

UNIT 6: ORAL TRADITION

"For countless centuries, First Nations knowledge, traditions, and cultures have been passed down from one generation to another in stories, and narratives, as well as through songs, dances and ceremonial artifacts. Before Europeans arrived in B.C., First Nations had oral cultures: their languages had no written form. The oral tradition was integrated into every facet of life and was the basis of the education system. The education system in an oral tradition is very precise and procedural: the information is taught to the next generation exactly as it was taught to the one before.

Stories are used because they are easier to remember: you learn by listening closely and remembering. The oral tradition passed on the spiritual beliefs of the people and the lineage of families. It recorded ownership of property and territory, political issues, legal proceedings and survival skills. The oral tradition also mapped the geography of an area, and it recorded history

OVERVIEW

The oral tradition includes oral narratives (or stories) that are used to teach skills, transmit cultural values and mores, convey news, record family and community histories, and explain our natural world. Along with narratives, the oral tradition also includes oratory (formal speech) and song. In recent history many oral narratives have been recorded in audio or visual recordings, which have then been transcribed into writing.

Primary Text

King, Thomas. *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*

Listen to the audio version of Chapter 1 " 'You'll Never Believe What Happened' Is Always a Great Way to Start" from *The Truth About Stories* from Thomas King's Massey lectures.

<http://www.cbc.ca/ideas/massey-archives/2003/11/07/massey-lectures-2003-the-truth-about-stories-a-native-narrative/>

RESPONSE QUESTIONS

"YOU'LL NEVER BELIEVE WHAT HAPPENED' IS ALWAYS A GREAT WAY TO START"
by Thomas King

1. What does King mean when he writes "The truth about stories is that that's all we are" (2)?
2. King introduces his mother by telling a story about her. What does the reader learn about the kind of person she is through this story? What does the reader learn about the world in which she lived?
3. King also tells the reader a story about his father. Through this story, what does the reader learn about the kind of person King's father was? What does the reader learn about the relationship between King and his father?
4. Explain the irony found in King's aunt's search for King's father.
5. What does King mean when he says "stories control our lives" (9)?

6. On page 17 King "interrupts" his story with a comment to the reader. What is the effect of this technique?

7. King writes "contained within creation stories are relationships that help to define the nature of the universe and how cultures understand the world in which they exist" (10). What does King mean by this? Do you agree or disagree? Explain.

8. What does King have to say about using different strategies for different stories (22-23)? Do you agree or disagree?

9. How would you answer the King's question "Do the stories we tell reflect the world as it truly is" (26)?