

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**“The Earth on Turtle’s Back”** (Onondaga), **“When Grizzlies Walked Upright”** (Modoc), **from**  
***The Navajo Origin Legend*** (Navajo), **from** ***The Iroquois Constitution***

## Cultural Connection: Native American Myths

The need to explain how life began gave birth to myths, or traditional stories, that are passed down from generation to generation. When these stories, which are often about immortal beings, reflect the origins of earthly life, we call them origin myths. In Native American cultures, many of the myths reflect the region of North America in which people lived.

For instance, the Blackfeet tell a story about how horses came to their land. The use of horses transformed the way Plains people lived. The first documentation of Native Americans on horseback comes from northern Mexico in the late 1500s. It is likely that the use of horses spread across the Plains as the result of trading among various groups of people. With horses, the Plains people became better hunters and so raised fewer crops. Horses also changed the way Plains people waged war. Rival warriors on horseback engaged in fierce battles on the Plains.

In the Arctic, frozen seas and icy, treeless plains made for limited resources. In summer, the Innuits collected driftwood from the ocean shores to make tools and shelters and hunted caribou or fished in inland rivers and lakes. In winter, they built igloos or houses of snow and ice at a favorite spot near the sea and hunted seals. Inuit religious beliefs reflected their close ties to the natural world; they believed that each animal has a spirit.

In the Southwest, the Pueblos grew corn, beans, and squash. Their religious beliefs reflected the importance of farming. Through prayers and other rituals, they tried to please the spirits of nature, such as wind, rain, and thunder. The Hopis believe that the *kachinas* were supernatural beings who lived among the first Hopis and taught them how to live in their new world. By making *kachina* dolls, the Hopis symbolize their belief in the gods (more than 250 of them) and share their beliefs with their children. The *kachinas*, then, are symbols of their faith and heritage. The characters in a *kachina* dance might represent animals, forces of nature, or even clowns.

**DIRECTIONS:** Answer the following questions on the lines provided.

1. Why do the Blackfeet tell a story about how horses came to their land?

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2. What types of origin stories did the Innuits probably tell? Why?

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3. What types of origin stories did the Pueblos probably tell? Why?

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4. What types of origin myths would a culture living on the southern coast of America most likely tell? Why?

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### Literary Analysis: Comparing Origin Myths

**Origin myths** are traditional stories that recount the beginnings of life on Earth. These myths often explain such phenomena as the beginning of human life, the customs and beliefs of a people, the creation of features of the landscape, and events beyond people’s control. Origin myths involve gods, spirits, animals, and the elements in their explanations.

**DIRECTIONS:** On the lines provided, compare the three creation myths (Onondaga, Modoc, and Navajo) by briefly explaining the role of animals, elements, or spirits and gods in each one.

**1. The role of animals**

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**2. The role of the elements (earth, wind, fire, water)**

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**3. The role of spirits or gods**

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## Build Vocabulary

**Spelling Strategy** When adding the suffix *-tion* to a word that ends in *te*, drop the *te*:  
*deliberate* + *-tion* = *deliberation*.

### Using the Suffix *-tion*

**A. DIRECTIONS:** The suffix *-tion*, which means “the act, state, or quality of,” turns words into nouns. For example, the verb *deliberate* + *-tion* becomes the noun *deliberation*. On the lines after each word, write the noun form ending in *-tion* and a definition of the new word.

1. create \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. relate \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. inflate \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Using the Word Bank

ablutions	confederate	deliberation
protruded	disposition	

**B. DIRECTIONS:** On the line, write the letter of the definition before the word it defines.

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|---------------------|--|
| ___ 1. disposition  | a. inclination to believe, do, or choose something |
| ___ 2. deliberation | b. ritual washings or cleansings of the body       |
| ___ 3. confederate  | c. careful consideration                           |
| ___ 4. ablutions    | d. stuck out                                       |
| ___ 5. protruded    | e. united with others for a common purpose         |

**C. DIRECTIONS:** On the line, write the letter of the word that is most similar in meaning to the word in capital letters.

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|----------------------|-----------------|------------|---------------|---------------|
| ___ 1. PROTRUDED:    | a. jitted       | b. curved  | c. stood      | d. reversed   |
| ___ 2. DISPOSITION:  | a. gain         | b. size    | c. tendency   | d. teamwork   |
| ___ 3. ABLUTIONS:    | a. rinsings     | b. dyeings | c. heatings   | d. coolings   |
| ___ 4. DELIBERATION: | a. anger        | b. belief  | c. action     | d. thought    |
| ___ 5. CONFEDERATE:  | a. disorganized | b. allied  | c. imprisoned | d. nonviolent |

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## Reading Strategy: Recognize Cultural Details

Literature reflects the culture that produces it. While you read a piece of literature, pay attention to cultural details—such as references to objects, animals, or practices that signal how people live, think, or worship—to gain cultural insight. For example, the cultural details in the three Native American myths and the Iroquois Constitution indicate how the Native Americans lived as well as what they valued in life.

**DIRECTIONS:** Read the following excerpts from the selections. Then answer the questions that follow.

### “The Earth on the Turtle’s Back”

There was an ancient chief in the Skyland. His young wife was expecting a child, and one night she dreamed that she saw the Great Tree uprooted. The next day she told her husband the story.

He nodded as she finished telling her dream. “My wife,” he said, “I am sad that you had this dream. It is clearly a dream of great power and, as is our way, when one has such a powerful dream we must do all we can to make it true. The Great Tree must be uprooted.”

### “When Grizzlies Walked Upright”

The Sky Spirit broke off the small end of his giant stick and threw the pieces into the rivers. The longer pieces turned into beaver and otter; the smaller pieces became fish. When the leaves dropped from the trees, he picked them up, blew upon them, and so made the birds.

### from *The Navajo Origin Legend*

The white ear of corn had been changed into a man, the yellow ear into a woman. It was the wind that gave them life. It is the wind that comes out of our mouths now that gives us life. When this ceases to blow we die. In the skin at the tips of our fingers we see the trail of the wind; it shows us where the wind blew when our ancestors were created.

### from *The Iroquois Constitution*

We now do crown you with the sacred emblem of your lordship. You shall now become a mentor of the people of the Five Nations. The thickness of your skin shall be seven spans—which is to say that you shall be proof against anger, offensive actions and criticism. Your heart shall be filled with peace and good will and your mind filled with a yearning for the welfare of the people of the confederacy.

1. What can you infer about the Native American’s attitude toward nature? Support your opinion with evidence from the excerpts.  
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2. Explain what you can infer about the place of dreams in Native American culture from the excerpt from “The Earth on Turtle’s Back.”  
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3. What does the excerpt from *The Iroquois Constitution* tell us about the ideals of the Iroquois people?  
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4. Explain the significance of the words “the thickness of your skin” found in *The Iroquois Constitution*. What does it mean today to be “thick-skinned”?  
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