

PERFORMING A SALMON STORY

Students learn about salmon mythology in Coast Salish Native American culture.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Understand how salmon and mythology shaped the lifestyle of Coast Salish people.
- Gain experience in working effectively as a team.
- Develop skill in being an attentive audience.

STANDARDS

Social Studies
Reading

THEME

Salmon

GRADES

3 - 5

TIME

15 mins. rehearsal
10 mins. performance
& discussion

WHAT TO DO

1. Make seven copies of the script and use a highlighter to designate one part on each copy. (Group of salmon will share.)
2. Explain to students what performing the story will involve, that some students will be reading parts and others will be the audience.
3. Call for 9 to 12 volunteers to be in the performance.
4. Assign audience members another activity while you meet with the cast to decide parts, read through the script, and do a second read-through with inflection.
5. Assemble the cast at the head of the classroom, where all can see. Introduce their roles.
6. State that audience members are to pay attention and really listen.
7. Start the performance by reading the title and source of the story, then point to the narrator to begin. Point along the way, as needed, if someone gets confused.
8. Repeat the performance if you think necessary to focus students on the story, not on the readers.
9. Lead the class in asking and answering questions, which might include the following:
 - Why might the Haida people have made up this story?
 - When and where might they have told it?
 - What does it tell us about the importance of salmon to them?
 - The diet and culture of these people were based on knowing that salmon would come every year. How might their lifestyle have been different if they had not been able to count on salmon?
 - What might we learn from this story today?
 - What did you experience as a member of the audience? Could you get over the fact that these were your friends and pay attention to the story?

NOTES

If you prefer to use a different story, search books or websites for one that can involve several students and perhaps a few simple props, depending on time and interest.

Consider adapting the story for an all-class choral reading in a school talent show.

THE COMING OF THE SALMON

A Story From the Haida People To Act Out

Cast: narrator, chief, girl, councilmember, elder, raven, 3 or more salmon

Narrator: One morning the chief of the tribe found his young daughter crying.

Chief: Why are you crying, my daughter?

Girl: I am c-c-crying because no one will give me w-w-what I want.

Chief: But I am a powerful chief and many members of our tribe are wise. Surely we can get it for you. What do you want?

Girl: I w-w-want what I saw in a d-d-dream: a great, shining fish leaping in our r-r-river.

Narrator: The girl continued to cry day and night until she grew sick from crying.

Chief: Call a great Council Fire! Round up all the tribal elders to come! We must save my daughter!

Narrator: They all came and, when everyone was seated around the fire, one rose to speak:

Councilmember: We have many big fish here where the river meets the sea but none is like what the daughter of our chief describes. Such a fish may prove a great thing for our tribe if we can find it. Maybe one of our oldest elders knows where such a great, gleaming, leaping fish can be found.

Narrator: Sure enough, a very old elder managed to stand.

Elder: Raven lives among the cedar trees and is my good friend. He knows many things that we do not. Let us bring him to this Council Fire to advise us.

Narrator: The chief gave permission, and a young man from the tribe followed the elder's directions to where Raven lived. The big bird flew to the young man's shoulder and they made their to the Council Fire. There, Raven spoke:

Raven: What the daughter of the chief asks for is a giant fish known as the salmon. At this season, they are far from here, at the mouth of a mighty river. Because the people of your tribe are my friends, I will fly there and bring a salmon to your village.

Narrator: Raven rose into the air and flew and flew. Finally, his keen eyes spotted many salmon swimming at the mouth of the river.

Raven: I will dive quickly.....Ah, I have caught the young son of the salmon chief. Others are sure to come to rescue him! I will hold him firmly and fly like the wind back to the village.

Narrator: Leaping high out of the water, a group of salmon saw the direction that Raven flew with their chief's son.

Group of salmon: After them! After them!

Narrator: Although the salmon swam rapidly in pursuit, Raven was faster. When he reached the village, he went to the crying girl.

Raven: Here is the great fish.

Girl: Oh, thank you, thank you! It is just what I saw in my dream!

Narrator: The girl stopped crying at once. Then Raven spoke to the elders.

Raven: Many salmon will be swimming soon into your river to try to rescue the young salmon. Be ready for them.

Chief: Make a huge net and tie it across the river! Quickly!

Narrator: The people made the net and tied one end to a big rock and the other end to a tall cedar tree. They finished just in time to catch nearly all the pursuing salmon.

Group of salmon: We are caught! We are caught! May we be a blessing for the people!

Narrator: Years later, the people cut the cedar tree and made a grand totem pole. At the top was their chief in the form of a Thunderbird. Next was Raven, representing himself, of course! And Salmon was right below, celebrating how the great fish has come, year after year, to feed the people.