

MYTHS, SCIENCE, AND SACRED ACCOUNTS

A CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY-BASED HUMANITIES CURRICULUM EXPLORING HOW ANCIENT PEOPLES UNDERSTOOD THEIR ORIGINS THROUGH MYTH, ART, AND ENVIRONMENT, COMBINING STORYTELLING, ARTIFACT ANALYSIS, AND HANDS-ON CREATIVE THINKING FOR MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL LEARNERS.

A NOTE FOR THE STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

THIS BOOK WILL GIVE BACK WHAT YOU PUT INTO IT.

*THE MORE YOU THINK, QUESTION, AND CONNECT,
THE MORE POWERFUL YOUR LEARNING WILL BE.*

*MANY OF THE QUESTIONS ARE DESIGNED TO SPARK DEEPER CONVERSATIONS
ABOUT LIFE, CHOICES, CULTURE, AND MEANING.*

*GO AHEAD! RELATE THE IDEAS IN THESE PAGES TO THINGS HAPPENING
IN YOUR OWN LIFE, TO BOOKS YOU'VE READ, TO YOUR FAMILY'S
EXPERIENCES, OR EVEN TO WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE NEWS.*

*HISTORY ISN'T JUST SOMETHING THAT HAPPENED LONG AGO, IT'S STILL
BEING WRITTEN AND THERE IS SO MUCH TO DISCOVER!*

*CONNECTING IT TO YOUR OWN KNOWLEDGE IS HOW REAL LEARNING
HAPPENS.*

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A STORYBOOK

Let me tell you something that might change the way you learn:

History is not just a list of facts, names, and dates. That's what it looks like on the outside. But underneath?

History is a story.

It's just like a book or a movie. The people in it are characters. They had hopes, fears, families, and regrets. They had favorite songs. They laughed, tripped over things, and sat on the toilet. They made choices. Some choices were ordinary, some brave, some brilliant, and some completely disastrous.

Every event you study was once a real moment in someone's life.

It was a Tuesday. It was raining. Someone forgot their lunch. Someone else was falling in love. It was loud. It was quiet. It smelled like soup.

And in the middle of all that mess, something happened that we now call history.

If you can think of historical people as characters. As real, messy, curious, mistake-making people, you'll find it easier to understand their choices and maybe even your own.

So don't start with the facts.

Start with the story.

This book is a storybook. But not like one you've read before. It's filled with myths, memories, and wonder. These are the tales humans have passed down for thousands of years. They are myths and truths – stories about where the universe came from, how the planet and its creatures were formed, and how we, the people, came into existence.

It's a storybook about questions.

About belief.

About how we try to make sense of being alive.

And now... it's your turn to join the story.

WHAT YOU'LL FIND INSIDE

A WIDE VARIETY OF ACTIVITIES & THE POWER OF CRITICAL THINKING

THIS IS NOT YOUR TYPICAL TEXTBOOK. INSIDE, YOU'LL FIND A WIDE VARIETY OF ACTIVITIES, FROM STORYTELLING AND CREATIVE DRAWING TO RESEARCH, JOURNALING, ANALYSIS, AND EVEN PERFORMANCE-BASED TASKS. SOME PROJECTS ARE QUICK AND IMAGINATIVE. OTHERS ARE DEEPER AND ASK YOU TO SLOW DOWN AND THINK ABOUT BIG IDEAS.

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT SKILLS YOU'LL BE PRACTICING IS CRITICAL THINKING.

CRITICAL THINKING MEANS ASKING THOUGHTFUL QUESTIONS, WEIGHING DIFFERENT POSSIBILITIES, MAKING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN IDEAS, AND FORMING YOUR OWN OPINIONS BASED ON WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED.

MANY OF THE QUESTIONS IN THIS BOOK DON'T HAVE ONE "CORRECT" ANSWER. THAT'S INTENTIONAL. YOU ARE NOT HERE TO MEMORIZE FACTS AND SPIT THEM BACK. YOU'RE HERE TO DEVELOP YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING OF:

THE PEOPLE WHO TOLD THESE STORIES.

THE CULTURES THEY LIVED IN.

THE SYMBOLS THEY USED.

AND WHAT IT ALL MIGHT MEAN FOR YOU, TODAY.

IN OTHER WORDS: THIS BOOK IS ABOUT THINKING FOR YOURSELF AND LEARNING TO ASK BETTER, DEEPER QUESTIONS. THAT'S WHAT HISTORIANS, ANTHROPOLOGISTS, AND PHILOSOPHERS DO, AND NOW, THAT'S WHAT YOU'LL DO TOO.

A NOTE ABOUT THE QUESTIONS

MANY OF THE QUESTIONS IN THIS BOOK ARE DESIGNED TO MAKE YOU THINK DEEPLY. IF WRITING IS DIFFICULT, FEEL FREE TO ASK AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS OUT LOUD INSTEAD. YOU CAN TALK THROUGH THEM WITH THE PERSON GUIDING YOUR EDUCATION, OR EVEN USE THEM AS DISCUSSION STARTERS WITH YOUR FAMILY OR CLASS. AFTER DISCUSSING A QUESTION, YOU CAN SIMPLY JOT DOWN A QUICK NOTE ABOUT WHAT WAS SAID, OR JUST CHECK IT OFF TO SHOW YOU'VE THOUGHT ABOUT IT. WHAT MATTERS MOST IS THE THINKING, NOT HOW LONG THE ANSWER IS.

WHAT IS A Scholar's Corner

THROUGHOUT THIS BOOK, YOU'LL FIND SPECIAL GREEN SECTIONS CALLED SCHOLAR'S CORNER. THESE ARE DESIGNED FOR DEEPER EXPLORATION, ASKING YOU TO THINK LIKE A HISTORIAN, ANTHROPOLOGIST, PHILOSOPHER, OR SCIENTIST.

SOME OF THESE ACTIVITIES MAY BE MORE ADVANCED. WE RECOMMEND THAT THE PERSON GUIDING YOUR EDUCATION, WHETHER THAT'S A PARENT, TEACHER, OR MENTOR, HELP DECIDE WHICH SCHOLAR'S CORNER ACTIVITIES ARE THE RIGHT FIT FOR YOU.

THINK OF EACH SCHOLAR'S CORNER AS A CHANCE TO GO DEEPER. AN OPPORTUNITY TO DIG INTO THE STORIES. THEY'LL STRETCH YOUR THINKING AND HELP YOU CONNECT WHAT YOU'RE LEARNING TO BIGGER QUESTIONS ABOUT PEOPLE, CULTURE, AND THE WORLD.

WHAT IS A Creative Capstone Challenge

AT THE END OF SOME SECTIONS, YOU'LL FIND THE CREATIVE CAPSTONE CHALLENGE. THIS IS WHERE YOU BRING EVERYTHING YOU'VE LEARNED TOGETHER IN ONE PLACE. THIS CHALLENGE HELPS YOU SYNTHESIZE ALL THE BIG IDEAS FROM THE BOOK - IDEAS ABOUT CULTURE, STORYTELLING, ENVIRONMENT, BELIEF SYSTEMS, AND HUMAN CREATIVITY. IT'S ABOUT USING YOUR IMAGINATION AND UNDERSTANDING TO CREATE SOMETHING ORIGINAL AND MEANINGFUL.

HOW TO USE THIS COURSE FOR CREDIT

THIS CURRICULUM IS DESIGNED TO BE FLEXIBLE, COMPREHENSIVE, AND CROSS-DISCIPLINARY, WHICH MEANS IT CAN FULFILL A VARIETY OF CREDIT NEEDS DEPENDING ON HOW YOU USE IT.

DEPENDING ON YOUR STATE'S REQUIREMENTS AND YOUR HOMESCHOOL GOALS, THIS COURSE MAY COUNT AS 1 OR 1.5 CREDITS IN ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

WORLD HISTORY OR ANCIENT HISTORY: THE FOUNDATION OF THIS COURSE IS ROOTED IN THE STUDY OF ANCIENT PEOPLES, MYTHS, CULTURES, AND THE EVOLUTION OF HUMAN UNDERSTANDING ACROSS TIME.

CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY OR SOCIAL STUDIES: STUDENTS EXPLORE HOW HUMANS UNDERSTAND THE WORLD AROUND THEM, MAKE MEANING THROUGH STORIES, AND PASS KNOWLEDGE THROUGH GENERATIONS.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES OR COMPARATIVE MYTHOLOGY: THE COURSE LOOKS AT THE CREATION BELIEFS OF DIVERSE GLOBAL CULTURES AND EXAMINES THEMES, SYMBOLISM, AND MORAL TEACHINGS.

PHILOSOPHY OR CRITICAL THINKING: THE COURSE DEVELOPS A STUDENT'S ABILITY TO QUESTION, COMPARE, REFLECT, AND REASON THROUGH COMPLEX IDEAS AND PERSPECTIVES.

GENERAL ELECTIVE: THIS COURSE CAN ALSO BE APPLIED AS A HUMANITIES ELECTIVE, INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES ELECTIVE, OR ENRICHMENT CREDIT, ESPECIALLY IF YOU ARE DESIGNING A CUSTOM CURRICULUM FOR YOUR STUDENT.

A STANDARD FULL-CREDIT HIGH SCHOOL COURSE GENERALLY REQUIRES 120 TO 180 HOURS OF WORK FOR A HOMESCHOOL OR PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENT.

IF YOU AIM TO GIVE CREDIT, LOG YOUR STUDENT'S HOURS USING THE BOOK, RESEARCHING, AND CREATING THE PROJECTS. FOR EXAMPLE, IF YOU USE THIS BOOK FOR ABOUT 5 HOURS OF WORK PER WEEK FOR 30 WEEKS IN A YEAR. THAT WOULD GIVE YOU 150 HOURS.

ADDING DEEPER ENGAGEMENT, SUCH AS USING THE QUESTIONS FOR ONE-ON-ONE OR GROUP DISCUSSIONS WILL INCREASE YOUR ACTIVE LEARNING TIME AND THE DEPTH OF THE STUDENT'S UNDERSTANDING AND ENGAGEMENT.

EVERY STATE AND SCHOOL DISTRICT HAS ITS OWN REQUIREMENTS, SO PLEASE CHECK WITH YOUR STATE'S HOMESCHOOL LAWS, PUBLIC SCHOOL, OR YOUR UMBRELLA SCHOOL TO DETERMINE HOW THIS COURSE FITS INTO YOUR STUDENT'S CREDIT PLAN.

YOU CAN USE YOUR LOGGED HOURS, THE BOOK, THE INCLUDED RUBRICS, PROJECT CHECKLISTS, AND THE CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION TO SUPPORT YOUR RECORDS FOR EVALUATION OR TRANSCRIPT DOCUMENTATION.



TO THE LANDS OF THE YORUBA

Ah, you have done well, apprentice. You have crossed the waters, braving waves and winds that even seasoned sailors fear. But the sea does not favor all travelers. I could see how glad you were when the ship scraped against the red shores of this new world.

Roll up your scrolls and steady your legs, for you have landed on the western edge of Africa, a place where stories rise from the earth itself.

WHAT DID YOU THINK OF THE VOYAGE?

The air here is thick and rich, heavy with the breath of distant forests. Waves crash against rocky shores, and beyond them stretch great plains of golden grass, broken by thickets of acacia and tamarind. Giant baobabs rise like guardians of time, their trunks wide and ancient. The cries of strange birds echo overhead, and in the distance, you can glimpse antelope flashing through the tall grass.

There are few signs of villages. The land belongs first to the beasts and the trees. The people live where the rivers run and the earth is kind, moving with the seasons, shaping their homes from branch, clay, and woven reed.

HOW DOES THIS LAND COMPARE TO YOUR HOME?

Listen well as we walk inland. Hear the rustle of monkeys leaping through iroko trees? The sharp call of hornbills perched high above? Beneath the great canopies grow kola and palm trees, their gifts prized for food, healing, and light.

Look there! A hunter crouches by a riverbank, shaping a stone into a blade with patient taps. Tools like these will tame the wilderness: cutting branches, preparing hides, carving bowls. Each one carries the mark of its maker's hands.

WHERE DO YOU FIND YOUR TOOLS AND WHO MAKES THEM?

Let's walk farther inland. Do you smell cooking fires? The people here know the taste of yam and the rhythm of digging sticks. They pound roots, crack nuts, and carry fire from place to place, wrapped in dried leaves... a precious ember.

They leave behind pottery etched with spiral patterns, scattered beads of stone and shell, and hearths where stories and food were shared.

And here, a gathering of my people! Their laughter mingling with the song of the land. They offer us a place by the fire and a share of their food. They welcome you, not as a stranger but as friends, with stories as old as the red clay underfoot. One such story begins now, as we sit by this red clay fire.

Ready your parchment and mark this location on your map and write "Yoruba."

The tale of Obatala and the Clay People awaits...



YORUBA: OBATALA AND THE CLAY PEOPLE

Long ago, the Earth was nothing but a wide, endless stretch of water. No land, no trees, no animals, only sky above and water below.

High above, in the bright realm of the Gods, lived Obatala, a wise and gentle orisha. He looked down at the watery world and dreamed of filling it with life. "I will create land," he said, "and people to live upon it."

BASED ON THE STORY, WHAT DO YOU THINK AN ORISHA MIGHT BE?

He went to Olorun, the Sky God and ruler of all things, and asked for permission. Olorun agreed and gave him sacred tools: a golden chain, a snail shell filled with earth, a white hen, and a black cat. Obatala climbed down from the heavens, using the golden chain like a rope, until he reached the edge of the waters.

Dangling above the ocean, he tipped out the snail shell, and earth spilled down. Then he released the hen, who fluttered down and scratched the soil into hills and valleys. Land began to take shape beneath Obatala's feet. He climbed down and named the place Ife, the very first land.

WHAT OTHER KIND OF ANIMAL COULD YOU USE TO MAKE THE LAND FULL OF HILLS, MOUNTAINS, AND VALLEYS?

Now the Earth was ready. Obatala decided to shape people out of clay. He found a cool, damp patch of earth and began to mold figures, one by one, carefully forming heads, arms, legs, and faces. The cat, always keeping Obatala company as he worked.

Some figures were tall, some were short. Some had wide noses, others had slim faces.

He worked for hours in the heat, his hands caked with wet clay.

*HAVE YOU EVER SCULPTED PERSON OR AN ANIMAL?
HOW HARD WAS IT TO MAKE?*

But as the sun blazed down, Obatala grew thirsty and tired. He found a palm tree and made wine from its fruit. The drink cooled his body and lifted his spirit. But soon, he drank too much, and his hands no longer moved with care.

As he shaped the clay, his fingers slipped. Some figures were crooked or uneven. Some had bent limbs or missing features. But Obatala, no longer steady, kept shaping and shaping.

When he woke the next day, he saw the figures he had made, and he wept. "What have I done?" he cried. "I was careless with my creation." He vowed never to drink again.

Still, Olorun saw what had happened and smiled. "These humans will be many and different," Olorun said. "Some will be strong, some will be weak. Some will walk with ease, and some will move in new ways. But all are yours, Obatala. And all are worthy of life."

WHAT LESSON DOES THIS STORY TEACH US ABOUT ACCEPTING PEOPLE THE WAY THEY ARE?

Then Olorun breathed divine breath into each clay figure, and they came to life, stretching, standing, walking, laughing. The Earth was no longer quiet and empty. It was full of people, in every shape, color, and form.

And so the Yoruba people say: we are all made from the same clay - but shaped with beautiful differences.

OLORUN IS _____

OBATALA IS _____

.....

*AN ORISHA (OH-REE-SHAH) IS A POWERFUL SPIRIT OR GOD
IN THE YORUBA RELIGION.*

*EACH ORISHA HAS SPECIAL POWERS AND HELPS PEOPLE IN
DIFFERENT WAYS.*

*OBATALA, THE CREATOR IN THE STORY, IS AN ORISHA OF
PEACE AND WISDOM.*

CAN A GOD HAVE FLAWS?

Even great gods and makers have flaws, young one. In many myths, mistakes shape the story. They help us understand the struggles of being human, and show how growth often begins with failure or surprise. If every tale were filled with perfect beings, there would be no story... and no lesson. Now, look closely at each word box. Circle the ones that match Obatala, in your own wise opinion.

FLAWS

IMPATIENT CARELESS
AFRAID DEMANDING
DISRESPECTFUL UNMOTIVATED
DISHONEST

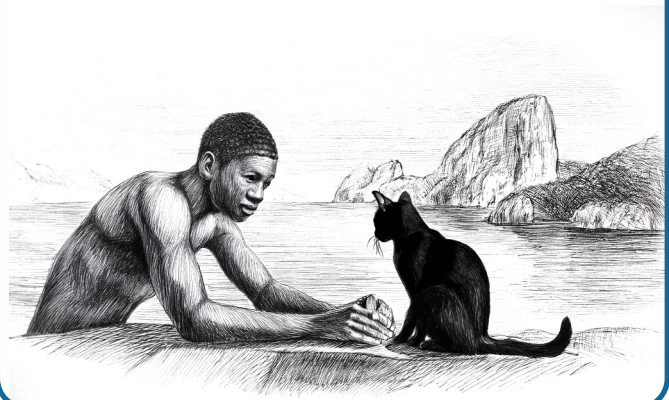
STRENGTHS

CREATIVE DETERMINED
FUNNY FRIENDLY
CARING BRAVE
LUCKY FORCEFUL

Obatala shaped people from clay, but when he grew weary, he formed them in many ways. Some were tall, some short, some bent, and some missing parts.

Take your time, young one. Draw four clay people with different shapes, sizes, and features. You may name them, if you wish.

If you have clay or dough nearby, try sculpting them first, then draw what your hands have made.



CRITICAL THINKING

WHY DID SOME OF THE CLAY PEOPLE OBATALA MADE LOOK DIFFERENT FROM ONE ANOTHER?

OBATALA'S TALE REMINDS US: ALL PEOPLE — WHATEVER THEIR SHAPE, SIZE, OR STRENGTH — ARE WORTHY OF LIFE AND DIGNITY.

Think back. Have you heard a story, in the world around you or from someone else, where a person showed kindness to someone different than themselves?

WHAT HAPPENED IN THAT MOMENT?

HOW DID IT CHANGE THE HEARTS OF THOSE INVOLVED?

THE YORUBA HONORED ALL THE CLAY PEOPLE, NOT JUST THE ONES WHO LOOKED "PERFECT." HOW CAN WE BUILD A WORLD TODAY THAT VALUES EVERY PERSON, EVEN WHEN SOCIETY FOCUSES ON PERFECTION?

SOME OF THE MOST POWERFUL MYTHS DON'T JUST EXPLAIN HOW SOMETHING CAME TO BE. THEY ALSO HELP US THINK ABOUT WHAT REALLY MATTERS. INCLUDING A LESSON IN A MYTH CAN MAKE IT MORE MEMORABLE AND MEANINGFUL.

A MYTH WITH A MESSAGE CAN STAY WITH READERS LONG AFTER THE STORY ENDS, GIVING THEM SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT OR EVEN SOMETHING TO LIVE BY.

WOULD THIS STORY BE MORE OR LESS MEANINGFUL IF OBATALA WERE PERFECT?

WHAT STRENGTHS AND FLAWS DO YOU HAVE?

OBATALA GREW TIRED AND MADE MISTAKES. WHEN HAVE YOU FELT TIRED OR OVERWHELMED AND STILL TRIED TO DO YOUR BEST?

HOW CAN SOMEONE TURN A FLAW INTO A STRENGTH?

REFLECT:

HOW ARE YOU LIKING THIS JOURNAL SO FAR?



Look closely at this carved head from the Yoruba people. The woman's hair is piled high in an elegant style, and the texture of the stone surface ripples like fine sand pressed by the wind.

Stone carving was a difficult and honored skill among the Yoruba. Artisans used simple but powerful tools: stone hammers, chisels made of harder rock or early metal, and sand or water to smooth surfaces. Every mark was made by hand, each careful tap shaping the image from the raw earth. A single sculpture could take weeks or even months to complete.

- Yoruba artists often carved figures of ancestors, gods, or important people. The human head was especially important. It was believed to be the center of wisdom, destiny, and spirit.
- Imagine sitting beside the sculptor as they worked, chip by chip, shaping not just a face but a memory for future generations.



ART STUDY INSTRUCTIONS:

TAKE TIME TO STUDY THE DETAILS. LOOK AT THE TEXTURE, THE FORM, THE WEIGHT OF THE HAIR AND FEATURES.

NOW, EXTEND YOUR STUDY:

1. RESEARCH A YORUBAN MASK

LOOK ON THE INTERNET OR IN BOOKS TO FIND A YORUBAN MASK.

2. DRAW AND COLOR THE MASK BELOW

NOTICE THE STYLE, MATERIALS, AND WHAT IT SEEMS TO BE FEELING.

3. WRITE A REFLECTION

How is the artwork you found similar to the woman's carved head?

WHAT CAN YOU LEARN ABOUT THE YORUBAN PEOPLE FROM THEIR ART?

My ART CHALLENGE RESULTS:

This is a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The left edge of the paper shows a slight shadow, suggesting it's part of a bound notebook. The bottom corners of the paper are rounded.

WHAT IF THE STORY HAD ENDED DIFFERENTLY?

Young storyteller, you have walked the path of Obatala and seen the beauty in his imperfect creations. But now, imagine another world, one where Obatala made each person flawless... and exactly the same.

WHAT WOULD SUCH A WORLD BE LIKE? _____

Write your own ending to the tale, apprentice. Tell what happens when all people are made perfect and exactly alike. What does Olorun say? How do the people live? How do they treat each other? What does the world look like a hundred years later?



COMPOSE AN *ORIKI*

Young scribe, let us turn now from clay and story to the music of words.

Among the Yoruba people, there is a special kind of poem called *oríkì* (oh-REE-kee). These poems are spoken or chanted aloud, often with rhythm, breath, and movement, and special vocal tones like high pitched voices or deep and low sounds.

Some are sung softly, like wind through the trees. Others are powerful and loud, like the beat of a drum.

Oríkì poems are full of praise, memory, and spirit. They may honor a person, a god, a place, or a thing; anything with life or meaning.

The Yoruba believe that names and words carry deep power, and *oríkì* helps awaken that power through sound.

These poems often repeat ideas or sounds. They might use strong images, like “footsteps of fire” or “rain with golden teeth.” They don’t need to rhyme. Just feel the rhythm in your chest, like a heartbeat or the pulse of footsteps on Earth.

Write your own *oriki* to show your gratitude for these things. Then choose something in your life to praise.

Here is an *oriki* to guide you:

ORIKI FOR THE GOLDEN CHAIN

*YOU CARRIED OBATALA DOWN THROUGH THE CLOUD.
YOU TOUCHED THE OCEAN, YOU KISSED THE LAND.
WITHOUT YOU, THERE WOULD BE NO FOOTSTEP,
NO PALM TREE, NO CLAY, NO CHICKEN'S SCRATCH.*

ORIKI FOR THE CHICKEN:

ORIKI FOR THE WATER:

ORIKI FOR THE _____

Scholar's Corner: Flaws and Worth in the Modern World

In the myth of Obatala, the God shapes people from clay, but when he grows tired and drinks too much palm wine, he forms people with differences: bent limbs, missing parts, unexpected shapes. And yet, when Olorun sees them, he declares them all worthy of life.

Obatala's story honors imperfection. It teaches that value is not measured by how perfect someone appears.

Now pause and think: In your world today, who decides what is perfect?

How does your culture treat people with physical or mental differences?

Has this changed over time?

Reflective Essay:

Write a short reflection to answer this prompt:

What does "flawed but worthy" mean to you?

Have you ever felt pressure to appear perfect? When and why?

How can this myth relate to you and the way you treat yourself?

MANY PEOPLE — EVERYDAY PEOPLE, FAMOUS ARTISTS, SCIENTISTS, AND LEADERS — HAVE BEEN TOLD THEY WERE "DIFFERENT." BUT THOSE DIFFERENCES HELPED THEM CHANGE THE WORLD.

THE FROZEN WORLD

The boat lands hard against the ice, scraping to a stop. Hands reach out and pull us up again. No words. Only movement. The storm howls behind us, furious that we've escaped.

They lead us inland. Just a few hundred yards, though in this weather it feels like a journey across an endless expanse. The land rises, dips, then opens into something I can't quite name: not a house, not a cave. A hollow in the snow.

We duck into it. We crawl through a tunnel of hide and bone, and emerge into quiet warmth.

The roof curves low, stitched with seams of sewn animal skin stretched over bent ribs of whale bone. The walls are half earth, half driftwood, banked high with snow to insulate against the wind. It smells of seal fat, smoke, and life.

The air is dim but soft. A small hearth glows in the center, made from flat stones blackened by fire. Around it, sleeping skins line the floor, thick and inviting. A pot steams gently, and the hiss of the wind is dulled to a distant sigh.

This is no igloo. It is something older. Wilder. Dug into the skin of the world, not built upon it. A yaranga's winter cousin. It's part burrow, part shipwreck. It is comfort.

The people here do not speak much. They do not need to.

One woman brings us a hot drink, black and bitter, but warm. Another places a thick fur cloak around your shoulders. You flinch, still shivering, but then lean into it, exhaling steam.

I try to thank them, but the words fall flat between us. Different tongues. Different worlds.

And yet, it does not matter. Their eyes are kind. Their hands are steady. They laugh softly when one of the children tries to pet the end of your frost-stiff hair. You smile. The fear is fading.

I glance around and wonder, not for the first time, why anyone would choose to live here. On the edge of the world, under a sky that forgets the sun, in a place where the land itself seems to push you away.

But then I see it. The way the mother tucks her child into the crook of her arm. The way the others sit close, leaning into each other like stones in a ring. There is no rush here, no hunger to prove anything to the world. Only presence.

And in a world like this, where storms can strip a man of his name, perhaps the only thing that matters is the people who remember it.

They live here not in spite of the harshness. They are here because it is enough.

As the fire dims and the storm sighs itself to sleep, the mother begins to speak. She does not look at us. She speaks to her children, her voice quiet but vivid, the syllables sharp as bone against the teeth of the wind.

We don't understand the words. Not at first. But something in her tone unlocks an older way of listening. Her hands move with the story. The children lean forward. So do you.

CHUKCHI: THE RAVEN

Before there was land or sky, Raven flew alone. There was nothing around him. There was only endless gray sea, cold wind, and floating ice.

But Raven was already there.

He flew low over the water, scanning the waves. He was hungry, clever, and full of questions. He was powerful in strange ways, and he knew how to change things.

In time, he saw a massive creature rise from the deep. Its skin was rough and ridged, its tusks curved like frozen horns. Some say it was a walrus. Others say it was something older, nameless, and large enough to carry a world on its back.

Raven circled above it, watching. He waited until the creature stopped moving and sat endlessly still. Then he landed.

He took pieces from the creature's body. Bones became mountains. Flesh sank into valleys. Blood ran into rivers, and fat hardened into tundra. Raven stomped across it all, testing this new creation.

WHAT KIND OF ANIMAL DO YOU THINK THIS IS?

But the world was dark and Raven hated the dimness. He couldn't see his own wings. He couldn't admire the things he'd built.

As he looked around him, he saw something floating in the sea. It was an enormous whale, gliding slowly.

Raven dove into its mouth. Inside, tucked in the soft, warm belly, he found something glowing. Raven stole it.

He burst out into the cold air, flapping hard. He threw it into the sky, where it stuck. Light poured over the land. Raven blinked, proud of himself. He pulled stars from under his feathers and tossed them into the night. He lifted the moon out of the water and hung it in the air. The world looked strange and brilliant under all that light.

Still flying, Raven shook himself dry and bits of foam fell to the earth, they didn't stay still. They twitched. They shifted. They stood up. They became people.

Raven didn't mean to make them. But there they were, soft, blinking, awkward things. They didn't know how to walk. They didn't know what fire was. They cried in the cold.

Raven tilted his head. He dropped a fish at their feet. He watched them figure it out.

He stayed a while. Just long enough to show them what was edible, what was dangerous, where to build a snow hut when the wind turned sharp. He showed them how to listen to the animals, how to read the clouds, how to keep going when the storm didn't stop.

Then he left.

The people stayed. They wore hides and hunted reindeer and fished through holes in the ice. They lived in homes dug into the ground, covered in skins and snow, where the wind couldn't reach. They told stories. They remembered how the sun arrived in the sky.

They remembered the bird.

Not a god. Not a king. Just a raven.

CRITICAL THINKING

DO YOU THINK THIS MYTH WAS MEANT TO ENTERTAIN, EXPLAIN, OR TEACH? MAYBE ALL THREE? GIVE A REASON FOR EACH ONE YOU CHOOSE.

Ravens appear in a lot of different stories around the world. Sometimes they are kind and sometimes they are tricksters who cause trouble.

IS RAVEN GOOD, BAD, OR SOMETHING ELSE ENTIRELY? WHY DO YOU THINK THAT?

HOW WOULD A CHUKCHI CHILD FEEL ABOUT RAVEN?

WHAT PARTS OF THE ARCTIC LANDSCAPE WOULD FEEL "ALIVE" AFTER HEARING THIS STORY?

ANTHROPOLOGISTS ARE SCIENTISTS THAT STUDY STORIES LIKE THE CHUKCHI MYTH TO UNDERSTAND HOW PEOPLE SURVIVE AND MAKE SENSE OF THE WORLD.

FOR THE CHUKCHI PEOPLE, THE ICY SEA AND SKY AREN'T JUST BACKGROUNDS. THEY'RE ALIVE WITH MEANING.

WHY MIGHT PEOPLE FROM WARM PLACES THINK THIS MYTH IS STRANGE OR EVEN SILLY?

WHAT WOULD YOU NEED TO EXPERIENCE TO TRULY UNDERSTAND THE MYTH THE SAME WAY THE CHUKCHI DO?

WHAT DO YOU THINK THIS MYTH SAYS ABOUT HOW THE CHUKCHI PEOPLE SEE THE ARCTIC?

HOW DOES IT COMPARE TO OTHER CREATION STORIES YOU'VE READ?

SKETCH RAVEN AS HE STEALS THE SUN FROM INSIDE THE WHALE.

WHY DO PEOPLE STAY IN PLACES SO HARSH, SO DIFFICULT, AND SO DANGEROUS?

CHOOSE ONE OF THE FOLLOWING TO FOCUS ON AND WRITE A LIST OF REASONS. AT FIRST, IT MIGHT BE EASY TO COME UP WITH THE ANSWERS, BUT LOOK DEEPER AND FILL IN ALL 10.

THE ARCTIC: LIFE IN SNOW, ICE, WIND, AND DARKNESS, YET PEOPLE STAY.

A WAR-TORN REGION: FAMILIES IN CONFLICT ZONES OFTEN REMAIN, DESPITE DANGER AND WARFARE.

A DROUGHT-STRICKEN LAND: PLACES WHERE WATER IS SCARCE, CROPS FAIL, AND YET PEOPLE STILL TEND THE SOIL.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

WHY DOES YOUR FAMILY STAY WHERE THEY ARE?

[illegible]

Draw a primitive tool and a modern tool here:

A black and white photograph showing a group of Eskimo people in traditional dress. One person stands in the center, wearing a long, patterned parka with a fur-trimmed hood and a decorative belt. To the left, a group of people are huddled together, some wearing hoods. In the foreground, two people are seated on a rocky shore. The background shows a body of water and a distant shoreline with buildings.

How do you find water in a frozen land? _____

How DO YOU BUILD A SEMI-SUBTERRANEAN HOME? _____

WHAT IS AN ADVANCED CIVILIZATION?

SOME MIGHT LOOK AT ARCTIC CULTURES AND SAY, "THEY'RE PRIMITIVE. THEY DON'T HAVE CITIES OR WRITING." BUT IMAGINE DROPPING INTO A SIBERIAN BLIZZARD WITHOUT WARM HIDES, SNOW GOGGLES, OR THE KNOWLEDGE OF HOW TO READ WIND AND ICE.

WHO'S REALLY ADVANCED IN THAT MOMENT? _____

HISTORIANS, ANTHROPOLOGISTS, AND ORDINARY PEOPLE MUST BE CAREFUL NOT TO LET BIAS, ESPECIALLY CULTURAL BIAS, CLOUD HOW THEY VIEW OTHER SOCIETIES.

JUST BECAUSE A CULTURE DOESN'T BUILD STONE MONUMENTS OR WRITE BOOKS DOESN'T MEAN IT LACKS INTELLIGENCE OR INNOVATION. TECHNOLOGY DOESN'T ONLY MEAN MACHINES OR METAL. IT INCLUDES CLOTHING DESIGN, SHELTER CONSTRUCTION, FOOD PRESERVATION, AND SURVIVAL SKILLS.

JUDGING A CULTURE'S VALUE BY HOW IT LOOKS, INSTEAD OF HOW IT WORKS, LEADS TO SERIOUS MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT HUMAN HISTORY.

THINK AHEAD. LOOK AT THE CLOTHES YOU ARE WEARING AND THE THINGS YOU USE. MAKE A LIST OF ITEMS THAT MIGHT SEEM PRIMITIVE IN A FEW HUNDRED YEARS.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

WHAT IS SOMETHING YOUR PARENTS OR GRANDPARENTS USED THAT SEEMS PRIMITIVE TO YOU?

THE CHUKCHI AND OTHER INDIGENOUS ARCTIC PEOPLES DEVELOPED HOMES THAT COULD WITHSTAND EXTREME COLD AND FIERCE WINDS, EVEN WITHOUT MODERN TOOLS OR INSULATION. ONE OF THESE IS THE YARANGA, A PORTABLE, TENT-LIKE HOME USED ESPECIALLY BY REINDEER HERDERS.

LOOK UP REFERENCE IMAGES OR DIAGRAMS OF A CHUKCHI YARANGA. DRAW AND LABEL A CUTAWAY DIAGRAM OF A YARANGA.

INCLUDE THESE LABELED PARTS

- OUTER WALL COVERING (OFTEN REINDEER HIDES OR CANVAS)
- INNER LINING FOR WARMTH
- DOME OR CONE SHAPE
- WOODEN OR BONE SUPPORT POLES
- HEARTH OR FIRE PIT IN THE CENTER
- SLEEPING PLATFORMS ALONG THE SIDES (ELEVATED OR FUR-COVERED)
- ENTRY TUNNEL (SOMETIMES A LOW, NARROW PASSAGE TO KEEP OUT WIND)

KIOWA APACHE: KUTERASTAN

Kuterastan, the One Who Lives Above, sat on a small disk, white on one side, yellow on the other, and stirred. Kuterastan was no larger than a frog and bearded like an old man.

When he awoke, he rubbed his eyes, and from that simple motion light was born. It was golden in the east and amber in the west. Clouds drifted from his breath and when he wiped his face, the moisture became another being. It was Stenatliha, the Woman Without Parents, who smiled, for she too had awakened to the first dawn.

Kuterastan rubbed again, and from his hands came Chuganaai, the Sun, and Hadintin Skhin, Pollen Boy, bright and strong. Together they wondered what could be made of the emptiness.

From the sweat of their joined labor, Kuterastan shaped a tiny brown ball, the seed of earth. The winds blew upon it until it swelled and turned.

Then he called Nacholecho, the Tarantula, who fastened cords of black, blue, yellow, and white onto the four directions of the world. Then they stretched the world wide beneath them.

When the world had grown wide and steady beneath the cords of the Tarantula, Kuterastan sat in silence and listened. Beneath the new land, something stirred. The soil shivered like a creature breathing for the first time. From its dark belly, life began to rise.

First came the animals, drawn by the hum of Kuterastan’s song. Coyote lifted his nose to the wind and laughed, for he understood the game of the world before anyone else did.

Then, from the same trembling ground, came the people, small at first, their eyes still closed, their voices unshaped. Kuterastan bent near them and breathed upon them. They stood upright and looked at the world with wonder, hearing the pulse of the earth beneath their feet.

TRIO OF CREATORS – A COMPARISON TABLE

THINK ABOUT THE LAST THREE CREATION MYTHS.
FILL IN THE SPACES TO COMPARE THEM.

	NEZ PERCE CREATION	CAHULLA CREATION	KIOWA APACHE CREATION
NUMBER OF CREATORS			
ROLE OF ANIMALS			
SHOWS PERFECTION, IMPERFECTION, BOTH, OR NONE			

DRAW AN ANIMAL SPIRIT THAT MIGHT REPRESENT THE
KIOWA APACHE’S CREATOR.

DRAW A TOOL THAT THE CAHULLA’S CREATOR MAY HAVE
GIVEN THE PEOPLE.

DRAW A SYMBOL TO REPRESENT ONE OF THE
CHARACTERISTICS SHOWN BY THE NEZ PERCE’S
CREATOR.

CHOCTAW: THE MOUND

A very long time ago, before the rivers had names and before the first fires burned, all people lived deep within the earth. There, in the hidden chambers beneath Nanih Waiya, the Productive Mound, the Great Spirit, Hvshtahli, shaped the first people from the red clay of the nearby creek. He molded their forms with His hands, breathed life into them, and kept them safe in the darkness until the world above was ready.

At last, the time came for them to rise. From a passage beneath the mound, the people crawled upward toward the light. They emerged in groups, each tribe in its turn.

The Muscogee came first, climbing out onto the mound's rampart and lying in the sun to dry the clay from their skin. When they were strong enough, they journeyed eastward, stopping along the way to rest and smoke their pipes before settling beside the Tombigbee River.

Next came the Cherokee. They too rested in the sunlight, but when they tried to follow the Muscogee trail, they found the forest burned and the path lost. So they turned north and made their home there.

The Chickasaw came third. They followed after the Cherokee, finding them already settled in the northern lands, and they, too, made their villages nearby.

Last of all came the Choctaw, slow and steady, emerging into the sunlight after all the others had gone. They lay upon the mound's earthen side, letting the warmth of the sun harden the clay of their bodies until they felt one with the land itself. When they were dry, they looked out across the green hills and rivers of Mississippi and knew it was their home.

The Great Spirit told them to remain near Nanih Waiya, the mound that had birthed them. Around it they built their villages and planted their corn, honoring the sacred hill as the Mother Mound, the center of their creation and the resting place of their ancestors. The Choctaw remember not only their own beginning but their kinship with the other peoples.

THIS STORY DOESN'T DESCRIBE THE CHOCTAW EMERGING ALONE, BUT ALONGSIDE OTHER SOUTHEASTERN PEOPLES. WHY DO YOU THINK THE STORYTELLERS CHOSE TO INCLUDE OTHER NATIONS IN THEIR OWN ORIGIN?

NANITH WAIYA AND A NEARBY CAVE ARE REAL PLACES. LOOK UP INFORMATION ON THESE SACRED LOCATIONS AND DRAW A PICTURE OF THEM BELOW.

EVERY GROUP "SUNNED THEMSELVES" BEFORE TRAVELING ON. HOW DOES THIS REFLECT SPIRITUAL REBIRTH OR READINESS?

ARE YOU SOMEONE WHO LIKES TO EXPLORE NEW PLACES, OR SOMEONE WHO FEELS MORE AT PEACE STAYING NEAR WHAT'S FAMILIAR? HOW DO YOU THINK BOTH CHOICES CAN BE VALUABLE?

CRITICAL THINKING

WHY MIGHT DIFFERENT TRIBES GATHER AT THE SAME PLACE SEASONALLY?
WHAT NEEDS OR BENEFITS DID THIS SERVE?

TRY TO DEVELOP THREE RULES OR CUSTOMS YOU THINK WOULD HELP PREVENT CONFLICT AT THESE GATHERINGS?

1.

2.

3.

HOW MIGHT THE RIVER SERVE AS BOTH A UNITING FORCE AND A BOUNDARY?

HOW MIGHT CULTURAL IDENTITY (LIKE ORIGIN MYTHS OR GENDER ROLES IN SPIRITUALITY) CAUSE CONFLICT OR MISUNDERSTANDING BETWEEN TRIBES AT THE MEETING?

IMAGINE TWO TRIBES DISAGREE ABOUT WHO CAN LEAD A CEREMONY.
HOW COULD THIS DISPUTE BE RESOLVED WITHOUT VIOLENCE?

IF ONE TRIBE BEGINS TRADING WITH OUTSIDERS (LIKE THE FRENCH OR SPANISH), HOW MIGHT THAT AFFECT TRUST WITH OTHER TRIBES?

CAN YOU THINK OF A TIME WHEN GROUPS TODAY, SUCH AS NATIONS, STATES, OR POLITICAL PARTIES, COME TOGETHER BUT STILL DISAGREE?

YES NO

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN ONE GROUP REFUSES TO LISTEN AT A GATHERING? CAN THE MEETING STILL WORK? WILL THEY REACH THEIR GOALS?

DO YOU THINK IT'S BETTER TO PRESERVE YOUR GROUP'S IDENTITY OR TO COMPROMISE FOR THE SAKE OF UNITY? WHY?

SEASONAL GATHERINGS BROUGHT TOGETHER MANY TRIBES WITH DISTINCT CULTURES, BELIEFS, AND STORIES ABOUT WHERE THEY CAME FROM. SOMETIMES THESE DIFFERENCES LED TO STRONG ALLIANCES, AND OTHER TIMES, TO DEEP MISUNDERSTANDINGS.

LOOK BACK AT THE CREATION STORIES FROM THE FOLLOWING TRIBES: KIOWA APACHE, OSAGE, MISSOURIA, PAWNEE, KANASA, IROQUOIS, AND THE CHOCTAW.

NOW, LOOK AT THE COMPARISON CHART ON THE NEXT PAGE. FILL IN THE DETAILS BASED ON THE MYTHS.

USE WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED FROM THE STORIES. FOCUS ON THEIR CHARACTERS, VALUES, ORIGINS, AND IDEAS ABOUT HUMANS, NATURE, AND POWER.

IF YOU DON'T KNOW THE ANSWER, RESEARCH THE TOPIC TO FILL IN THE COMPLETE CHART.

	<i>ORIGIN OF HUMANS</i>	<i>ROLE OF THE CREATOR(S)</i>	<i>RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE</i>	<i>PLACE OF HUMANS IN THE WORLD</i>	<i>SKY/STARS CONNECTION</i>	<i>CONFLICT OR HARMONY IN CREATION</i>
	<i>WERE HUMANS MADE FROM STARS, ANIMALS, EARTH, OR BORN FROM GODS? TRIBES MAY DISAGREE ON HUMAN NATURE.</i>	<i>WAS THERE ONE GOD OR MANY? MALE, FEMALE, BOTH? HOW ACTIVE OR DISTANT WERE THEY?</i>	<i>IS NATURE SACRED, NEUTRAL, OR SOMETHING TO BE RULED? THIS AFFECTS HOW TRIBES TREAT ANIMALS AND RIVERS.</i>	<i>ARE HUMANS HUMBLE PARTS OF THE WORLD OR RULERS OF IT? THIS AFFECTS IDEAS OF LEADERSHIP.</i>	<i>ARE THE STARS OR SKY REALMS IMPORTANT? THIS COULD BE A SHARED OR DIVIDING VALUE.</i>	<i>WAS THE WORLD CREATED PEACEFULLY OR THROUGH STRUGGLE? THIS REFLECTS ON HOW TRIBES SEE COOPERATION.</i>
<i>KIOWA APACHE</i>						
<i>OSAGE</i>						
<i>MISSOURIA</i>						
<i>PAWNEE</i>						
<i>KANASA</i>						
<i>IROQUOIS</i>						
<i>CHOCTAW</i>						

FOR EACH OF THE TOPICS BELOW, THINK CAREFULLY ABOUT WHICH OF THE TRIBES MIGHT:

- *FORM ALLIANCES OR FIND COMMON GROUND.*
- *DISAGREE STRONGLY OR STRUGGLE TO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER.*

USE EXAMPLES FROM THEIR MYTHS TO SUPPORT YOUR THINKING.

[illegible]

WHAT TRIBES WOULD GET ALONG BEST BASED ON HOW THEY WERE CREATED?

WILL THEY FORM ALLIANCES OR DISAGREEMENTS ?

Alliances Disagreements

CAN BELIEVING SOMETHING SIMILAR ACTUALLY LEAD TO CONFLICT?

WHICH PEOPLE DO YOU THINK WILL FOCUS MORE ON COOPERATION?

WILL THEY FORM ALLIANCES OR DISAGREEMENTS?

Alliances Disagreements

WHAT PARTS OF THEIR STORIES MAKE YOU THINK THAT?

[illegible]