

Native American Heritage: THE HISTORY OF Storytelling

Choctaw Traditional Stories & Tales

Many traditional Native American stories have been passed down from generation to generation for hundreds of years. Sometimes these stories help explain the world around us, why animals act a certain way, or how the earth was created. Other stories might help explain the history of the tribe or family, or might be used to teach children a valuable lesson. These traditional tales are repeated over and over by members of the tribe, especially to the young children. Since many tribal languages are spoken languages, meaning they do not have a written form, most of these stories were passed down through oral storytelling or song. This tradition of telling stories aloud is a very important part of the tribal culture for many Native Americans.

Why Does the Rabbit Have a Short Tail?

A traditional tale of the Choctaw tribe tells the story of why rabbits have short tails. In this activity, you will come up with your own story about why rabbits' tails are short.

Materials needed:

- Pencil/pen
- Paper

Activity:

1. Have students work either individually or in small groups.
2. Read the Choctaw version of "Why Rabbits Have Short Tails."

"A very long time ago it is said that only the Red people and wildlife were on this land. It is also said at that time the rabbit had a long tail. Early one very cold morning he was out hopping

and playing. He looked toward the trail and saw a fox coming up the trail. The fox had some fish with him. Wow, I'll ask him where he caught those fish. When the fox got there the rabbit said, "Fox, where did you get those fish?" The Fox said, "I caught them at the branch." The branch is frozen over, however, I dug a small hole in the ice and put my tail down through the hole and I sat there for quite a while. My tail began to get heavy so I pulled my tail out and the fish were hanging on my tail. The rabbit started hopping very fast toward the branch. When he got to the branch he dug a small hole in the ice and dropped his tail through the hole. It was very cold but the rabbit kept sitting on the frozen ice. He thought he had enough fish so he gave his tail a pull, but it would not come out. He pulled again, but the tail had frozen to the ice and wouldn't come out. So he gave a hard jerk and the tail snapped off. That's why the rabbit has a short tail today."¹

3. Create a story that could explain why rabbits have short tails.
4. Each group/student shares story with the class.
5. Vote on the best story in the class.

¹ Quoted from Mike Boucher, mike-boucher.com/wordpress/?page_id=232

