



Name:

Date:

The Purpose of Stories in the Pomo Oral Tradition

Directions: Read the following quotes from How A Mountain Was Made by Greg Sarris and answer the follow-up questions.

“Tell me, Answer Woman,” she asked, “how do stories come to you?”

“Quite simple,” answered Answer Woman. “You ask me a question and my answer comes up in the form of a story. After all, the best answer to anything will always be a story.”

-pg. 55-56

Based on this quote, what is the purpose of stories?

“Stories teach us that we are all connected and equal...the humans, the plants and trees, birds, animals. The entire Mountain, everything you see, is really one ongoing story.”

-pg. 55-56

Based on this quote, what is the purpose of stories?

“...If we only see a poppy as a wildflower, if we don’t know its story, then we can’t learn any lessons from it. If grass is just grass, or a rabbit is just a rabbit, then what do we know?...

The big ongoing story is that each of us - the humans, the plants and trees, birds, animals - has a story to tell. For that reason, we must respect all life. When we forget this big ongoing story we get into trouble.”

-pg. 55-56

Based on this quote, what is the purpose of stories?

“Lizard and Mockingbird Kidnap Rock’s Daughter”

from How A Mountain Was Made by Greg Sarris

Lizard didn’t always know about the weather, but he learned. Today, if you watch Lizard, you can know about the weather, too. If it is going to be a very warm day, Lizard will be out just before sunrise. If the warm weather is going to change, if it is going to become cooler, Lizard will be looking west toward the ocean for the fog or rain clouds. Lizard has a song to help him know these things long before any others of us can know. But Lizard didn’t always have this song. It belonged to Rock, a tall, handsome woman who lived at the village on Copeland Creek with her three bird daughters, Meadowlark, House Wren, and Finch.

How does Lizard’s behavior reflect the weather? Refer to text details.

Lizard lived there too. Lizard was an older man with graying hair and a pointed nose. He liked to eat mosquitoes and ticks. He used nets made of fern bracken to catch mosquitoes that hovered over the creek in summertime; and, to catch ticks in the fall after the first rains, he used a basket made of willow branches. One day he thought to himself, “I am getting to be an old man. I am tired of having to set my nets about the creek every day during the summer for mosquitoes, and I am tired of walking about these hills with my willow basket every day after the first rains looking for ticks.”

That was when he thought of Rock. She knew when it was going to be warm, which was when the mosquitoes would be above the creek water; and she knew when it was going to rain, which was when the ticks would crawl about in the hills. “Oh, if only she would teach me her special weather song,” thought Lizard, “then I would not have to waste as much time and work as hard. If I knew when it was going to be warm, I would put up my fern bracken nets above the creek water only on those days. Likewise, if I knew in the late fall when it was going to rain, I would pack my willow basket into the hills only on those days.”

What does Lizard want from Rock? Explain why using details from the text.

Lizard went to the large house at the edge of the village where Rock lived with her three bird daughters. She invited him in and asked him to sit at her table. Being a gracious and generous woman, she offered him a cup of fine nettle tea.

“This tea will make your eyes bright and your hair shiny,” she told him. But when Lizard asked her for her special weather song, she bowed her head and didn’t say a word.

As it turned out, Rock’s three bird daughters were sitting in a corner preparing seed for a pinole. When they looked to the table and found their mother with her head bowed, they repeated, one after the other,

“Lizard, our mother cannot give away her special weather song. She is forbidden to give up that special song. It is hers and hers only. Please do not ask again for you know it is not in our gracious and generous mother’s nature to refuse people.” Three times he heard the message from Rock’s daughters.

“All right then, I understand,” Lizard said, and then left without taking any of the fine nettle tea Rock had so generously prepared for him.

Rock is described as “gracious” and “generous”. What does it mean for someone to be “gracious” and “generous”?

How do you think Rock treats others?

He tried to think of another way to make his work easier but came up with nothing. All the while he became more and more frustrated thinking how much easier his work would be if only he had Rock’s special weather song.

One day Lizard came upon Mockingbird gathering seeds on a hillside. Mockingbird was the step-daughter of Coyote. She was known to be a bit of a schemer, like her step-father, but she was nonetheless a very good worker. She was particularly good at gathering seeds.

“Mockingbird, I am in a predicament,” said Lizard. “I am wondering if you could help me with something.”

“What is the problem?” asked Mockingbird.

“You see I am getting to be an old man. It is harder for me to put up nets over the creek water for mosquitoes every day in the summer, and it is harder for me to go about these hills every day after the first rains with my heavy willow basket looking for ticks. If you will help me to get Rock’s special weather song, I won’t have to work every day. I will even be able to get more mosquitoes and ticks because if I know when it is going to be warm and when it is going to be cold I can put up more nets and pack an extra basket. And I can share some of my good catch with you - I know you like to eat bugs too.”

“So what is your plan?” asked Mockingbird.

“There’s really not much to it,” answered Lizard. “If you will just tell Rock’s three bird daughters that you know where there is an abundance of good seeds for pinole and then take them out of the village for a day, then I can ask Rock for that special weather song, which, being gracious and generous, she will give as long as her three protective daughters are not around to interfere.”

“What happens when those three bird daughters find out that I am lying?” asked Mockingbird.

“Just tell them that you are lost. Go far on the other side of the mountain.” Mockingbird thought of those fat mosquitoes and plump ticks and said, “Yes.”

What are Lizard’s reasons for wanting Rock’s weather song?

How would you describe Lizard’s character? What does he value?

So early the next morning Mockingbird coaxed into the hills Rock’s three bird daughters, Meadowlark, House Wren, and Finch. But before long, Rock’s daughters became suspicious. After all, it was well known that Mockingbird, the step-daughter of Coyote, was a trickster.

“Something is wrong here,” said Meadowlark.

“Yes,” responded House Wren, “Mockingbird said she was taking us to the far side of the mountain, but why are we going the long way around instead of directly over the top, the shorter way?”

Finch agreed and said, “It is as if Mockingbird wants to keep us away from our home.”

Mockingbird was walking quite a ways ahead of the three sisters and could not hear what they were saying. But when she saw the three sisters hesitate and then stop, she called out to them, “Come along. A huge patch of seed is just up ahead here.” But what was up ahead was a deep crack in the earth, and when the three sisters approached the deep crack, Mockingbird pushed them inside and sealed the top with a big rock.

Meanwhile, Lizard went to Rock’s house and asked again for her special weather song. Again, Rock, gracious and generous, gave him a cup of fine nettle tea that would make his eyes bright and his hair shiny. But once more Lizard did not drink the tea. He kept asking for Rock’s special weather song, and each time Rock bowed her head and said nothing.

Because it was not in her nature to refuse people’s wishes, Rock became more and more upset. She knew that she was forbidden to give away her special song, but she could no longer refuse Lizard. At last, she ran out of the house and tore out of the village to escape Lizard. He kept after her, all the while pleading with her to give him her song. Then on the west side of the mountain, just below Round Oak Road, he got in front of her and stopped her in her tracks.

How is Rock being pressured to act against her nature? Refer to specific language from the text.

“Now give me your special weather song,” he commanded. When she looked up at him there was a beautiful light around her face, and she was smiling just as when she met him at her front door and offered him nettle tea. Her words floated forth soft as dandelion cotton.

“I will give you my song, but first I must tell you exactly what it does so that you will be able to know the weather before anyone else. When you sing the song, you will feel your ears open up. Your ears will not become bigger, only more sensitive. If it is going to be warm, you will feel heat in your ears. If it is going to be foggy or rainy, you will feel the cold. You only need to sing the song once for then your ears will be fixed special forever.”

And then she began to sing thus:

*It's not what I can see,
That's not what I know
coming to me
coming to me on invisible wings.*

In Rock's weather song, she sings that her knowledge about weather is not based on what she sees. What do you think her knowledge comes from then?

Lizard immediately began to sing this song. He felt a slight pop in his ears, like when he climbed to the top of the mountain, and he knew then that his ears had been fixed. But when he looked back at Rock, he was alarmed to find that she had become stiff and hard. Already dried moss and lichen covered her. She would not move. Lizard commanded her to follow him back to the village.

"You, who does not refuse people, come with me," he said to her, but still she did not move. At last, Lizard went back to the village alone.

Every decision has its consequences. How do you think Lizard's decision to sing Rock's weather song might impact the rest of the community?

By this time it was approaching nightfall. Rock's three daughters had figured out what had happened. They knew that they had been kidnapped so Lizard could get their mother's special weather song. In that hole below the big rock they cried for their mother. Even though they were sad and crying, Mockingbird thought that they sounded beautiful. When Mockingbird pushed the big rock aside, the three bird sisters climbed out of the hole and raced back to the village. Alas, their mother was nowhere to be found, and again they cried and cried. They sat at the table where they used to sit with their mother and wept awfully, unable to console one another.

Passing the house on her way back into the village, Mockingbird heard them. Again, she thought they sounded beautiful, that they had lovely voices, and Mockingbird, who had no beautiful songs, and not a particularly good voice, saw an opportunity for herself. She knocked on the door and then made the three sisters an offer.

“You sound sad now, but you have beautiful voices, and I know you know many beautiful happy songs. If you teach me those happy songs and teach me to sing them beautifully, I will find your mother for you.”

“No, we don’t trust you,” answered Meadowlark. “You first tell us what happened to our mother. Where did Lizard take her?”

Both of Meadowlark’s sisters, House Wren and Finch, agreed with her. “Show us where our mother is first,” they told Mockingbird.

“Well, I guess you will never see your mother again,” said Mockingbird as she started away from the three sisters. “Goodbye then, you motherless girls.”

“Wait!” cried Mockingbird. “I will teach you my song and, if you sing just like I teach you, it will sound beautiful.”

House Wren and Finch were perplexed. They couldn’t believe their smart older sister would actually trust Mockingbird, the step-daughter of Coyote. But when they heard her singing her song, teaching Mockingbird to sing the song completely off-key, they understood how truly smart their older sister was. They followed in the same manner, teaching Mockingbird to sing their songs completely off-key.

Mockingbird did not know the difference. She thought to herself, now I can sing beautifully. Then she found Lizard, and Lizard told her to bring Rock’s three bird daughters to him and together they could all go to where he left Rock.

“Something quite strange has happened,” Lizard told Mockingbird before she left to fetch the three bird sisters.

So all of them went to the west side of the mountain where Lizard left Rock. Even before they reached Rock, her three daughters could hear her singing thus:

*My daughters,
My daughters,
My daughters,
I am your mother,
I am your mother,
I am your mother.*

When Meadowlark and House Wren and Finch saw how their mother had become stiff and hard and how she was covered with dry moss and lichen, all at once where they had been standing there appeared three rocks, smaller but hard and lichen-covered just like the Rock mother.

“Oh, well, nothing we can do now,” said Lizard. “At least Rock and her daughters are together again.”

Then, at once, there was a beautiful chorus in the air. When Lizard and Mockingbird looked up, they saw the three bird sisters perched high on a pine branch.

“Yes, it is us, the three bird sisters,” Meadowlark said.

House Wren said, “Lizard, you have taken our mother’s heart and now she is still and cold. Her special weather song was her heart. You will know about the weather long before anyone else, but you will never again be able to leave our gracious and generous mother. At night, you will sleep under her. During the day, you will crawl about her, tickling her skin so she will once again laugh. Furthermore, since you didn’t want what she had to offer, that good nettle tea to make your eyes bright and your hair shiny, you will have dull eyes and dry hairless skin.”

What are the consequences of Lizard’s actions?

Describe Lizard’s new relationship with Rock.

“Hey, I thought the three of you turned into rocks,” Mockingbird shouted up to the three sisters. Then Finch, the last of the three sisters, spoke. “Only our hearts have turned to stone. Our hearts will remain with our mother. As for you, Mockingbird, you will find that all you can do is imitate our beautiful songs, and you will sing thus like a fool all day and night for the rest of time.”

Then Lizard went to Rock, and lo and behold, he found that Rock, gracious and generous, continued to protect him. Why? Because Lizard now had Rock’s special weather song, which

was her heart. As long as Rock's heart was close to her, she would act in the same gracious and generous manner she always had before. And Mockingbird found that her foolish singing kept Rock company through the night, reminding Rock of her daughters' great love for her. And, just at dawn when Mockingbird stops singing, the three bird daughters know it is time for them to wake and sing, and all the other birds gather around and join them.

Analysis

1. Stories in the Pomo oral tradition often have a moral, or lesson. What is the lesson in the story "Lizard and Mockingbird Kidnap Rock's Daughters"? Provide 2-3 examples from the text that help communicate the lesson.

2. In Pomo culture, humans, animals, plants, and nonliving (abiotic) things are all a part of the same community.
 - a. What examples from the text show community members **respecting** one another?

 - b. What examples from the text show community members **disrespecting** one another?

 - c. In a community, all members have their own special **roles** and ways that they contribute. What are some of the specific roles that the community members from "Lizard and Mockingbird Kidnap Rock's Daughters" play?

