

**Title**

Comparing North American Origin Stories—by Joshua Harms, Spring Creek

**Grade Level**

Fourth and fifth grade—upper elementary

**Theme**

Critical reflection of North American origin myths (Columbus vs. “the New World”)

**Duration**

1 – 1.5 hours

**Goal**

- Students will be able to describe the common “Columbus discovered America” myth and the Lakota banishment and emergence stories.
- Students will recognize that America is full of hundreds of different origin stories, which reflect the hundreds of different first nations in North America.
- Students will be able to describe why it’s false to say that Columbus “*discovered*” America.

**Objectives**

- Students will read / watch depictions of Columbus and traditional Lakota origin stories.
- Students will develop a working understanding of the term *origin* by filling out a four-way definition sheet.
- Students will participate in a class discussion about who really “discovered” America—students will collectively reflect on why/how people have different perspectives on the “origin” of America.
- Students will write a letter to the governors of different states, stating that South Dakota changed *Columbus Day* to *Native American Day* and describing why this is a more historically accurate and culturally respectful practice. Students will use their well-supported opinions to ask the political figures if they will consider making a similar change in their own states.

**South Dakota Standards**

Students will learn about the early history of the North American Continent. Students will practice persuasive writing.

**Cultural Concept**

Students will learn about Lakota origin stories.

**Cultural Background**

“In the beginning, prior to the creation of the Earth, the gods resided in an undifferentiated celestial domain and humans lived in an indescribably subterranean world devoid of culture. Chief among the gods were Takushkanshkan (“something that moves”), the Sun, who is married to the Moon, with whom he has one daughter, Wohpe (“falling star”).

Old Man and Old Woman, whose daughter Ite (“face”) is married to Wind, with whom she has four sons, the Four Winds.

Among numerous other spirits, the most important is Inktomi (“spider”), the devious trickster. Inktomi conspires with Old Man and Old Woman to increase their daughter’s status by arranging an affair between the Sun and Ite.

The discovery of the affair by the Sun’s wife leads to a number of punishments by Takuskanskan, who gives the Moon her own domain, and by separating her from the Sun initiates the creation of time.

Old Man, Old Woman, and Ite are sent to Earth, but Ite is separated from the Wind, her husband, who, along with the Four Winds and a fifth wind presumed to be the child of the adulterous affair, establishes space.

The daughter of the Sun and the Moon, Wohpe, also falls to earth and later resides with the South Wind, the paragon of Lakota maleness, and the two adopt the fifth wind, called Wamniomni (“whirlwind”).

The Emergence Alone on the newly formed Earth, some of the gods become bored, and Ite prevails upon Inktomi to find her people, the Buffalo Nation. In the form of a wolf, Inktomi travels beneath the earth and discovers a village of humans. Inktomi tells them about the wonders of the Earth and convinces one man, Tokahe (“the first”), to accompany him to the surface.

Tokahe does so and upon reaching the surface through a cave (Wind Cave in the Black Hills), marvels at the green grass and blue sky. Inktomi and Ite introduces Tokahe to buffalo meat and soup and shows him tipis, clothing, and hunting utensils.

Tokahe returns to the subterranean village and appeals to six other men and their families to travel with him to the Earth’s surface.

When they arrive, they discover that Inktomi has deceived them: buffalo are scarce, the weather has turned bad, and they find themselves starving. Unable to return to their home, but armed with a new knowledge about the world, they survive to become the founders of the Seven Fireplaces.” Student Activities

### **Resources**

Old/New World Poster

Columbus / Lakota origin stories: youtube videos / children’s books

### **Assessment**

Persuasive Letter. Students will make a pro/con list about the switch from Columbus Day to Native American Day. Students will write persuasive letters

### **Developer**

Joshua Harms

### **Date**

October 12, 2014