**Purpose**
Youth explore the similarities and differences among people through storytelling and its importance in the American Indian culture.

**Facts to Know**
- **Suggested group size:** six to eight children per adult volunteer
- **Time frame:** group meeting 30 to 60 minutes
- **Recommended ages:** 5- to 7-year-olds (kindergarten through second grade)

In Chippewa culture, stories are only told when there is snow on the ground. This lesson would be an excellent group activity in the winter.

**Materials:**
- Cloverbud handout: Magic Cedar Basket
- Markers
- Staplers and staples
- Scissors
- Yellow, black, red and white construction paper
- Large wallpaper samples or heavy-weight colored paper
- Snacks for Magic Cedar Baskets (for example, popcorn)
- Large pillows or blankets for sitting on during storytelling time (members can bring their own)
Background Knowledge

Cultural understanding and acceptance plays an important role in our relationships. The food, clothing, music, art, homes or religion of another culture may be different from our own. Learning about these differences and similarities, and what we do with that knowledge, affects our relationships with all people.

The culture of the American Indian plays a central role in understanding the world from this perspective. Historically, every tribal nation had unique homes, foods, art or religions. Today, many Native Americans live in homes similar to yours, eat similar foods and even may enjoy the same art or practice similar religions. However, the preservation of cultural tradition and passing along the oral history of a tribe remain important to American Indian culture.

American Indian culture is known for its rich tradition of oral history. Storytelling allows tribal elders to share history, customs, rituals and legends with younger generations. These stories are often vivid narratives that breathe life into tribal culture and teach life lessons about life, love, leadership and honor.

In this lesson, the tradition of sharing oral history will be represented in each storytelling activity.

Learning Activities

Because storytelling is a significant part of each activity in this lesson, choose a meeting location that provides a comfortable space for storytelling. Encourage members to bring a pillow or blanket for sitting on, and to wear comfortable clothes to the meeting.

Do: Getting Started
We Are All Links in a Chain (15 minutes)

Prior to the meeting, cut several strips of red, yellow, black and white paper to be used to make a paper loop chain. Strips of paper 1 inch by 9 inches work best.

1. Say to the members: “In several American Indian cultures, colors have special meaning. In this activity, we will construct a chain of paper loops. Our chain will be made with four colors: black, red, yellow and white. In Lakota/Dakota/Nakota culture, each color may represent a cardinal direction: north, south, east or west. The directions for each color may be different for each band of Sioux, but that is part of what makes it interesting.”

2. Have each member select a colored strip, and with an adult’s help, write one of the cardinal directions on it. Then help members connect the loops in a chain with a stapler.

3. Then say, “The last color meanings we will learn about are the values shown by each color. In Lakota/Dakota/Nakota culture, red represents bravery, yellow represents fortitude, white represents generosity and black represents wisdom.”

4. Again, have each member select a colored strip, and with an adult’s help, write the appropriate value on it. Then help members connect these loops to the chain with a stapler. To wrap up the activity, ask, “Does the length of the chain make a difference in its strength? How is our club like a chain?”

(Circle of Chainlinks, 2003)
Prior to reading this story, encourage members to have a seat in a storytelling area. They might want to use a pillow or blanket if sitting on the floor.

1. Share with members that the story they are about to hear will illustrate the Native American value of wisdom. Discuss with members the value of wisdom. Say, “Wisdom always is doing your best and being open-minded. It is building a good reputation and being reliable. To be wise is to be in balance and harmony with values, beliefs, attitudes and relationships with all of your fellow creatures, with nature and with the universe.” Take a black strip of paper from the “We Are All Links in a Circle” activity and ask an adult helper to write the title of our story on it, then connect the loop to the chain made earlier. Say, “This Lakota/Dakota story is about wisdom and fairness. It is called ‘Why Bees Can Sting.’”

2. Read the following story to members:

“Why Bees Can Sting”

“Long ago, animals lived everywhere and they were friends. There were many kinds of animals, birds and bugs. Each did its own work, lived its own way and worked hard. The bees worked the hardest of all of them. They went to the flowers and made honey, but Bear did not work hard at all and was very lazy.

“One day, Bear was hungry and went for a walk. He saw a tree in the forest, where many bees lived and stored their honey. There was a hole in the tree. Bear stuck his paw in the hole and felt something on his paw. He took his paw out and put it in his mouth and tasted something sweet. It was honey! Bear liked the honey because it was sweet, and Bear loved anything sweet. After Bear was full, he went away but kept coming back all the time.

The bees were not happy, so they went to the Great Spirit and said, “We are not happy. We work hard, but Bear comes and takes away all our honey. What can we do?”

“The Great Spirit thought and thought. Then the Great Spirit said, “I can help you by giving you stingers. Then when Bear comes to take your honey again, you can use your stingers to make him leave your honey alone. He will not take your honey again.” Now the bees had stingers, so they went home. Now they could sting Bear, so they made more honey and waited for Bear.

“Well, one day, Bear did come back because he was hungry again. When Bear stuck his paw in the hole in the tree, he had a big surprise. Bear did not have something sweet on his paw; he did not have honey on his paw, but he did have bees on his paw, and the bees stung him. The bees stung Bear’s paws, ears and nose. They stung him everywhere. Oh, but did it hurt! Bear was not happy and cried and cried. Bear ran away from the tree and the bees, and he never went back again.”

3. After reading the story, ask the members how wisdom was important to the story. Emphasize that being wise is being in balance with fellow creatures and nature. In this story, Bear was stealing honey from the bees. Bear was out of balance with the bees. When the Great Spirit gave bees stingers, the balance between Bear and the bees was restored. Then say, “We must all work together as a team because one person’s actions are felt by others.”

4. Demonstrate how they are connected by pulling on part of the chain of links. Ask members to share other examples of how they are connected to others and how their actions affect people around them.

Prior to reading this story, encourage members to have a seat in a storytelling area. They might want to use a pillow or blanket if sitting on the floor.

1. Share with members that the story they are about to hear will illustrate the Native American value of generosity. Discuss with members the value of generosity. Say, "Generosity is shown in caring: be kind and compassionate, and help people in need. It is being a good neighbor and protecting the environment. Generosity is contributing to the well-being of one’s people and all of life." Take a white strip of paper from the “We Are All Links in a Circle” activity and ask an adult helper to write the title of our story on it, then connect the loop to the chain made earlier. Say, “This Lakota/Dakota story is about generosity. It is called ‘The Magic Cedar Basket.’”

2. Read the following story to members:

“The Magic Cedar Basket”

“One morning, Wi Sapa (Black Moon) went into the forest to find food for her people. She walked and walked to find berries or roots or nuts to feed her people. When she grew tired, she stopped beneath a cedar tree to rest. Now I don’t know if you know this or not, but a cedar tree can do magic. Wi Sapa did not know this.

“Wi Sapa soon fell asleep and dreamed that the cedar tree could talk. The cedar tree said, ‘Dig under me. Dig and you will find roots. Take the roots and make them into a basket for you to gather fruit, berries, roots or nuts in. The basket will have magic and it will help you work. It will help all the children in the village gather food to eat.’ This sounded so good to Wi Sapa. Wi Sapa awoke and began to dig under the cedar tree. She found the roots of the cedar tree and wove them into a basket.

The basket was big and very strong. Wi Sapa found other roots, as well as berries and nuts, to fill the basket. Soon it was very heavy. It was too heavy for Wi Sapa to carry. She said, “Oh, no, this basket is too heavy to carry now. I cannot carry it home.” And she began to cry.

“Do not cry, Wi Sapa,’ said the basket. ‘I will carry the roots home and you may walk beside me.’ Wi Sapa thought that was very generous of the basket. So Wi Sapa and the basket went home to the village where the other children were. They wanted to know about the basket, too. Wi Sapa told them about the cedar tree and the dream and how the basket had helped her. They were all very happy and liked having a basket to do the work for them.

“Each day, one of the children went out with the basket to gather food. They looked for food. The forest was very generous; they found berries, roots and nuts. The basket always carried the food back to the village for them. Nobody was hungry.

“Soon the children became lazy. ‘We do not want to look for food anymore. We do not like to pick the berries. We do not like to dig the roots. We do not want to gather nuts. You can find the food and bring it to us.’ The basket was angry. The basket did not like lazy children. The basket would not go. The basket would not go alone to the forest. It just sat there.

“The children grew hungry and went to the basket. ‘Why haven’t you filled yourself with nuts, berries and roots for us?’ the children asked. The basket replied: ‘I helped you gather food for your people. I offered you my help, I was generous, and you were not thankful for my help. You just wanted me to do more for you.”
I felt good inside when I helped you, when I was generous to you. You were not generous back to me. I feel sad now.

“The children felt bad, they took the basket and went out to pick berries. They went out to dig roots. They went out to gather nuts. But this time, they carried the basket themselves. When they returned to the village, they shared the berries, roots and nuts with everyone. The cedar basket had taught them how good it feels to be generous.”

3. After reading the story, ask the members how generosity was important to the story. Emphasize that being generous is being kind, compassionate and helping others. In this story, the cedar basket helped the children gather food for the village. But the children grew lazy and told the cedar basket to gather food alone. The cedar basket refused. When the children saw that the basket was sad, they took the cedar basket to the forest to gather food for the village. The balance between the cedar basket and the children was restored. Then say, “We can show generosity and caring by making something special for someone else.”

4. Have the students make their own magic cedar basket with the Cloverbud handout: Magic Cedar Basket template. Trace and cut the pattern from large pieces of wallpaper samples or other heavy-weight paper. Then glue or staple the baskets together. Use the instructions provided on the Cloverbud handout. Attach the handle and fill with a simple snack such as popcorn or trail mix. Encourage the Cloverbud members to share their magic cedar basket with someone special.

“Eldest son had been obedient since early childhood. He seemed pensive, thoughtful of others, mild in manner, and always a joy to his family and to his tribe. At the first indication of spring, tradition told him to build a hut somewhere in an isolated place. There, he would not be disturbed during his dream quest. He prepared his hut and himself and went immediately to begin his fast for seven days.

“For the first few days, he amused himself by walking in the woods and over the mountain trails. He examined trees, plants and flowers. This kind of physical effort in the outdoors prepared him for a night of sound sleep. His observations of the day filled his mind with pleasant ideas and dreams.

“More and more he desired to know how the trees, plants, flowers and berries grew. Seemingly, they grew wild without much help from the Indians. He wondered why some species were good to eat, while others contained poisonous juices. These thoughts came back to him many times as he retreated to his lodge at night. He secretly wished for a dream that would reveal what he could do to benefit his family and his tribe.

“’I believe the Chief of Sky Spirits guides all things and it is to him I owe all things,’ he thought to himself. ‘I wonder if Chief Sky Spirit can make it easier for all Indians to acquire enough food without hunting animals every day to eat.

“’I must try to find a way in my dreams,’ he pondered. He stayed on his bed the third day of fasting because he felt weak and faint. Sometimes he thought that he was going to die. He dreamed that he saw a strong, handsome young man coming down from the sky, advancing toward him. He was richly dressed in green and yellow colors. He wore a plume of waving feathers on his head. His every movement was graceful.

“’I have been sent to you,’ said the sky-visitor. ‘The Sky Chief, who made all things in the sky and upon the Earth, intends for me to be your Guardian Spirit and I have come to test you.

“’Sky Chief has observed all that you have done to prepare yourself for your Quest. He understands the kind and worthy secret wish of your heart. He knows that you desire a way to benefit your family and your tribe. He is pleased that you do not seek strength to make war. I have come to show you how to obtain your greatest wish. First, your spirit name shall be Wunzh.’

“The stranger then told Wunzh to arise and wrestle with him. This was the only way for him to achieve his sacred wish. As weak as he was from fasting, Wunzh wondered how he could ever wrestle the stranger.

“He rose to the challenge, determined in his heart to die in the effort if he must. The two wrestled. After some time when Wunzh felt nearly exhausted, the Sky Stranger said, ‘It is enough for today. I will come in tomorrow to test you some more.’ Smiling, the visitor ascended in the same direction from which he came.

“Next day at the same time, the stranger appeared. Again the two wrestled. While Wunzh felt weaker than the day before, he set his mind and heart to his task. His courage seemed to increase, however, in reverse proportion to his waning physical strength. The stranger stopped just in time before Wunzh dropped to the ground.

“’Tomorrow will be your last chance. I urge you to be strong, my friend, as this is the only way for you to achieve your heart’s sacred wish,’ said the sky-visitor.

“Wunzh took to his bed with his last ounce of energy. He prayed to the Sky Chief for wisdom and enough strength to endure to the end of his Quest.

“The third time they wrestled, Wunzh was so weak that his arms and legs felt like rubber. But his inner determination drove him forward with the kind of endurance necessary to win. The same length of time passed as in the first two wrestling bouts. Suddenly the stranger stopped and declared himself conquered by Wunzh!

“Then the sky-visitor entered the lodge for the first time. He sat down beside Wunzh to instruct him in the way he should now proceed to achieve his secret wish.
"Great Sky Chief has granted your desire. You have wrestled manfully. Tomorrow will be your seventh day of fasting. Your father will come to see you and bring you food. As it is the last day of your fast, you will be able to succeed.

"Now I will tell you what you must do to achieve your final victory. Tomorrow we will wrestle once more. When you have prevailed over me for the last time, then throw me down and strip off my clothes. You must clean the Earth of roots and weeds and make the ground soft. Then bury me in that very spot, covering me with my yellow and green clothes and then with Earth.

"When you have done this, leave my body in the Earth. Do not disturb it. Come occasionally to see if I have come to life. Be careful to see that no grass or weeds cover my grave. Once a month, cover me with fresh Earth. If you follow what I have told you, you will succeed in your Guardian Spirit Quest. You will help your family and all the Indians by teaching them what I have now taught you," the Sky Stranger concluded as they shook hands and the visitor left.

"On the seventh morning, Wunzh's father came with some food.

"My son, how do you feel? You have fasted long enough. It is seven days since you have eaten food. You must not sacrifice your life. The Great Spirit does not require that of you."

"My father, thank you for coming and for the food. Let me stay here alone until the sun goes down. I have my own special reasons."

"Very well. I shall wait for you at home until the hour of the setting sun," replied the father as he departed.

"The Sky Stranger returned at the same hour as before. The final wrestling match began. Wunzh had not eaten the food his father brought. But already he felt a new inner power that had somehow been given to him. Was it Spirit Power from his Guardian Spirit?

"Wunzh grasped his opponent with supernatural strength and threw him to the ground. Wunzh removed the beautiful clothes and the plume. Then he discovered his friend was dead.

"He remembered the instructions in every detail and buried his Guardian Spirit on the very spot where he had fallen. Wunzh followed every direction minutely, believing his friend would come to life again.

"Wunzh returned to his father’s lodge at sundown. He ate sparingly of the meal his mother prepared for him. Never for a moment could he forget the grave of his friend. Throughout the spring and into summer, he visited the grave regularly. He carefully kept the area clean of grass and weeds. He carefully kept the ground soft and pliable. Soon he saw the tops of green plumes emerging through the Earth. He noticed that the more care he gave the plants, the faster the green plumes seemed to grow.

"Wunzh concealed his activity from his father. Days and weeks passed. Summer was drawing to a close. Then one day, Wunzh invited his father to follow him to the site of his Quest. He showed his father the graceful-looking plants growing there. They were topped with yellow silken hair and waving green plumes. Gold and green clusters of fruit adorned each side of the stalks.

"Father, these plants are from my dream friend," explained Wunzh. ‘He is my Guardian Spirit, a friend to all mankind, named Mon-daw-min, meaning “corn for all Indians.” This is the answer to my Quest, my secret heart’s wish. No longer will we need to hunt animals every day for our food. As long as we take care of our corn gift, the Earth will give us good food for our living.’

"Wunzh pulled off the first ear of corn and give it to his father.

"See, my father. This corn is what I fasted for. The Chief of Sky Spirits has granted my Quest. He has sent us this wonderful new food of corn. From now on, our people need not depend entirely upon hunting and fishing to survive."

"Wunzh talked with his father, giving him all of the instructions he had..."
received from his Guardian Spirit. He showed his father how the corn husks should be pulled off the stalks, and how the first seed must be saved for future plantings. He explained how the ears of corn should be held before the fire only long enough for the outer leaves to turn brown, so that the inside kernels remained sweet and juicy.

“The entire family gathered for Wunzh’s feast of corn. The father led a prayer of thanksgiving for the bountiful and good gift from the Chief of Sky Spirits. Wunzh felt happy that his Guardian Spirit Quest was successfully completed.

“This is how Wunzh became known as the father of Indian corn by the Chippewa and Ojibwa Indian tribes.”

After reading the story, ask the members how fortitude was important to the story. Emphasize that having fortitude is about sticking with something, even if it is difficult, until you do your very best. In this story, Wunzh asked the Great Spirit to teach his people how to have food every day without having to hunt or fish. Wunzh’s vision quest revealed to him how to grown corn. When Wunzh faced his vision quest with courage, the Great Spirit taught him to grow corn so that his people always would have food. Then say, “We must all work to make the world a better place. What can you do to help make the world a better place for all?”

Apply: Going Beyond

1. Make a Good Deeds Tree. Make the world a better place together: Plan, complete and celebrate a service project. Take photos while planning and doing. Place a large tree branch in a large flowerpot with sand in the base to hold the branch upright. Then attach ribbons to photos and hang them from the small branches of the Good Deeds Tree during a celebration for completing the service project.

2. Do a “happy dance.” Form a circle, play music and dance around the circle until the music stops. Dance in any way that brings happiness. Then pause while everyone moves to the center of the circle and makes happy sounds. Repeat this pattern two or three times.

3. Learn the language. Learn the Lakota words for the numbers one to six and four colors from the Links in a Chain activity. 1 = Wanji (Wanh Zhee), 2 = Nunpa (Noon pah), 3 = Yamni (Yah mnee), 4 = Topa (Doe pah), 5 = Zaptan (Zahp tahn), 6 = Sakpe (Shak pay). Black = Sapa (Sa pah), Yellow = Zi (Zee), Red = Sa (Shah), White = Ska (Skah).

Acknowledgements

Project Coordinator, Author and Editor: Monique Snelgrove, Extension Agent, Extension Center for 4-H Youth Development
Curriculum Consultant and Editor: Rachelle Vettern, Ph.D., Extension Specialist, NDSU Extension Service

Resources

Circle of Chainlinks. (2003). CHARACTER COUNTS, WE ARE ALL RELATIVES! pg. 12, Josephson Institute of Ethics, Marina del Rey, Calif. CHARACTER COUNTS! and the 6 Pillars of Character are service marks of the CHARACTER COUNTS! Coalition, a project of the Josephson Institute of Ethics.

Why Bees Can Sting. (2003). CHARACTER COUNTS, WE ARE ALL RELATIVES! pg. 32, Josephson Institute of Ethics, Marina del Rey, Calif. CHARACTER COUNTS! and the 6 Pillars of Character are service marks of the CHARACTER COUNTS! Coalition, a project of the Josephson Institute of Ethics.

The Magic Cedar Basket. (2003). CHARACTER COUNTS, WE ARE ALL RELATIVES! pg. 46, Josephson Institute of Ethics, Marina del Rey, Calif. CHARACTER COUNTS! and the 6 Pillars of Character are service marks of the CHARACTER COUNTS! Coalition, a project of the Josephson Institute of Ethics.

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