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American Studies English

**Native American Literature**

**Guided Reading Questions**

**“The World on the Turtle’s Back” Iroquois**

1. What do you think the Great Tree symbolizes? Cite one DQ to support your answer.
2. When the woman falls from the sky, the gods “paid no attention to this. They knew what was happening, but they chose to ignore it.” What does the reaction of the gods suggest about their part in the creation of the world?
3. What part do the animals play in the creation of the world?
4. What do you think the woman’s actions, walking in a circle following the same direction as the sun, represent?
5. What do you think the twins’ conflict even before birth explains?
6. What do you think the buried mother, from whose body the various plants grow, represents?
7. What does the twins’ competition to make animals explain?
8. Why do you think the myth says the left-handed twin “died and he didn’t die”?
9. Why do you think the right-handed twin called the “Master of Life”?
10. What can you infer about the Iroquois view of opposing forces in the world? Cite one DQ to support your answer.
11. How is the Iroquois view of good and evil different from most contemporary Americans’ views of good versus evil? Cite one DQ to support your answer.

**Guided Reading Questions**

**“Coyote and the Buffalo” retold by Mourning Dove**

1. According to the opening lines of the story, what does Coyote’s greed explain?
2. Why does Coyote vandalize Buffalo Bull’s skull? What does this behavior reveal about the trickster’s character?
3. How does Coyote use his wiles to try to manipulate Buffalo Bull?
4. After Buffalo Bull kills Young Buffalo, what is the “reward” that he gives to Coyote? What are the conditions of the reward?
5. What happens after Coyote violates the conditions of his reward?
6. What strategy does the Old Woman use to trick Coyote?
7. What is ironic about the old woman tricking Coyote and stealing his food?
8. Tricksters cross boundaries and break rules to teach just how important rules are. What lessons can be learned through Coyote’s experience?

**Guided Reading Questions**

**“The Way to Rainy Mountain” Memoir by N. Scott Momaday**

1. What language is used to describe Rainy Mountain? Use a specific DQ in your response.
2. Why is the author returning to Rainy Mountain?
3. The author writes, “I wanted to see in reality what she had seen more perfectly in the mind’s eye, and traveled fifteen hundred miles to begin my pilgrimage” (54). What does the diction of the word “pilgrimage” suggest about the nature of this journey (from Yellowstone to Rainy Mountain)?

1. Two major natural phenomena are explained by the Kiowa legend about the seven sisters and their brother. In the legend, the brother turns into a bear and chases his sisters to a tree. The tree speaks to the sisters, tells them to climb the tree, and then the tree rises into the air. The bear scores his claws into the tree and the seven sisters are borne into the sky. What two major natural phenomena are explained in this legend?
2. Why do you think the author chooses to include the Kiowa legend in his memoir?
3. The author describes major historical events for the Kiowas, including the tribe’s migration from western Montana to Oklahoma, their final Sun Dance, and their ultimate surrender to the U.S Cavalry at Fort Sill. Consider the dispersal of the Kiowa Sun Dance. Why do you think this action was so devastating for the Kiowas?
4. How does the narrator describe the environment of his grandmother’s house when he was a child? As an adult?
5. Given this contrast, what might the house symbolize?
6. What do you think is the most important insight that the author gains during his pilgrimage?

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| **Characteristics of the Story** | **“The World on the Turtle’s Back”** | **“Coyote and the Buffalo”** | **“The Way to Rainy Mountain”** |
| What lessons/ideas does the story teach? |  |  |  |
| What does the story explain about creation? |  |  |  |
| What cultural values does the story reveal? |  |  |  |
| What common motifs seen in Native American literature are evident in the story? |  |  |  |