

Native American Literature: Pre-colonization

America's First Literature - Before Colonization

Widely agreed that the first American literature was “written” by Native Americans

We will read North American literature from both before and after colonization

Recap: What does “colonization” mean?



Before Colonization

“Columbus did not discover a new world; he established contact between two worlds, both already old.”
- J.H. Parry

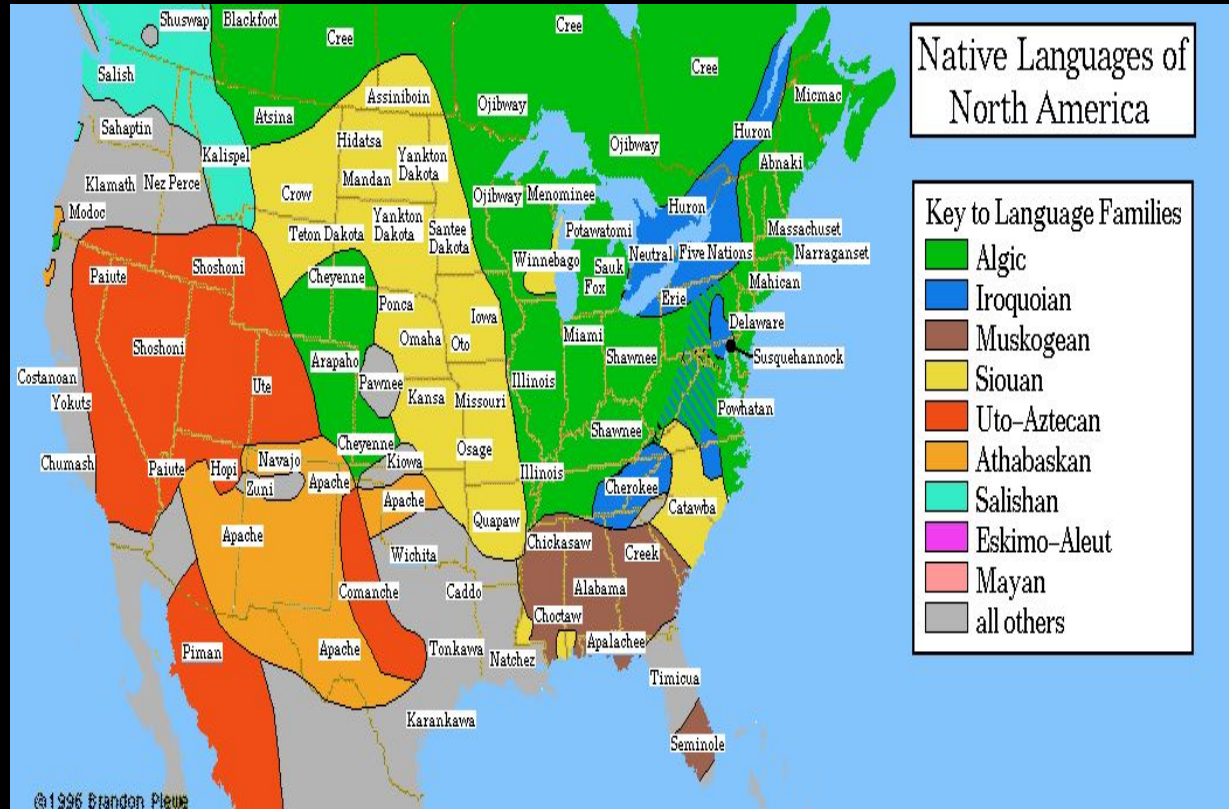
Somewhere between 2.1 million and 18 million Native Americans thrived in North America before Columbus arrived in 1492.



NA Languages

American Indians are not one cultural group. There are hundreds of cultural identities which make up the “native” population

There are an estimated 500 distinct Native American nations, speaking about 300 different languages.



Story Similarities

Despite their differences, their cultures and literary traditions had the following common elements:

- Lack of a written language, they believed in the power of words and relied on memory, rather than writing to preserve their texts.
- Stories are not defined by the boundaries of written language; there are no ending pages and they are not contained within a limited, concrete, physical source.
- Stories belong to the collective people/the tribe.

Similarities

- The oral tradition was a performance and is offered to the audience as dramatic events in time.
- The audience is not passive.
- The storyteller is very important to Native cultures and is one of the most honored and respected member of the tribe/society.
- There is usually no known original author

Types & Functions of Stories

Lesson - moral lessons to warn the younger generation to behave or instructions from spirit mentors to explain how to conduct ceremonies.

Descriptions of natural processes - water cycles, inter-species relationships, life cycles of plants, earth movements and soil types (among others)

Survival accounts - hunting, gathering and farming stories

Types & Functions of Stories

Oral maps for travel - describe historic and on-going migrations of tribe for subsistence and holy journeys.

Magical tales of transformation - articulate the mystery and complexity of being human.

Bonding - Adventures in love, romance, and marriage

Creation Myths

The purpose of a creation myth is to explain how the universe, earth, or other natural elements began.

Served four functions:

1. To give the audience a sense of awe and wonder
2. To explain the natural world
3. To support social customs
4. To guide people through the trials of living

Throughout history, societies have explained how the world came to be...

Asian Mythology

From the void, a cosmic egg formed



Norse Mythology

Man was created from the branch of an Ash tree



Greek Mythology

In the beginning, there was Chaos, everything was in confusion and darkness. Out of Chaos, there appeared Night and Depth.



“The World on a Turtle’s Back

Together, we’re going to read a creation story from the Iroquois tribe.

In your notebook, create this graph:

Items created	What Caused Them

Response Questions

2. **Infer:** Do you think the husband pushed the woman? Why or why not? If so, do you think she deserved it? Why or why not?
3. **Infer:** Why do you think the beings in the Sky World didn't pay attention to what the animals were doing?



Response Questions



4. **Predict:** What do you think the conflict between the left and right handed twin is meant to symbolize? Explain.

5. **Connect:** What similarities do you see between the Iroquois creation myths and other religions' creation myths?

Exit Slip

Write at least three sentences for full points. However, if you choose to write more, you might get some bonus points!

6. Consider the four purposes of origin myths from our notes. Do you see all four in “The Earth on a Turtle’s Back”? Which do you see? Which do you not see (if any)? Explain using examples from the text.

