first crow calling out. Moshup made good progress so Cheepee sent the largest crab to attack Moshup. When attacked, Moshup took the crab, throwing it, creating a new island, Nomans Island. Not one to lose, Cheepee next takes a crow and steals fire from a nearby village and tricks the crow into thinking the crow had missed the dawn, causing the crow to cry out. In terms of a nature teaching point, this is the origin of an unfinished land bridge. In terms of social emotional learning, both characters, Cheepee and Moshup, demonstrate that one should never give up. (Pages 87-94)

Additional Resources: Jonathan Perry biography. Maps of Martha's Vineyard.

(3) *When Coyote Decided to Marry* by Eirik Thorsgard: Set near the Columbia River in Washington. This story focuses on a lonely Coyote who seeks to settle down after travelling alone for many years. The Coyote tracks down his old friend, a village chief, to help him in his task. After the villagers build Coyote a home, he also expresses his desire for a bride. Women travelled from all over to meet Coyote. When a Native princess is offered the opportunity by her mother, the princess declines but keeps to herself the reason is due to her secret relationship with another man. When the girl's father catches them, the father sends off the man and tells his daughter to forget about this relationship. When the princess is brought to the Coyote, the Coyote immediately recognizes that she is in love with someone else. As a result, the entire family is turned into rocks that can be found at the Columbia Gorge. In terms of a nature teaching point, this discusses the formation of a specific rock formation. In terms of a thematic or social-emotional teaching point, it offers a discussion of honesty as well as gender roles. (Pages 165 - 176)

Additional Resources: Eirik Thorsgard university biography.

(4) *The Bear Who Stole the Chinook* by Jack Gladstone: During a harsh winter, a village was starving because of the lack of resources. Owl, Magpie, Coyote, and Weasel, along with an orphaned boy, meet to discuss the dilemma. Magpie reveals that Bear has taken the Chinook. After traveling, the group located the bear. First,

Owl tried to sneak in, but Bear hit him in the eye with a stick. Then, Weasel entered and nearly got the bag with the Chinook, but Bear woke and roared Weasel away. Later, the group smoked out Bear while Coyote snuck in and took the bag. Once out of the cave, the Chinook, a warm wind,²⁵ was released into the atmosphere. When Bear was unable to catch the Chinook, he returned to his cave to sulk. In terms of a nature teaching point, this explores the reason behind the changing of the seasons and the hibernation of bears. For a social-emotional or thematic teaching point, the idea of cooperation versus individualism. (Pages 201-209)

Additional Resources: Jack Gladstone's biography. Chinook description page. Jack Gladstone performing.

(5) *Espun and Grandfather* by John Bear Mitchell: Set in the forest, Espun, a curious raccoon, travels in search of a new and interesting place. When Espun spots someone on the mountain, his arrogance causes him to go after the man on the mountain. When Espun discovers it is only a rock in the shape of a person, he laughs until the boulder starts speaking to him. Upon learning that the boulder, called Grandfather by Espun, doesn't travel, Espun becomes determined to push Grandfather so they can travel together. After getting Grandfather rolling down the mountain, Espun ends up trapped underneath the rock. After spending a day trapped, an ant arrives and Espun convinces the ant to help him by offering the ant friendship. The ant gathered his fellow ants and together they worked to get Espun out. Finally free, Espun realizes he is now flat with short legs and broke his promise to be friends with the ants. In terms of a nature teaching point, this story provides a rationale for why raccoons bodies are shaped the way they are. In terms of social-emotional or thematic teaching point, the idea of team work is brought up repeatedly and Espun breaking his promise is something that could be explored further. (Pages 219-230)

Additional Resources: John Bear Mitchell biography.

(6) *Mai and the Cliff Dwelling Birds* by Sunny Dooley: Set in a cliffy area, Mai, a coyote, goes about in search of the perfect location after having travelled all over. After spotting cliff dwelling birds, Mai tracks down a single bird and expresses his desire to learn to fly. The bird agreed only after Mai lied that he had permission to learn how to fly. Initially, Mai fell down a lot, but, eventually, he was able to fly using his tail. To make sure he could sustain flight, the birds stuck dried weeds into Mai's fur. To their surprise, Mai was able to fly much better with his fake wings. When Mai fell hard, the birds decided to trick Mai further by putting their own feathers on him. In the air, Mai encountered the blue jays who convinced him to take his eyes out and throw them around. When Mai lost them, the blue jays gave him pine resin to put in his eyes leaving Mai embarrassed. In terms of a nature teaching point, this story involves the explanation of why coyotes have yellow eyes. In terms of social-emotional or thematic teaching point, the deception of the birds and of Mai would be worth exploring. (Pages 231-238)

Additional Resources: Sunny Dooley's biography.

In terms of the writing elements of the units, these stories would be used as model texts for the student writers as they create their own stories. Initially, students will rewrite one or two of these stories in pairs or small groups set in a more modern setting or explore a similar theme involving a different element of nature as described in lesson three.

Activities

Lesson 1: Introduction to Environmental View Points

In this soft introduction to environmentalism and the different viewpoints, students will be asked to define what environmentalism is and then determine what two different viewpoints are based on comparing and contrasting two articles on environmentalism.

To start off, students should be asked to identify in a group (or individually) what they think the word environmentalism is. If you know your students have studied this topic before, have them simply list three things they know about environmentalism. After reviewing their list, inform the students you are going to use their prior knowledge and new knowledge developed today to develop a working, class-wide definition of environmentalism. To do this, the students will watch the YouTube video “What is ENVIRONMENTALISM...” While viewing, have the students take notes, allowing them to use whatever form of notes they would prefer, as this will be developed more in lesson two. After they have completed the film, have students list what they feel are the most important parts of the definition. Use these key words to create a class generated definition which is stored on an anchor chart and is copied into the students' notebooks.

In the second step, have students set up two column notes (or whatever is the common notetaking practice of your building/district). Explain to the students you want them to be able to find the main ideas of the article with the intention of answering the question: What does the author think is the definition of environmentalism? How does it compare to our definition?

In groups, students will read the Op-Ed by Ericka Anderson “I’m A Christian Conservative Environmentalist. No, That’s Not an Oxymoron.” If you feel students would need more support, feel free to do this initial reading whole class. While reading the students should be looking for the key points which include:

- (1) Religion:
 - (a) faith-based world is overlooked source of environmentalism,
 - (b) use the Genesis story as the basis of environmentalism
- (2) Growing Number of Christian Environmental Groups
 - (a) Young Evangelicals for Climate Action
 - (b) Creation Care Prayer Breakfast

Once this is done, review the notes with the class to see where they compare and where they are differing. After this is completed, give the students time to answer the guiding questions presented above: What does the author think is the definition of environmentalism? How does it compare to our definition?

In the third step, guide the students to repeat the process using Jazmine Murphy’s “Decolonizing Environmentalism.” Again, have the students read the articles in groups to determine the main ideas and supporting details using two column notes. Once the notes are completed, the students should examine both charts looking for similarities and differences in the writers' points of view before finally provide them time to

answer the guiding questions.

Finally, students should examine both viewpoints and explain which writer they agree with citing evidence from the articles to prove their claim.

Lesson 2: Visual Notetaking: Coyote and the Pebbles

In this second lesson, students will use the notes they made yesterday to apply a newly learned process of sketch noting in order to improve upon their understanding of a text. By the end of the lesson, students will understand that they can incorporate sketch noting into the two forms of note taking they are used to for literacy: (a) Cornell Notes for informational texts and (b) the Four Square for literary texts.

To start off, direct students to their notes from yesterday on the two articles. What did they find easy and difficult about the note taking process? Explain to students that there are multiple ways to approach note taking and that they are going to watch a video that describes a new process: sketch noting. Before class, the teacher should have Doug Neill's "What is sketchnoting?" ready to go. While watching the video, have the students identify three takeaways on a post it notes.

After watching, have the students in groups share their post it notes to see what the commonalities are. After a brief small group discussion, give the students the opportunity to share as a class what sketchnoting is. The teacher and student can both add the definition to their anchor chart and notebook where they already have stored the definition for environmentalism.

Then, students will be asked to watch a second video, Doug Neill's "Improving Notetaking with Sketchnoting," to see how they can use the process with the work they have already done. Students will then choose one of the two articles: Jazmine Murphy's "Decolonizing Environmentalism" or Ericka Anderson "I'm A Christian Conservative Environmentalist. No, That's Not an Oxymoron." After choosing the article, they will review their notes on said choice and add some visuals to the notes in order to enhance their understanding of the piece.

In my class, students use different models for different types of texts. While we use the two column notes for informational reading, we use a four square for literary texts. Given this unit involves both types of texts, students will need to practice this with a literary text. Using Dayton Edmond's "Coyote and the Pebbles," students will identify: (a) characters, (b) setting, (c) plot, and (d) theme. The teacher should model the process showing the traditional word-based notetaking while also going back and adding in the visuals afterwards.

As a wrap up, students should reflect on their feelings about the sketchnoting process. It may be worth having students watch Doug Neill's "The 50/50 Rule of Visual Note-Taking."

Consider, at this point, having the students try to add additional details to their work both in the classroom and outside in nature. The teacher should assign them an additional text which would be enhanced by nature in the world around you. If I were to use the story, *Raven the Trickster* (pages 35-48), I would have the students practice their visual notetaking at the river nearby. After completing this activity, students should reflect on whether or not they felt being out in nature increased their understanding of the work or made it more difficult.

Lesson 3: Developing Origin Stories

In this lesson, students will take the work they did for the visual sketchnotes for the story, "Coyote and the Pebbles," and identify the elements of origin stories. In order to do this, students will need to take

informational notes on Native American mythology as well as the Trickster archetype.

The teacher should review the sketchnoting process with the overview of the Britannica article on “Native American Literature.” After reviewing the process, students should work in groups to identify: (1) Repetition (2) Time (3) Cultural Regions. After completing their notes, students should be able to choose one of the regional sections and take notes on just that section which they will share with the class. They can choose from: (1) Arctic, (2) Northwest Coast, (3) California, (4) Southwest, (5) Northeast, and (6) Plains.

When reviewing the notes, guide the students to recognize the repetition of the Trickster character across the regions. Students will then read *Meet the Trickster* (pages 4-5) from Matt Dembicki’s text *Trickster*. On post-it notes, allow the students to take one to two notes in a form of their choice about the Trickster archetype. Once completed, students should share their notes to create a class definition. Rather than adding the definition to the definition sheet, have the students create a visual representation of the trickster using visuals and words to describe what a trickster is. To do this, they should consider doing it in the style of sketchnotes with a mix of words and pictures. Also, the students should include evidence of who was the trickster in *Coyote and the Pebbles* and why they were the trickster.

On the second day, students would have the opportunity to develop their own version of the story *Coyote and the Pebbles*. Offer them the options of making the story more modern by changing the time and the place, by changing the characters to another animal, or by changing the events in the story that lead to a different outcome. Students should use a graphic organizer like the four-square they’ve already created reusing some elements, but changing others. If time permits, they can briefly write out a draft of the story.

On a third day, offer the students to use the opportunity to practice their writing in a natural setting based on what is available in the general surrounding of your school. I would take the students to each location. For example, my school has access to a grassy area, a woody area, and a river. I would have them complete visual notes in each of those locations creating details about the world around them. Once completed, they would be asked to incorporate some of those details into their outline or writing.

Upon completion of the outline or the draft, students should reflect on how their version of the story is an example of an origin story using their notes.

The second day lesson, rewriting the origin stories, should be done 2 to 3 more times during the course of the unit so that students have several different drafts to work with when they get to the final assessment. Consider the locations available to you, and not available to you when choosing different stories to have students rewrite.

Lesson 4: Understanding the Stars: Coyote and the Pebble

As a precursor, this lesson also uses the story *The Coyote and the Pebble*. It is not necessary to do this story, but I feel the stars are a concept my students would understand fairly well. Teachers could choose to use a different story with the suggested stories available above with the possible natural teaching points available at the end of the summaries.

In this lesson, the expected student outcome has the students focus on the story *Moshup’s Bridge* from *Trickster* to consider the author’s purpose in telling this story. Later, students will be asked to do similar work when reading an article on the formation of stars from NASA and watching a video from National Geographic to determine the difference between the ways to understand science.

To begin, the students should refer back to their sketchnotes for the story *Coyote and the Pebble*. Review the ending of the story and have the students consider the author's purpose for writing this story. If the students haven't already, have them create an anchor chart with the list of the five categories of author's purpose: persuade, inform, entertain, and explain. After creating the chart, the students should consider what reason the author had for telling this story and should back it up with evidence. This could be done as a journal entry or as an oral response.

After determining the purpose, the students should then work in notes to specifically explain what the author is trying to do. Some may say the point of the story is to entertain, which wouldn't be wrong. With multiple groups, it would be good for there to be some reasonable variety as I really want my students to understand that it's not about getting the right answer, but rather explaining your thinking. Those who didn't choose to inform should be asked to consider that option later in the comparison section.

With this process in mind, students will be directed to read the first part of the article from NASA on star formation. While reading, students should take notes with the guiding question: how are stars created? The article is a little difficult so it may be better to start with the video based on your understanding of your students' thinking and learning processes. Again, this would be an opportunity for students to use sketchnotes.

After reading the article, the students would continue to build their understanding by taking notes on the National Geographic video on stars. The students should be using the same guiding question as above.

Afterwards, students should consider what the author's purpose is in the three different texts. In what ways did the creators use similar methods? What methods did they use that were different? In all three genres, scientific articles, video, and graphic novel, there is a mix of words and visuals in order to get across the author's message. Students should specifically examine how each of those were used in all three texts.

Lesson 5: Using Maps to Build Context: Moshup's Bridge

In this lesson, there are two key student outcomes. The first is students are to develop an understanding of setting through location and pictures to see the impact that has on their level of understanding of a text. The second student outcome has students using images and written text to understand an author's purpose.

To begin with, the students should have read the story *Moshup's Bridge* prior to the start of class and come into class with their four-square sketchnotes on character, setting, plot, and theme. The teacher should focus on setting during this part of the lesson. Students should be provided with an individual copy of the map of Martha's Vineyard and several colored pencils. Students should name the details they identify in the prior reading. Using the digital maps available from the Martha's Vineyard Chamber of Commerce, have the students examine the different maps. For the general island map, have the students identify Aquinnah, the location of the story and it will give them a general idea where to locate it on a map. Students should color in Aquinnah with a yellow-colored pencil. Students should be looking at the southwest corner of the island when considering the story. Using the beach map, have the students use a purple-colored pencil have them draw the location of Moshup's Beach. Next, have the students identify Moshup's Trail using a red color pencil. This trail should start around the beach and head south until it starts to curve. Have the students consider the connection between the stories and the modern names of the beach and the trail. Using the interactive map, have students identify Noman's Island (created by Moshup when he throws the crab) as well as have them identify the location of the Elizabeth Islands. The students should color this green and label it. Since the map doesn't label the islands as the Elizabeth Islands, give the students the name of the individual islands

(Nonamesset, Naushon, Gosnold, Nashawena, and Cuttyhunk). The students should color them green and label them Elizabeth Islands.

Upon completing the map, the students should do a brief search for images of Moshup's Beach and gather them in a Google document. Once all the pictures are compiled, have the students examine the picture for finer details. What do you see in the pictures? Have them list their notes below the pictures. At this point, have students consider the impact this additional knowledge has on their understanding of the story in a brief journal response.

In a final task, students should look over the map and consider science. Why did the author include the story of Moshup creating Noman's Island? Why might a partially built bridge exist between the different islands based on the world splitting apart? Students should do this work in small groups.

Lesson 6: Oral Storytelling: Bear Who Stole the Chinook

As previously stated, I work in a K-8 school so I have the opportunity to have my older students work with younger students. This lesson could also be done virtually, I suppose, but I really want my students to engage in direct storytelling where possible as this will also build into their final projects.

In this lesson, students will develop an understanding of the role oral storytelling plays in learning and comprehension.

Prior to class, students should have read the story *Bear Who Stole the Chinook* and completed sketchnotes on the story. At this point, the teacher should review the notes with the students to confirm they all have a general understanding of the text. At this point, the teacher should have the students examine their reading habits: do they prefer to read something aloud? Do they prefer to hear it on audio? Do they prefer reading it online or in print? Where do they most like to read? It is suggested that this is done initially as a class discussion before asking students to journal about a time that someone read them a story.

After the students share their responses, students will then be provided the opportunity to listen to the author, Jack Gladstone, recite the story in a more lyrical form through the video on YouTube. While students are listening, ask them to consider how they feel during this experience with some sketchnotes. Once it is completed, have the students consider the role this plays in history.

Once the students have heard the performance, explain to the students how important hearing a story is for some students. The teacher should inform the students at the start of the unit that they will be reading to younger students as part of their learning experience. Prior to this lesson, the teacher should arrange for students to work with a grade of younger students (preferably students old enough to understand the stories, but young enough to appreciate older students reading to them). With the students, set rules for reading to younger students. Allow the students the opportunity to choose the story they would like to read to the younger students. Also, the teacher should pair the students up to practice reading the story to improve clarity and to alleviate nerves.

On the second day of this lesson, students would go to the other classroom and have the opportunity to read their story to 2-3 different groups of students. Intergrade level planning could be done with the other teacher to address standards being worked on in the language arts classroom. Also, if the weather permits, consider having the students read to the students in an outdoor setting.

Afterwards, have the students who were being read to write a brief response about how they felt about the experience. Share the responses with the students and talk about things that went well and need work based on that day's experience. This anchor chart should be reused during the final lesson where students write and share their stories.

Lesson 7: Considering Setting: Espun and Grandfather

In this lesson, students are asked to think about the impact their knowledge of a location has on a story. Students will attend a field trip to a local scenic overlook where they will do some journaling about the location and reread the text.

As pre-work for this assignment, students will need to be able to list all the different locations in the story with a brief description of them (written or visual). This list will be used later when the students are walking to the East Rock Park summit.

I think it is important that students be able to recognize their access to nature around the city. For this lesson, students will go to East Rock Park where they will hike to a summit. On the walk, students will stop and take notes about different locations they see and identify places they think would be similar to different locations in the story. They should be adding to their notes. They can even create a second column to distinguish between their notes specifically from the story and from their walk. Also, since I believe that keeping phones away will be a struggle, students will be encouraged to take pictures of locations that they think match up in the story. This will tie back to the pictures they used for Moshup's Bridge.

Once at the top, students will journal about their experience in nature. What stood out to them? How do they feel? After a five-to-ten-minute journaling session, students will be asked to share their journals. The teacher will then direct them to the story and ask them to think about how all the things they have seen today impact their understanding of the text. After completing the text, students will write a second journal entry in which they consider the impact of their new knowledge on their understanding of the text.

Upon returning, it is important to have students reflect on the three different ways they have interpreted learning in this unit: without any context, with context from research (Moshup's Bridge), and with context from experience (Espun and Grandfather).

Lesson 8: Writing Origin Stories

The ultimate goal of this unit is for students to create their own original origin stories that they would write for children in the younger grades. This would allow them the opportunity to take what they learned and produce a creative work, while also building towards the opportunity of sharing their work with a specific, authentic audience. One of the strengths of my students is their desire to help others. This has historically remained a constant. Many of my students are older siblings with responsibilities at home that they take seriously. By activating this attribute, I'm hope to increase student success.

Given the work with the trickster character, students will develop their own trickster creature by considering what creatures live in nature in their world. In lesson two and seven, students are asked to learn in spaces outside the classroom. In these lessons, opportunities to take notes about nature may be afforded to the students or a teacher may spend time in this final lesson allowing students to experience different environmental settings. Students will be encouraged to use these notes in their writing.

For their story, students should develop a story with a beginning, middle, and end that has their heroic lead encountering a trickster character that will teach the audience something about nature or something about life. In their writing, students should keep in mind their audience, school aged children, and make sure that both language and content are appropriate. Students will be encouraged to use their drafts from lesson three in order to gather ideas for their origin story. For struggling students, the opportunity to expand the drafts into a final, polished product will also be available.

For some of my more artistic students, the opportunity to create a graphic novel version of their story would provide them with buy-in they might not have under other circumstances. Considering this will be presented to younger students, the graphics would have to be appropriate for the audience.

Once the stories are completed, students will read their stories to younger students after a brief discussion regarding their reflections from the end of lesson number six where the students read to their younger peers.

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Appendix on Implementing District Standards

Reading Literature

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.7

Analyze the extent to which a filmed or live production of a story or drama stays faithful to or departs from the text or script, evaluating the choices made by the director or actors.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.2

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.9

Analyze how a modern work of fiction draws on themes, patterns of events, or character types from myths, traditional stories, or religious works such as the Bible, including describing how the material is rendered new.

Students will determine the theme of various stories in *Trickster*. Students will also look at the trickster archetype. Students will examine how close Jack Gladstone's written story is to his musical presentation.

Reading Informational Text

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.2

Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.6

Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.

Students will read a series of informational articles about nature elements related to the stories in *Trickster*. Students will compare different writers points of view in separate articles.

Writing

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

Students will write origin stories and write paragraphs on nature topics.

End Notes

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- ⁴ Robin L. Danzak, "Defining Identities Through Multiliteracies: EL Teens Narrate Their Immigration Experiences as Graphic Stories," *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 55, no. 3 (November 2011): pp. 187, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.00024>.
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- ⁶ Paige Tutt, "How-and Why-to Introduce Visual Note-Taking to Your Students," Edutopia (George Lucas Educational Foundation, April 9, 2021), <https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-and-why-introduce-visual-note-taking-your-students>.
- ⁷ Neill, Doug. What Is Sketchnoting?, YouTube (YouTube, 2017).
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- ¹⁴ Rae Jacobson, "Metacognition: How Thinking About Thinking Can Help Kids," Child Mind Institute, August 15, 2021, <https://childmind.org/article/how-metacognition-can-help-kids/>.
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¹⁷ Dave Aftandilian, "What Other Americans Can and Cannot Learn from Native American Environmental Ethics," *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 15, no. 3 (2011): pp. 220, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853511x588635>.

¹⁸ Aftandilian, "What Other Americans Can and Cannot Learn from Native American Environmental Ethics," pp. 231-232.

¹⁹ Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Vancouver, B.C.: Langara College, 2022).

²⁰ Aftandilian, "What Other Americans Can and Cannot Learn from Native American Environmental Ethics," pp. 238.

²¹ Roberta Rosenberg, "Being There: The Importance of a Field Experience in Teaching Native American Literature," *Studies in American Indian Literature* 12, no. 2 (2000): pp. 40.

²² Rosenberg, "Being There: The Importance of a Field Experience in Teaching Native American Literature," pp. 43.

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