

## Lesson 1.2: Pomo Stories

### LESSON INTRODUCTION

**Time Frame:** 1-2 class periods

**Materials:**

- [The Purpose of Stories Reading Activity](#)
- Blank paper (optional) and pencils

In this lesson, students read and analyze a contemporary Pomo story. Students explore the purpose of oral tradition in teaching lessons about community, respect, and purpose.

**Teacher Background:**

The interdependence between humans, plants, and animals is highlighted in nearly every story passed down through Native families. Stories and songs solidify the responsibility that humans have in caring for the environment in which they live and warn of potential conflicts that can arise when imbalance occurs. Exploring Pomo stories can be a jumping off point for exploring land stewardship, ecosystem balance, traditional foods, and the cultural importance of fostering a strong, respectful relationship with the natural world of which humans are included.

Stories teach a range of lessons and often explore the root and origin of natural phenomena. Common topics include explaining geographic location, weather, the roles, and purpose of specific organisms within an ecosystem, customs around family, spirituality, food, and respect, and elements of human nature including internal conflicts.

The story included in this lesson comes from a collection of stories written by Greg Sarris called “How A Mountain is Made.” Greg Sarris is the Honorable Chairman of the **Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria**, located in Sonoma County, California. The stories explore a range of topics, all centering around the same geographic location: Sonoma Mountain.

### Why use place-based stories?

Native culture is not a monolith. Each tribe has its own specific oral tradition and customs that are rooted in the physical location of the community. Within large tribal groups exist smaller bands of tribes that have their own stories, traditions, and customs. **Pomo** territory spans four separate counties, and within that territory exists many separate tribal groups that may or may not share cultural overlaps.

The range of tribes and tribal customs within Pomo territory make it difficult to choose a text that accurately represents the values of the entirety of the Pomo people. Because of this, choosing and acknowledging the specific tribal group and specific setting in which the story takes place is important to showing respect to the Native community being represented in the classroom.

### Why use contemporary texts, written by Natives?

Many examples of recorded Native oral tradition are altered to reflect the settler-lens. For decades, anthropologists, Native culture enthusiasts, and philanthropists recorded, interpreted, and published stories from the Native oral tradition in an attempt to protect stories from being lost. These texts, more often than not, are interpreted to reflect a Western point of view, representing an idea of how Native culture should be, as opposed to what it actually is, from a Native perspective.

Including stories that are written by Native peoples in lesson plans increases the visibility of tribal communities in ways that they wish to be represented. It also highlights the knowledge that Native people desire to have passed on to Native and ally communities. When possible, including texts by contemporary Native authors provides students with a view into Native culture that is more accurate. Highlighting modern texts and interpretations of the Native oral tradition communicates that Native culture is a dynamic culture which shifts, adjusts, and adapts with time.

## ENGAGE

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Provide students with “**The Purpose of Stories in the Pomo Oral Tradition**” worksheet.

As a class, read each of the quotes included. After each quote, ask students what they think to be the purpose of stories, from a Pomo perspective.

Explain that each quote is from “How a Mountain Was Made,” a collection of short stories written by Greg Sarris, Honorable Chairman of the **Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria**, which includes **Southern Pomo** and the **Coastal Miwok** peoples.

**NOTE:** Stories are used to teach values, traditions, and scientific knowledge. Native youth learn about the role they play in their communities and ecosystems by listening to the oral tradition of their elders and ancestors. In the story included in this lesson, students will notice how science and storytelling combine to teach us about the nature of our world.

## EXPLORE

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Distribute the “**Lizard and Mockingbird Kidnap Rock’s Daughters**” story.

Read through the story as a class, in partners, or in groups. Have students work together to answer each of the included questions.

Review the analysis questions together.

## EXPLAIN

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Explain to students that in the **Pomo** worldview, every living and nonliving thing in an ecosystem is a part of a community. When we see all parts of our ecosystem as a part of our community, we understand that we must show respect and care for all things around us.

## ELABORATE

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On a separate piece of paper, or on the back of the story, ask students to complete the following prompt:

**Draw out your home (including your front or backyard if you have one). Include as many of the following details as you can:**

- a. The people and animals who live there.**
- b. Specific plants.**
- c. Specific nonliving natural items (rocks, water, etc.)**
- d. Any other nonliving things (furniture, books, toys)**

## EVALUATE

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Analyzing their images, ask students to follow these directions:

- 1. Make a list of all the plants, animals, and nonliving things that live in your home.**
- 2. Explain how you show respect and care for those things.**
- 3. Choose one item from your list. Explain what happens to that item when you do not give it respect and care.**

Ask students to share their answers with the class.

## STANDARDS

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### **Common Core:**

#### **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.2**

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

#### **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.1**

Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

#### **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.3**

Analyze the interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text (e.g., how ideas influence individuals or events, or how individuals influence ideas or events).

### CA Indian Essential Understandings:

**Essential Understanding 3:** Tribal traditional beliefs and practices, including links to spirituality, are practiced in communities where the culture, traditions and languages are vibrant parts of daily life. Additionally, each tribe has an oral history that predates contact with non-Indians.

**Essential Understanding 5:** Land and place are unique and inextricably tied to tribal cultures.

**Essential Understanding 6:** Written histories are most often codified through the subjective experience of the historian. Tribal histories are being rediscovered and revisited. Tribal perspectives of historical events often conflict with textbook histories.

### NGSS Standards:

*This is an introductory lesson. [Section 1: Lessons 3-8](#) work together to reach the following standards:*

- MS-LS2** -1. Analyze and interpret data to provide evidence for the effects of resource availability on organisms and populations of organisms in an ecosystem.
- MS-LS2** -2. Construct an explanation that predicts patterns of interactions among organisms across multiple ecosystems.
- MS-LS2** -3. Develop a model to describe the cycling of matter and flow of energy among living and nonliving parts of an ecosystem.
- MS-LS2** -4. Construct an argument supported by empirical evidence that changes to physical or biological components of an ecosystem affect populations.
- MS-LS2** -5. Evaluate competing design solutions for maintaining biodiversity and ecosystem services.

## RESOURCES

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[How A Mountain Was Made](#) by Greg Sarris (2019)

Adapted from: [Lessons of Our Land](#)