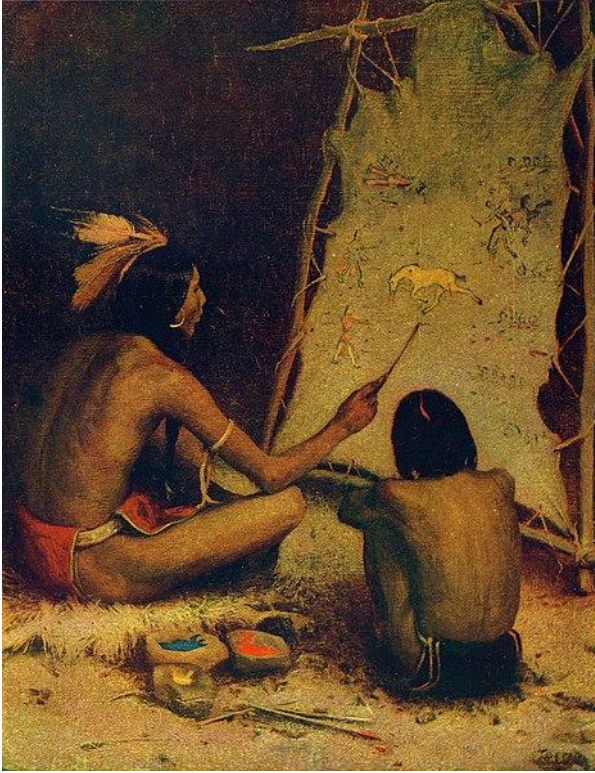


Indigenous Oral Storytelling



Indigenous peoples have strong storytelling traditions. Histories, stories, and religious rites were/are passed from the memories of one generation to the next through the spoken word. The worldview of Native people is intricately woven into the fabric of language and ways of speaking. The oral tradition connects past, present, and future and tightens tribal and familial bonds. These oral traditions can provide moral lessons for children on how to behave; they can communicate creation stories, cultural beliefs, and personal, family, or tribal history and experiences. Creation stories are often sacred and only told through oral tradition.

Oral traditions are a form of shared history in specific Native communities and are a source of historical knowledge. American Indians employed a variety of methods to record and preserve their histories, including through pictures, song, dance, and rote memory. Native Americans of the Northern Great Plains region recorded their histories through pictographic paintings on bison hides called winter counts. Winter counts were preserved by keepers who painted the images and served as storytellers. Winter counts are only one example of how Indigenous knowledge is sustained and

shared. Storytelling is an integral part of traditional Native education systems. Stories develop listening skills, memory, and imagination, and they support social and emotional learning to develop the whole child.

Language loss was part of the systemic destruction or assimilation of Native peoples. Some languages have vanished completely, while many others are weakened. Elders believe that if the language is lost, the people will be too. Teachers, elders, and linguists have been working to capture Native speech in written form as a way to pass on the languages—and cultures—to younger generations.

For primary-source recordings of Indigenous history and storytelling, please visit the [Archive of Native American Recorded History](#), part of the United States Archives. The National Museum of the American Indian also has a [primary-source video featuring Indigenous storytelling](#) by Cherokee Nation member Robert Lewis.



Sources

- Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian. Native Knowledge 360. Celebrating Native Cultures Through Words. <https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/informational/storytelling-and-oral-traditions#:~:text=The%20oral%20tradition%20connects%20past,or%20tribal%20history%20and%20experiences>.
- Digital scan of a color plate of painting. Printed with the following caption: *1902 by E. Irving Couse, A. N. A.; The Historian*. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Historian_\(The_How_and_Why_Library\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Historian_(The_How_and_Why_Library).jpg).