



ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

# Oral Traditions (Tenas Man)

## ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

- Since time immemorial
- Identity
- History
- Lifeways

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Explain the cultural significance of oral traditions, including the importance of storytelling for Indigenous communities in maintaining the culture and ways of knowing and being
- Interpret the moral or lesson of the story of Tenas Man
- Describe the importance of first foods to Native peoples

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How do human actions impact the natural resources of a community?
- How do the stories we tell reflect our values and beliefs?

## LOGISTICS

- Where does the activity take place?  
*Classroom*
- How are the students organized?  
 Whole class    Teams: 3 – 4  
 Pairs    Individually

## TIME REQUIRED

2 hours and 15 minutes

## Overview

In this lesson, students will learn about the importance of stories and storytelling to the peoples of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians. Students will listen to a traditional story about eeling and work together to reflect on the lessons of the story. They will also connect the practices described in the story to present restoration work to protect and enhance eel runs.

## Background for teachers

The Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians is composed of dozens of bands and Tribes from across western Oregon as well as parts of northern California and southwestern Washington—each with a unique cultural and linguistic background. One commonality uniting these diverse peoples is the importance of stories and storytelling. Across millennia, Indigenous people in western Oregon have relied on a huge web of traditional stories, some shared and some unique, to transmit their understandings of the world down through the generations. Stories help Tribal people understand who they are, why the world is the way it is, and the best way to interact within a community.



Siletz people tell many kinds of stories. Some stories talk of more recent events like shipwrecks, fighting with settlers, or the shift to life on the reservation. Others tell of the time before settlers and relate stories of conflicts between different groups of Indigenous people, times of hunger, marriages, or even huge floods caused by earthquakes far in the past. Still older stories tell about how the world came to be the way it is and have lessons about the way that Tribal people must act.

In village times, storytellers were important people who made sure that the younger generations learned not just the message of stories but memorized exactly how each story was supposed to be told. Elders interviewed on the reservation remembered that storytellers would teach youngsters by repetition, sometimes stopping in the middle of a story to quiz younger people about what line came next. Sometimes elders would tell stories in tandem with another elder to correct any mistakes. Stories are part of a shared education that every person learns from the time they are very young.

In this way of thinking, stories are powerful living traditions and the act of telling a story can affect the way the world works today. Those effects can be positive. Telling stories teaches each coming generation the best way to behave so that the world will continue in the right way and ties Tribal people to each other and their ancestors. But those effects can also be negative. If stories aren't treated with respect or are told in the wrong way, bad or dangerous things can happen—people

## STANDARDS

### Oregon social sciences standards

**3.2** - Describe the responsibilities of people in their community and state.

**3.10** - Identify and analyze Oregon's natural resources and describe how people in Oregon and other parts of the world use them.

**3.12** - Describe how the identity of the local community shaped its history and compare to other communities in the region.

**3.19** - Analyze different ways that people, other living things, and the environment might be affected by an event, issue, or problem.

### Oregon English language arts standards

**3.RL.2** - Recount and summarize stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral, and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.

**3.RL.3** - Describe characters in a story and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.

**3.SL.1** - Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 3 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly

**3.SL.2** - Determine the main ideas and supporting details of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.



might even get hurt or killed. The entire world might even be changed for the worse. Different types of stories have different power, impact, and protocols. Most Siletz ancestral languages have entirely different names for stories about the time before the world came to be the way it is today (like creation stories), about events that happened in recent memory (historical stories), and stories meant to teach children the right way to behave. Along with different names and purposes, each type of story has a different power that requires them to be told and cared for in different ways.

For Indigenous people from across western Oregon, winter is the special season to tell and learn stories. Creation stories and stories from before the world was set are especially important to tell only during winter so that their telling doesn't disrupt the world. While other stories, like historical stories, might also be told at other times during the year, in general winter was (and is) a special time for Siletz people to gather to listen, learn, and tell stories. Telling the wrong story outside of winter can bring bad luck to an individual or even the entire community.

Many families continue these traditions to this day, joining an unbroken chain of storytelling stretching back thousands of years. For many other Tribal members the same pressures that have alienated Siletz people from their lands, languages, cultural practices, and identities have also interrupted opportunities to hear and learn from ancestral stories. The history of colonization and demands of

## MATERIALS

- Slides (PowerPoint slide deck)
- Classroom audiovisual technology and internet access to display PowerPoint slides, video, and websites (see following items)
- Web-enabled devices for students (school/district-issued laptop or tablet computers for allotment-mapping activity; students could also use personal smartphones if school or your own classroom policy permits their use for instructional purposes and classroom internet access is available)
- Recording of the story of Tenas Man
- Readings and resources on the Siletz eels

modern life make it more difficult for Tribal people to maintain their connection with stories. Despite these struggles, Siletz people remain committed to their stories and work to foster the connections that still exist and to reconnect with stories that may have been written down but are no longer told in the community today.

The oral tradition in this lesson is a short story about a young boy eager to grow up and join in eeling. Lamprey eels were (and are) an important ancestral food for Siletz people. Along the Siletz River and its tributaries harvesting eel was a family affair with older men hooking the eels on long poles and flinging them onto shore for youngsters to collect and put into sacks. Before the state of Oregon poisoned eels in the Siletz River as part of a misguided attempt to restore salmon runs, the entire community was involved in fishing at nighttime in the early summer. In this story, Tenas Man does not want to wait until he is old enough to hook eels and sneaks down to the riverbank to try to harvest on his own. What happens next offers lessons about the difficulty of waiting to grow up as well as the importance of caring for children, teaching them to understand consequences, and fostering a balance between responsibility and freedom.

### To prepare for lesson teachers should

- Read <https://projects.seattletimes.com/2022/first-foods-native-people-pacific-northwest-preserving/>

### VOCABULARY

**Elder** – An older member of a Tribe or community, specifically someone who teaches or leads others and shares their knowledge and experience. An elder could be a parent, grandparent, aunt or uncle, or a teacher.

**First foods** – Traditional foods that Native people have eaten since time immemorial. These are found in nature and are often healthier than processed foods.

**Moral** – The lesson to be learned from a story or an experience.

**Oral traditions** – Stories and histories passed on through telling.

#### For extension activities

**Point of view** – The position or attitude from which something or someone is observed; also called “perspective.”

**Primary source** – A document, recording, photograph, first-person account, newspaper article, film, or other record that historians can study and analyze to describe and interpret the past.

**Secondary source** – A document or other material that interprets, evaluates, or discusses information found in one or more primary sources. Secondary sources interpret primary sources of information.



- Review all handouts and worksheets for this lesson.
- Ensure students will have access to all materials (printed and/or electronic) and audiovisual resources (e.g., internet access and web-enabled devices such as laptop or tablet computers) needed to participate in this lesson (see “Materials” section above).
- Prepare classroom audiovisual technology to display the slides.

### ADAPTIONS FOR DISTANCE LEARNING



Much of this lesson can be done through distance learning. Using videoconferencing, students can participate in partner and small group conversations. Conversely, activities can be recorded and viewed later.

## References

The Siletz Eels: Oral History Interviews with Siletz Tribal Elders and Neighboring Residents Regarding the Decline in Siletz River Lamprey Populations. [Online]. [https://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/concern/technical\\_reports/hd76s777x?locale=en](https://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/concern/technical_reports/hd76s777x?locale=en)

A hand-woven history: A cherished basket finds its way back to the Siletz tribe and inspires hope for a replacement. Sep. 24, 2010. [Online]. [https://www.oregonlive.com/environment/2010/09/basket\\_few\\_willing\\_to\\_mess\\_wit.html](https://www.oregonlive.com/environment/2010/09/basket_few_willing_to_mess_wit.html)

## Resources

- Downey et al. (1996). Skwakol: The Decline of the Siletz Lamprey Eel Population During the 20th century. [https://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/concern/technical\\_reports/br86bb99z](https://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/concern/technical_reports/br86bb99z)
- Reservation Maps: <https://www.ctsi.nsn.us/reservation-maps/>

- Grade 11 lesson on food sovereignty: [https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/NativeAmericanEducation/Documents/SB13%20Curriculum/Siletz%20Food%20Sovereignty\\_Grade%2011\\_Lesson%20Plan.pdf](https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/NativeAmericanEducation/Documents/SB13%20Curriculum/Siletz%20Food%20Sovereignty_Grade%2011_Lesson%20Plan.pdf)
- Mini-lesson on story mapping: <https://www.readingrockets.org/classroom/classroom-strategies/story-maps>

## Considerations for teachers

### Assessment

Teachers can informally assess students whenever they share their thoughts during discussions. The students' story maps and written reflections can be used for more formal assessments.

### Practices

- *Small groups* – Small group activities allow students to share and analyze ideas with three to five other people. This practice can be good for students who do not want to share their ideas with the whole class and/or who may be afraid of others' reactions. The teacher should monitor group discussions to determine the degree to which students are understanding the concepts and contributing to the group.
- *Classroom discussion* – Large group, whole class discussion allows students to express their thoughts and hear the thoughts of others. For the instructor, this practice is a good way to take the pulse of the group and see what general themes are emerging. For students, large group discussion can be a way to express themselves or to hear differing perspectives from others.
- *Differentiation* – This lesson makes use of readings with complex sentence structures and archaic language. You may choose to organize groups based on reading needs and supports or have students identify appropriate scaffolds for understanding if necessary.

- *Snowball fight* – To have a snowball fight in the classroom, simply give each student a piece of paper with whatever skill you want to practice or assess on it, have students crumple the paper up, and then throw it at each other. After you stop the snowball fight, each student picks up one of the snowballs and is responsible for the skill on that sheet of paper. Then, students crumple up their snowball and play again!

### Learning targets

- I can explain the importance of oral traditions in Indigenous communities.
- I can explain the importance of first foods to Native people.

### Options/Extensions

Compare accounts of the history of the Siletz eels from multiple points of view using primary and secondary sources.

- Primary source: interview with Tribal elder Nellie Orton  
<https://siletzartsheritagesociety.org/its-all-about-eels/>
- Secondary sources on the decline of the lamprey eels:  
<https://terra.oregonstate.edu/2014/01/to-bring-back-a-native-fish/>  
<https://today.oregonstate.edu/archives/2015/feb/study-finds-lamprey-decline-continues-loss-habitat-oregon>  
[https://www.oregonlive.com/outdoors/2016/10/celebrating\\_the\\_10th\\_anniversa.html](https://www.oregonlive.com/outdoors/2016/10/celebrating_the_10th_anniversa.html)

### Appendix

Materials included in the electronic folder that support this lesson are:

- Slides\_Tenas Man.ppt
- Graphic Organizer.pdf
- Tenas Man.mp3

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## Activity 1

# Building Background Knowledge: The Siletz Lamprey

*Time: 60 minutes*

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### Overview

Students engage in a teacher-led mini-lesson exploring Oregon's geography, particularly the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians reservation as it is now compared to the past and to the Siletz peoples' ancestral lands. They discuss the first foods of the region, especially lamprey eels.

### Step 1

Display slide 2. Review the learning targets and vocabulary for the lesson.

#### Say:

*Today we are going to learn about first foods that have been important to the Native people of our region. First foods are traditional foods that Native people have eaten since time immemorial. These are found in nature and are healthier than the processed foods we eat a lot of today. What do you think an example of a first food might be? Turn to a partner and share your ideas. [Give students time to talk with an elbow partner.] I want to see who was being a good listener. Who can give me an example of a first food that your partner shared? What did your partner think? [Let a few students share.] You had a lot of good ideas. Let's learn more about first foods and see if your ideas are correct.*

### Step 2

Display and read aloud or summarize the Seattle Times story on first foods:

<https://projects.seattletimes.com/2022/first-foods-native-people-pacific-northwest-preserving/>

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## Activity 1 (Continued)

### Say:

*Now that we've read that article, who can give me an example of a first food? [Allow students to respond.] You've been great listeners today. Give yourselves a pat on the back. Later, I am going to share a traditional story with you, and it includes a first food that wasn't mentioned in the Seattle Times article. I'm going to teach you about that first food after we talk a little about the people who once relied on it for a healthy diet.*

### Step 3

Display slide 3.

### Say:

*The Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians are a group of Native American people who live here in Oregon. Siletz ancestors come from many different groups of Native American people from across what is now western Oregon, as well as parts of northern California and southwestern Washington. Like many Indigenous people, the Siletz ancestors were forced from their homes when new settlers arrived. They were moved to the Coast (Siletz) Reservation beginning in the mid-1850s. Before we begin, let's look at some maps together so we understand what part of Oregon we're talking about and how it has changed. [Point out the outline of Oregon, the shaded area that indicates what used to be Indigenous lands and what now belongs to the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians.]*

### Step 4

Allow students to notice and wonder.

### Say:

*What do you notice? What do you wonder? Turn to your partner and talk about what you see in these maps. [Allow students to discuss in pairs while you listen in before bringing the group back together and letting a few students share their thinking.] Most of you noticed that the Siletz Tribes' home got much*

## Activity 1 (Continued)

*smaller. We know that when North America was colonized and divided up, many Native Americans lost their lands and were forced into much smaller places called reservations. Soldiers guarded the reservations and wouldn't let people leave to find and collect the foods, medicines, and plants that they had always used to live a healthy life. The government said that they would give people food and teach them to farm but they did not usually keep their promises. There often wasn't enough to eat on the reservations.*

### Step 5

Display slides 4–5.

#### Say:

*To survive, the people removed to the reservation relied on their traditional ways of finding food. For some people on the reservation, like the Siletz ancestors whose homelands are in southwestern Oregon, the reservation was a very different place. It was much rainier and colder than the homelands they knew. Different plants grew on the reservation, and others (like oak trees) were nowhere to be found. But some things were familiar, like the lamprey eels that lived in the Siletz River. Lampreys are special ancient fish that have been an important ancestral food for the people removed to the Coast (Siletz) Reservation. Lampreys—sometimes called eels—are a first food, like the ones we talked about at the beginning of this lesson. When people were brought to the reservation the lamprey run at Siletz was full and healthy. It became a lifeline for many of the families taken to the reservation. Some elders today tell stories about being sent to school with smoked eel in their pockets for lunch. Instead of a sandwich.*

*Lampreys are special fish that have a life cycle similar to salmon's. They are born in the rivers and creeks and then go out to sea as adults before returning to their homes in the rivers to spawn, which means to lay eggs. The time to catch eels is in early summer when they are returning from the ocean, and this was an important time for people at Siletz. The entire family and community would come together to*



## Activity 1 (Continued)

*catch eels at night. Each person in the family had a different role. Older men would catch the eels using a long hook while younger children would collect the eels in sacks for others to clean, smoke, and preserve.*

*Today the Siletz River has very few eels because the state of Oregon poisoned them in the 1980s. They thought that killing the lamprey would help the salmon population grow and they didn't think to ask Tribal people about how important eels were to their community. Instead, by poisoning the eels they destroyed the first food that the Tribe had relied on for so many years. Today, Siletz people can no longer support their families with eels, but they remain committed to protecting eels and working to make sure that the runs will be healthy again in the future.*

### Step 6

Pause to take any questions from students before moving on.

#### Say:

*What questions do you have about what we learned today? [Pause for questions.] Turn to your partner and tell them one new thing you learned today. [As students discuss, add the header "Today I Learned" to the top of a piece of chart paper or on your smartboard or chalkboard.] Who would like to share one thing they learned today? [Allow students to share. Clarify any misconceptions as you add their comments to the chart paper/smartboard/chalkboard.] Great thinking! Remember what we learned about the Siletz people and first foods like the lamprey. It's going to be important when we talk about oral traditions and I share a traditional story from the Siletz people with you.*

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## Activity 2

# Oral Traditions and the Story of Tenas Man

*Time: 45 minutes*

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### Overview

In this activity, students learn the importance of oral traditions to Native people. After learning about identifying the lesson or moral of a story, they will listen to the story of Tenas Man. Afterward, they will analyze the story's various elements and its moral or lesson.

### Step 1

Gather students for conversation. Be sure they are seated in such a way that you can ask them to turn and talk to their neighbors at various times during the discussion. Revisit slide 2 as needed when you introduce new vocabulary.

### Say:

*An elder is someone born long ago who has become a teacher or leader. An elder can be a parent, grandparent, aunt or uncle, or a teacher. Respect for elders is extremely important to Native communities. Elders play a major role in educating Native children. They pass along the traditional knowledge and history from one generation to the next. One important way that elders teach the children is through oral traditions like storytelling. Have you ever learned something from an elder? Let's all take a moment to think about a time an older person taught us something important like how to make a certain food, play a game, or some other new skill. [Pause so that students can think about the question.] Turn to your partner and tell them about one thing an elder has taught you. Make sure you listen carefully to your partner.*

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## Activity 2 (Continued)

### Step 2

Allow students to talk with their partners as you circle around and listen in on their conversations, checking for understanding and noticing when the conversation begins to wane.

**Say:**

*I heard a lot of good conversations. Who can tell me about one thing their partner learned and who they learned it from? [Allow a few students to share, praising them for using strong listening skills and respecting their partners.] How did it feel to learn from an elder? [Allow students to share their thoughts.]*

### Step 3

Introduce the concept of oral traditions.

**Say:**

*Native people have lived in Oregon since time immemorial, long before people developed writing systems and long before settlers from other places first started coming to this area. Instead of writing, Siletz people have shared their stories and histories orally for hundreds of generations. What do I mean by orally? [Allow for students to respond. Then confirm and clarify student responses.] So, these stories are oral traditions, passed down from generation to generation since time immemorial.*

**Say:**

*Stories that Native people tell are sacred and have been passed down for thousands of years. Some stories are about recent or historical events—other stories are older and teach Siletz people about how the world was created and things came to be the way that they are today. Siletz people take special care of stories and recognize that the act of telling a story is a powerful thing that can impact the world today. That impact can be positive—stories help teach Siletz children who they are, about their history, and about their responsibilities to each other and the world around them. But that impact can also be negative. Siletz people believe that telling stories*

## Activity 2 (Continued)

*the wrong way or the wrong time of year can hurt people telling the story—or even change the world for the worse! Different stories have different protocols—ways of acting. Some powerful stories—like stories about how the world came to be—should only be told in the winter.*

### Say:

*Now we are going to learn a story from the Siletz people—a story that has been passed down for a very long time. Native people don't always want to share oral traditions with outsiders or even allow them to be recorded or written down. Why do you think that might be?*

Allow students to respond, encouraging them to think about how historical harm and continued oppression might lead Native people not to trust outsiders with their sacred truths. Guide them in thinking about how their discussions might be related to the history of the Siletz eels.

### Say:

*Thanks for sharing. Now that we have talked about this history let's agree to treat this story with respect and gratitude. What are some ways you all think we can demonstrate respect and gratitude toward this story we are lucky enough to listen to today?*

Lead student discussion about how to respect the story in this lesson as one part of a broader culture that students can view with respect.

## Step 4

Display slide 6. Introduce story elements including characters, setting, problem, solution, and moral or lesson.

### Say:

*You already know a lot about stories. Who can tell me what the “setting” of a story is? [Allow students to respond, clarifying and correcting as necessary. Repeat with the terms characters, problem, and solution.] Great! Today, you're going to*

## Activity 2 (Continued)

identify those elements in the story, as well as one more very important element—the moral of the story. Does anyone know what that means? [Give students an opportunity to respond.]

### Say:

*The moral of the story is a life lesson that you can learn from it. Traditional stories like the one we'll hear today can give us insights into people's beliefs and values. They might include lessons or morals or examples of characteristics that the storyteller wants to encourage in youngsters—stories are one way that Native people teach younger generations what kind of person it is good to be.*

### Step 5

Introduce the story of Tenas Man.

### Say:

*Now let's listen to a story told by Siletz Tribal member Randy Austin. As you listen to the story of Tenas Man, I want you to notice the different elements of the story. Tenas Man has been passed down through oral tradition since time immemorial, so it must have an important lesson for us to learn. Listen for the moral or morals of the story.*

### Step 6

Pause to take any questions from students before moving on. Next, play the recording of Tenas Man.

### Step 7

Hand out graphic organizers and display the example on slide 7.

### Say:

*Now you are going to identify the different story elements we discussed. Here is an example of what you will do. [Talk through the example on the slide. Conversely, you can share the mini-lesson in the video here: <https://www.readingrockets.org/classroom/classroom-strategies/story-maps>.] Think about the story of*

## Activity 2 (Continued)

*Tenas Man carefully as you fill out your graphic organizer. I will play the story one more time to help you.*

### Step 8

Play the recording again. Move around the room as children work on completing their handouts so you can check for understanding and answer questions.

### Step 9

Share about Indigenous pedagogy to give insight into the ways that most Tribal youth hear and interact with stories.

#### Say:

*This way of learning—breaking down a story into pieces and finding the moral—is how we teach in school today, but Siletz people don't usually tell stories this way. Instead, Siletz storytellers and elders connect stories to their everyday lives and what is happening in the community. Instead of saying "this is the moral of this story" they just choose when and where to tell stories to youngsters who might need to hear them.*

#### Ask:

*When do you think that an elder might choose to tell this story to a youngster?  
What lesson might an older person (like a parent) take from this story?*

**INSIGHT:** Stories like these often teach many morals. This story has lessons about how to act when feeling, how to understand feelings about growing up, and lessons for parents about how to guide children.

#### Say:

*Thanks for sharing! Siletz people hear and learn stories over the course of their lives—these stories are part of the way that many Siletz people understand the world. Since everyone knows the same stories, teachers and elders can often just*

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## Activity 2 (Continued)

*reference a part of a story to get someone's attention. Stories are all around Siletz people all the time—reminding the community of how the world came to be the way it is and the right way to act to maintain a healthy balance.*

### Step 10

Collect student work and reconvene for the lesson closing.

#### Say:

*We have learned a lot today about oral traditions in Native communities. We learned an important story from the Siletz people that included some lessons about how to act. Let's recap what we learned.* [Discuss the questions below, letting students answer and build on each other's thoughts, and guiding them in refining their thinking.]

- *So, who can tell me why oral traditions are so important?*
- *What was one of the morals of the story of Tenas Man?*
- *What else might we infer (figure out) about the Siletz people from the story of Tenas Man?*

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## Activity 3

# Small Group Basket Share-Out

*Time: 25 minutes*

### Overview

In this activity students reflect on and summarize what they learned in the lesson.

### Step 1

Review quickly using a **snowball fight**. Put a vocabulary word or concept from the lesson on each paper. Students can then define or explain the concept orally or in writing. You can do this as a whole group or have students share in small groups or with partners, as you see fit.

### Step 2

Prepare students for writing activity.

#### Say:

*I want you to think back to the story of Tenas Man. In your journals, you're going to reflect on one of the morals of the story. The story taught us that we shouldn't be in a hurry to grow up and that we should trust our community to help guide us as we grow. Why do you think this story has been passed down for generations? Why is the moral of the story important?*

### Step 3

Pause to take any questions. Allow students time to reflect through writing.