



**NATIVE AMERICAN  
LITERATURE**

**30,000BC - 1730**

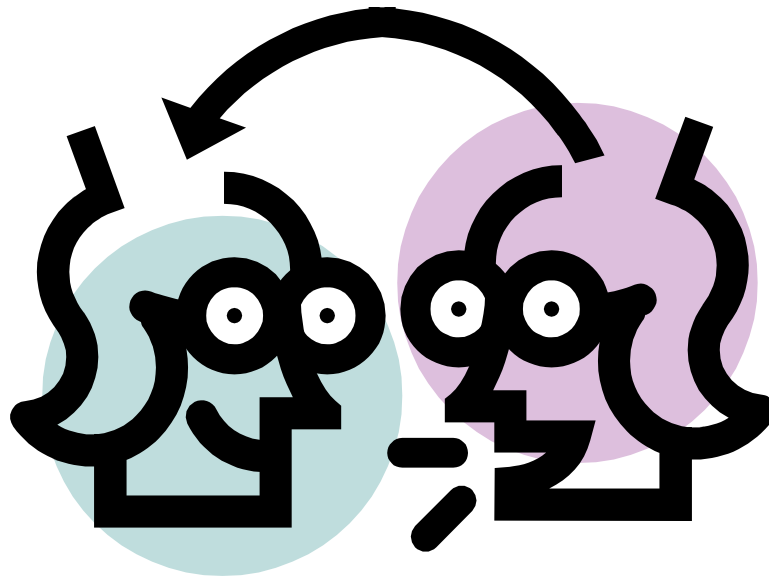
# HISTORICAL CONTEXT

- N.A.'s have been in America 30 TIMES LONGER than Europeans.
- N. A.'s befriended the first Europeans and instructed them in AGRICULTURE and WOODCRAFT.
- If not for the help of N.A.'s, the Europeans may not have survived the COLD WINTERS.

<b>Arrowhead</b>  Alertness	<b>Arrow</b>  Protection	<b>Bear Track</b>  Good Omen	<b>Bird</b>  Carefree
<b>Broken Arrow</b>  Peace	<b>Butterfly</b>  Everlasting Life	<b>Cactus</b>  Sign of the Desert	<b>Cactus Flower</b>  Courtship
<b>Coyote Tracks</b>  Trickster	<b>Crossed Arrows</b>  Friendship	<b>Day &amp; Nights</b>  -Time-	<b>Deer</b>  Plenty - Game
<b>Eagle Feather</b>  Chief	<b>Enclosure</b>  Ceremonial Dances	<b>Fence</b>  Warding Good Luck	<b>Four Ages</b>  Infancy, Youth Middle & Old Age
<b>Gila Monster</b>  Dream Time	<b>Headdress</b>  Ceremony	<b>Hogan</b>  Longtime Home	<b>Horse</b>  Journey
<b>Lasso</b>  Captivity	<b>Man</b>  Life	<b>Mountain</b>  Great Abundance	<b>Mountain Range</b>  Destination
<b>Morning Stars</b>  Guidance	<b>Paths Crossing</b>  Life's Journey	<b>Rain Clouds</b>  Good Prospect	<b>Raindrops - Rain</b>  Plentiful Crop
<b>Running Water</b>  Constant Life	<b>Saddle Bags</b>  Journey	<b>Shaman's Eye</b>  Medicine	<b>Sky Band</b>  Leading to Happiness
<b>Snake</b>  Defiance	<b>Sun Rays</b>  Constancy	<b>Sun Symbols</b>  Happiness	<b>Thunderbird</b>  Sacred Bearer of Unlimited Happiness
<b>Tipi (Tepee)</b>  Temporary Home	<b>Water House</b>  Life	<b>Warding Arrows</b>  Warding off -evil spirits-	

Recorded in **PICTOGRAPHS**, or **SYMBOLS** conveying ideas.

No fixed versions exist because of the **ORAL TRADITION**. Stories change over time with each speaker.



Language is **POETIC** and moving.



Interaction with **NATURE** is portrayed.



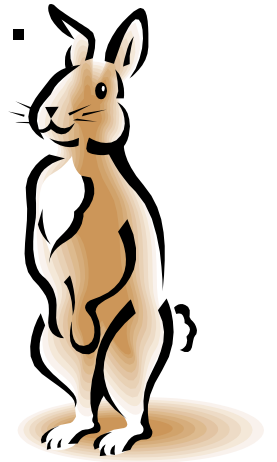


Related to TRIBAL KNOWLEDGE,  
CUSTOMS, and RITUALS.





**TRICKSTER STORIES** illustrate  
culturally appropriate **BEHAVIOR**  
and explain the **ORIGINS** of some  
feature of the natural world.





# WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

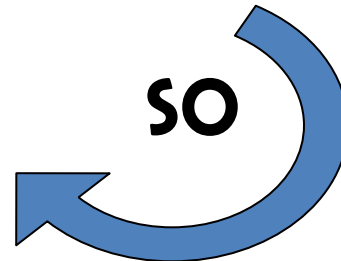
- The arrival of the white settlers resulted in almost the **COMPLETE DESTRUCTION** of N. A. societies.
- N. A.'s were forced to learn the **WHITE MAN'S WAYS** of survival.
- N. A.'s were in danger of losing their **IDENTITY, LANGUAGE, and TRADITIONS.**
- Some N. A.'s and whites are credited for **KEEPING THE HERITAGE ALIVE.**

# Native American Literature: Cultural Diversity

At time of Columbus,  
350 distinct  
languages existed in  
North America

Thousands of  
distinct cultural  
groups existed  
as well.

No single Native  
American culture  
or literature.



# What are the characteristics of Native American Literature?

## Oral history:

- Good speakers valued in many tribes because of tradition of participatory democracy
- Stories handed down through the oral tradition



# Characteristics of Native American Literature

## Oral Tradition

Storytelling: primary means of communicating and teaching about the physical world, social order, appropriate behavior, human nature, and the problem of good vs. evil.

Repetition is a common characteristic

Ritual beginnings and endings

Use of archaic language

Terse writing style

# Additional Characteristics of Native American Literature

Explains beliefs about the nature of the physical world. Example: how did the world come to be?

Takes place in primal world or pre-civilization.

Beings are animal spirits in more or less human form: monsters, confusions of nature, etc.

Mythic age flows into age of transformation (legends), which flows into historical time (real heroes)

# “The Sky Tree”

- Huron piece of literature
- Creation myth
  - The beginning of the earth
  - How people, and land came to be
- The Earth Diviner Myth
  - Common among Native American cultures
  - Earth is covered by water
    - An animal dives down in to the water and brings up soil
    - Many Native Americans call North America Turtle Island
- Symbolism: What does the rooting of the tree represent?



# “The Sky Tree”



- Archetype
  - Prefix “arch” = Extreme
  - Carl Jung (one of the founding fathers of psychology)
  - There are certain images which our minds unconsciously create that appear in the dreams of all humans and in the myths of every culture.
- Archetypes are symbols, but symbols are not always archetypes.
  - Symbolism may vary slightly

# Archetypes

## Examples of Archetypes



## In “The Sky Tree”...

Archetype

Tree

Universal religious symbol

Gilgamesh  
(Mesopotamian)

Eve (Christian)

Yggdrasil (Norse)

Symbolism?

What does the rooting of  
the tree symbolize?



# “Coyote Finishes His Work”

- Creation myth
  - Explains creation of the Indians
  - Explains the creation of Indian culture
- Messianic (savior) Myth



- Archetypes
  - Coyote = archetypal trickster
  - Earth-woman
  - Old Man

# “Coyote Finishes His Work”

- The return of Old Man and Coyote
  - Coyote will return first.
  - Earth will require a change.
  - Old Man will bring spirits of the dead with him.
  - There will be no more “other side camp.”
  - All people will live together.
  - Earthmother will be restored.

