
Project Caribou

An Educator's Guide to Wild Caribou of North America

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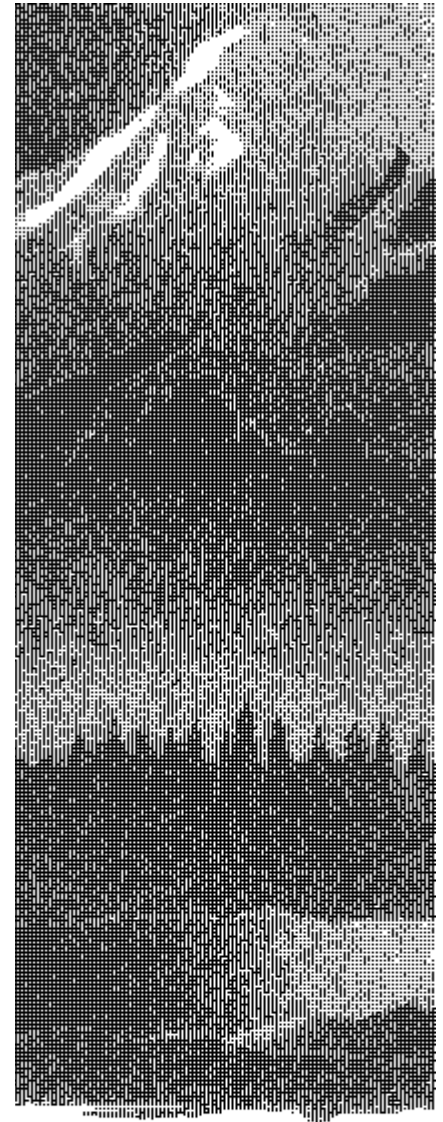
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Age

Grades K – 12

Subjects

Drama, Language Arts, Music

Skills

Listening, imagining, role-playing

Duration

Several periods

Setting

Indoors

Materials

- Copies of caribou stories (supplied in this guide and available elsewhere)
- Drama/audio aids such as drums
- Recorded drum music and caribou sounds
- Art supplies

First Peoples stories about caribou

Objectives

Students should be able to:

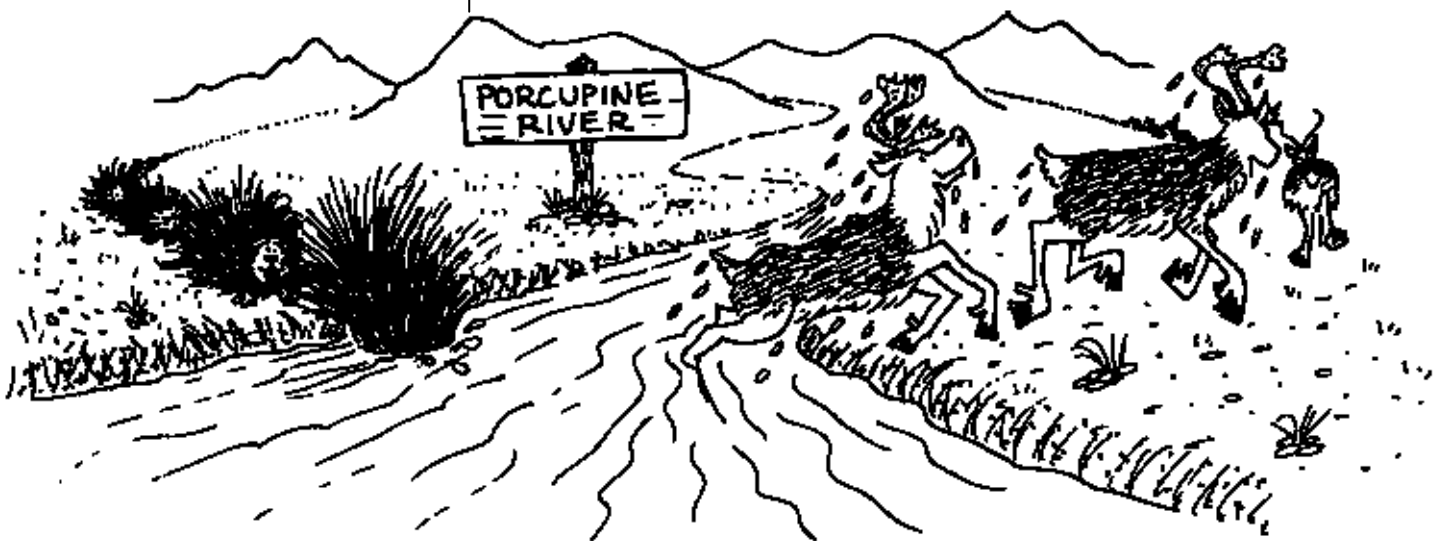
1. Understand the importance of caribou to Inuit and other aboriginal cultures as expressed through stories, music and visual art.
2. Study and understand one story about caribou.
3. Illustrate, dramatize or create their own legends about caribou.

Method

Students read or listen to a story about caribou and draw pictures and/or create a dramatization of the story.

Background

Caribou are important to many aboriginal cultures across Canada. They have always formed a basic part of the cultures of people living in the Arctic and subarctic. People such as the Vuntut Gwich'in of Old Crow (see Porcupine Caribou Herd case study) have depended upon caribou for thousands of years for food, clothing and a way of life that involves close ties with the northern land. Many other Dene and Inuit cultures have also depended upon caribou.



All human cultures create stories that express ideas about the world around them. They sing songs, tell tales and create dances and artwork that express how they feel about important natural creatures and places. Stories are passed on from generation to generation, sharing important information about culture and environment. Animals are depicted in stories and legends in various ways according to beliefs about them and their importance. In the north, many stories contain powerful figures based on animals such as the bear and the raven.

People also formed mythologies and legends and structured their cultures around the caribou. They travelled to known migration routes to intercept herds for hunting. They told stories about caribou. They taught their children to respect these animals. Traditional hunters believed that if they had the right thoughts about animals and treated the carcasses properly, they would always have enough to eat.

Procedure

1. Discuss the importance of caribou as portrayed in legends and stories from various cultures, using background information and other sources.
2. Read aloud or have students read a story about caribou. (Two sample stories are given at the end of this lesson plan.)
3. Separate the students into groups. Ask each group to dramatize the story. The students may wish to mime the story, use sounds, or add dialogue.
4. Have each group present its caribou skit to the class.
5. As a follow-up discussion, ask the students to think about what the story taught them about caribou behaviour and about the relationship between people of various cultures and caribou.

Variations

1. Have each group present a play using a different caribou legend.
2. Have students write their own stories and dramatize or illustrate them.

Extensions

1. Find Internet collections of First Nation tales about caribou.
2. Research other traditional stories about caribou and share them with the class or school.

Evaluation

Discuss with students how one First Nation culture views caribou and how this view is expressed in stories and other art forms.

Adaptations for different ages

Primary: Have students draw pictures based on what they hear in the story. Have each student explain his or her drawing to the class.

Senior: Have each student write his or her own legend about caribou. Students may also illustrate their stories.

The Man Who Became a Caribou

(From www.gov.nt.ca/kids/legend/inuitleg.htm)

An Inuit man was unhappy because he was a poor hunter.

One day he decided to leave home. He left all his weapons and began to walk inland. All the time, as he was walking, he thought, "I wish I were an animal, not a man. No one can be as unhappy as I am."

He saw some ptarmigan eating the leaves and berries and making little noises. He followed the ptarmigan all day hoping they would feel sorry for him and, perhaps by their magic, change him into a ptarmigan. At last he came to a village where, he knew, the ptarmigan lived when they changed themselves into people.

"I'm sorry," said the chief of the village, "You cannot stay with us. You will not like being chased by the big birds of the air and men with their bows and arrows."

So the hunter left the village and, seeing some arctic hares playing among the rocks, he thought, "That's the life I want. They seem very happy." He followed the two hares all day and at last, saw them enter a little house at the bottom of a hill. When he got inside the house there were two old people already there, but no hares.

"Why have you followed us?" asked the man.

"I want to be a hare," answered the hunter.

"I'm sorry," said the hare. "You cannot stay with us. You will not like being hunted by the big birds of the air and the men with their bows and arrows."

So the hunter left the little house and walked further inland until he saw a herd of caribou. All day he followed them until, in the evening, he came to a large village. Knowing that all the men were in the meeting house, the hunter went there, hoping that he could talk to the chief.

"Why were you following us all day?" asked the chief.

"I was not hunting you," said the man. "See, I have no weapons." Then the man told everyone of his wish to become a caribou and how he had talked to both the ptarmigan and the hares. They felt sorry for him so the chief allowed the hunter to join them.

When the hunter ran with the caribou herd he found it difficult. He could not run quickly. He found the food unpleasant to eat and he did not grow big like the other caribou. Also, he was always afraid because the men came with their bows and arrows, and he never knew whether they were near. Sometimes, there were traps set for caribou, sometimes holes in the ground for them to fall into, but the old hunter who had become a caribou was never caught. Because he was old, however, he decided he would like to see his family again, so he went to see the chief.

"It will be very hard," said the chief. "You are a clever caribou now. It will be hard for you to learn to be a man again."

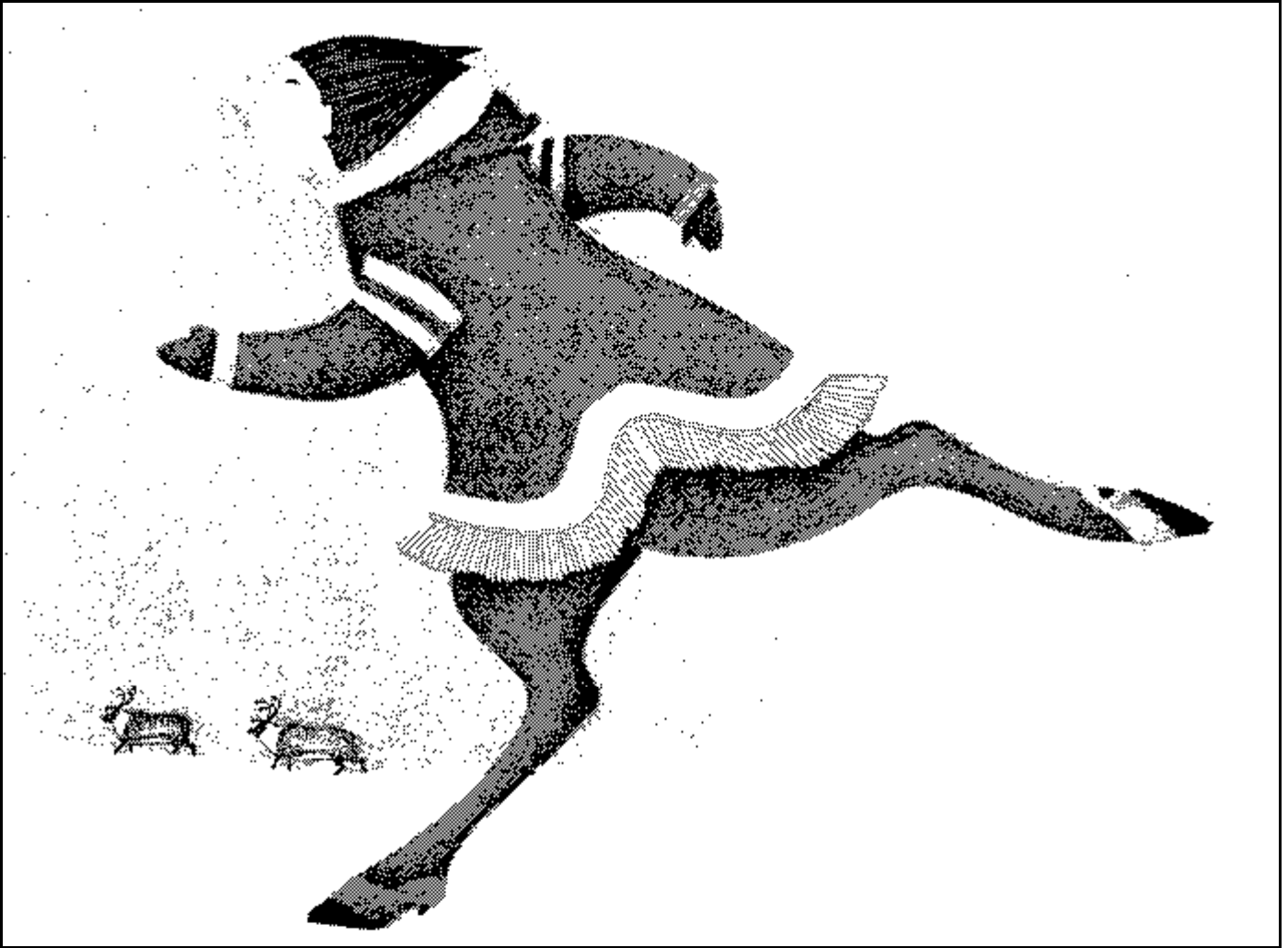
"I know," said the hunter, "but I must see my family before I die."

For many days the hunter who had become a caribou walked. When he was getting near his village he was so excited he forgot about the traps, and his legs were caught so that he could not move.

In the evening two boys came and they were very happy to find a caribou in their trap. Before they could shoot him the hunter spoke. The two boys were afraid.

"Don't shoot me," said the hunter, "Just take your knife and take off my skin."

The two boys did what they were told and were surprised to find a man inside the skin. They recognized him as their father who had left home many years before.



The Boy Who Found the Lost Tribe of Caribou

(Told by Donald Kaglik of Inuvik in *People and Caribou in the Northwest Territories*)

A group of Eskimos lived along the seashore. Now, there lived a poor boy whose parents had died, and he was living with his grandparents, who were very old. The ruler, knowing this, called the boy over to his place and asked him if he would do odd chores for him. He would always make sure the boy and his grandparents had something to eat. The boy was very glad and he ran home and told his grandfather and grandmother.

The years went by and he became a boy whom no one could beat in sports. One winter he was allowed to go out hunting, but he had to listen to all that was said in the meeting before the hunt. The hunt was very good. They had almost enough meat to last through the long winter.

The ruler then decided to teach the boy how to get a caribou with a knife, without the use of a bow and arrow. The boy was now very excited, for he was always anxious to learn of new ways to catch game.

They had to use a skin to cover themselves with and sneak up to the herd until they were close, and then use a knife to kill. It had to be placed in just the right spot.

When it was time for him to try this new way of hunting, he crept very close to some caribou. But just as he was ready to spring, the caribou spoke to him. "You must be using my brother's skin to cover yourself with. Why don't you put it on the right way and I will tell you what to do?" Was he going mad, or was the caribou really speaking to him?

The caribou continued, "Those of us who are to be leaders in the future have this gift of being able to lift the face-mask, and so we are able to speak on behalf of our people. Now close your eyes and slip the coat on, and I'll tell you more as we travel. Hurry, for we do not have much time." He did as he was told, and to his surprise, he was now a caribou.

"Follow me," the caribou said, and now they were all travelling at a great speed.

After a bit he saw that he was getting left behind, and now he stumbled. He didn't know how far they had gone when he heard a voice saying, "We are safe now, and you can have a rest. We have been going for a good half-a-day, and now I will tell you how we travel. When we are running at high speed, we never look back at the ground. This slows you down. Hold your head high and just look where the ground meets the sky, and run. This way you can see your direction and also anything that may be on the ground to trip you. I will give you a test run after you have had a little more rest."

They ran and soon the ground below him seemed to be a blur. Soon they turned and they were on their way back to the herd.

Once back he realized that he was hungry. As they fed on the sweet lichen, his friend told him, "You must never stray far from us until we have told you more of the dangers we face in life."

To his surprise, there was a lot he had to learn. First of all he was told never to go near anything if he was not sure what it was. He was told of wolves, and always to stay with the herd when in danger. Also, there would be times when they would be hunted by humans.

Now, the air was cool and there was snow on the ground. The next day they had a long journey to make, and the only time they would stop was in the evening to feed and bed down. To his surprise, there were a few browsing around and feeding. He looked around, but he could find no lichens.

His friend came over to him and said, "I will have to show you how to search for food in the winter. However, you must not waste any food when you eat. You must always eat all you find, for those who waste food don't always find food when the chips are down."

He took him aside and told him to dig in the snow and turn up the ground. To his surprise, there were berries and fresh plants. They were very delicious and he ate all he had found. Now his friend told

him, "Never dig for food till you are hungry. That is our way of life."

The winter was long and the days grew short, and there were times when he bedded down without anything to eat, for he would be too tired to eat. And then he would be up very early for another long day.

Soon the days were long and the sun shone very warm. Spring was here and now they were to watch even more carefully than before, for they were now passing a very dangerous country where a different tribe of Inuit lived. Water was beginning to show in some places.

One day they were attacked, and he was wounded in the neck by what he knew to be an arrow. To his own surprise, he was able to slip out of his coat. He was now back in human form. To his surprise, there was his hunting knife still in his belt.

Now as he lay where he had fallen, one of the hunters came running to his aid. He looked in awe and wonder as he saw he was from a different tribe. At last he spoke, and asked, "Where did you come from? For I know your tribe of people. From a long way back I have heard many stories and tales of them."

He told him what had happened, and as he spoke, he saw others come and they were listening as well. After applying some kind of spruce tree gum to his wound, they built a fire and had some roasted meat like he had never tasted before. At first he was a little slow in eating, for he remembered the friends he had made. Soon he was over it and he enjoyed his meal. He helped in preparing the meat to pack, for he was told that he was now one of the tribe.

