

Lesson 7: One Mountain, Many Cultures



Created by Montana State University Extended University
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<http://www.montana.edu/everest>

Overview:

Mount Everest rises above a land that is home to a diverse population of indigenous cultures. This region is home to people that have lived in harmony with their environment for centuries. Discover what it is like to live in a land of extremes below the highest mountain in the world and the significance of ceremonies and prayer flags. Explore this sacred mountain and sacred mountains near you.

Objectives:

Students will:

1. Describe the Sherpa's sacred ceremonies.
2. Compare and contrast relationships American Indians have with sacred places to the relationships Sherpas have with Mount Everest.
3. Read and compare Tibetan folktales with American Indian folktales.
4. Explain the symbolism of prayer flags.

Vocabulary:

American Indian: indigenous peoples of the Americas

animism: belief that nonhuman entities are spiritual beings

Buddhism: religion based on the teachings of Buddha; developed in India and later spread to China, Japan, Nepal, Tibet and parts of Southeast Asia

Christian: a person who adheres to Christianity, a religion based upon the life and teachings of Jesus Christ

folktale: a characteristically anonymous, timeless, and placeless tale circulated orally among a people that often includes fables, fairy tales, and legends

Hinduism: the dominant religion of India, it has no founder or known date of origin. The term "Hinduism" derives from the word "India" and refers to a wide variety of religious traditions and philosophies that developed in India over thousands of years. Most Hindus worship one or more deities, believe in reincarnation, and value the practice of meditation

indigenous: belonging to a certain place

prayer flags: colorful, rectangular pieces of cloth with sacred Buddhist prayers, blessings, symbols and mantras printed on them; hung to bless the surroundings and send messages of good will and fortune through the wind

sacred: worthy of great respect; venerable; dedicated to or set apart for the worship of a deity (god/goddess)

Sherpa: people who traveled from Tibet to Nepal and settled in the lower regions of Mount Everest. The word itself means 'people from the east'.

Background Information:

Since ancient times, cultures around the world have had sacred places. These places can be mountains, rivers, trees, or temples. Sacred places can be in the most remote corners of the earth or in your very own backyard. Sacred to one or to many, such places have been set aside and are worthy of great respect by all. Of the many places some people consider sacred, Mount Everest is one of them. Called 'Goddess of the Sky', or Sagarmatha by the Nepalese and 'Goddess Mother of the Earth' or Chomolungma by the Tibetans, Mount Everest is revered most by those who live in her shadow, the **Sherpa**.

The word *Sherpa* is often referred to as a native person from Nepal or Tibet that is hired for climbing expeditions to help carry supplies and equipment up the mountain, yet *Sherpa* literally means, 'people from the east.' Not all Nepalese or Tibetan people are Sherpas. Nepal has a population of 20 million with more than fifty distinct ethnic groups. There are only 20,000 Sherpas in Nepal. The Sherpa are a group of people who moved to the Everest region over 500 years ago and believe that the mountain is sacred and home to an enlightened goddess. Sherpa people are **Buddhists**, the primary religion of Tibet and Nepal. They have many gods, goddesses and demons, and believe that these deities inhabit the nearby mountains, caves and forests. Sherpas speak their own language and have their own customs and unique way of life. Though the people that visit Everest are of many different faiths, or none at all, they take part in the sacred rituals and ceremonies that the Sherpa perform for themselves, for the goddess of the mountain and for climbers on their way to her summit.

An important part of many sacred ceremonies for the people of Nepal and Tibet is the raising or 'planting' of Prayer Flags. Prayer flags date back over 2000 years and have roots in Tibet, Persia, China and India. The Tibetan words for 'prayer flag' are Dar Cho. Before Buddhism came to Tibet, prayer flags were used in healing ceremonies for the sick by the Bonpo Shamans (pre-Buddhist spiritual teachers). It was believed that when placed strategically around the ailing person's body, the flags would bring internal balance back into the body. Prayer flags were also raised outside to bring harmony to the environment. When Buddhism came to the area of Tibet and Nepal, the use of prayer flags was continued and elaborated. The Tibetans added their own sacred symbols, mantras, prayers and blessings to them and believe that these messages are carried by the wind to whoever is meant to receive them.

There are dozens of categories of prayer flags used today but the most common carry messages of good will and fortune, protection, health and longevity, peace and harmony. Each color in a string of prayer flags represents a basic element; yellow for earth, green for water, red for fire, white for air, and blue for space. Prayer flags can be hung indoors or out and the person or people who hang them are encouraged to hang them without thinking that they themselves will benefit, but with the intention that all beings everywhere will benefit.

Activity 1: Sacred Mountains, Sacred Ceremonies

Lesson Length: 20 minutes

Materials:

- *Map of Montana*
 - *Project this slideshow of some of Montana's sacred places to your or print hard copies from it to pass around (or find your own images of your home state's sacred places)*
http://www.montana.edu/everest/multimedia/index.htm#sacred_places
 - *Book: The Way To Make Perfect Mountains; by Byrd Baylor (optional)*
 - *Computer with Internet access and projection system (optional)*
 - *Book: Sacred Mountain Everest by Christine Taylor-Butler (optional)*
1. *Optional: Read the book 'The Way To Make Perfect Mountains' by Byrd Baylor to your class.*
 2. Discuss the following questions with your students:
 - a. What does the word 'sacred' mean? Take many responses then share the definitions from this lesson.
 - b. What might make a mountain sacred? (It's size, shape, overall beauty, history, wild weather, color, etc.)
 - c. Why do you think that the Sherpa people believe that Mount Everest is sacred? (Their Buddhist religion believes that gods, goddesses and demons live in the mountains surrounding them. They believe that they need to honor them and appease them in order to be protected from harm, have good harvests, and have good health, luck and spirituality; i.e. through rituals and ceremonies)
 3. Share with your students that there is a very sacred ceremony performed before Mount Everest can be climbed by any group of people accompanied by a **Sherpa**. It is called a **Puja Ceremony**.
 4. Explain to your students that the Sherpa people are the native people living in the Mount Everest region and describe the multiple definitions others have for 'Sherpa'. Tell your students that Sherpa people will not climb Mount Everest without participating in the Puja. In the Puja Ceremony, the Sherpa ask for permission from the gods to climb the mountain and for safety and protection while doing so. Many rituals are performed throughout the ceremony and the entire climbing team participates.
 5. Watch a real Puja Ceremony (seven minutes in length) with your students.
<http://youtu.be/FjA5wfDAY4A>
 6. Ask your students when they might perform a ceremony similar to a Puja. Brainstorm with students and accept various answers. Responses might include: before they take a family trip in the car or on a plane, before they go on a hike, or before they visit a sacred mountain near their home. Some of your students might say a prayer or wear a 'lucky charm' for events like these.
 7. Tell your students that there are many mountains in Montana (or places near where you live) that are considered sacred by American Indians. On a classroom map, locate these sacred mountains and explain to your students who considers these mountains sacred and why.

- a. **The Crazy Mountains and Crazy Peak (Southwest Montana):** Sacred to the Crow Indians. It is here that the Crow went to fast and seek visions. They believed the Crazy Mountains were a place to be feared and a place where one was 'tested' during their fasts. The Crow still use the Crazies for rituals such as fasting and vision questing today.
 - b. **Pryor Mountains (Crow Reservation):** Sacred to the Crow Indians. The Crow called the Pryor Mountains the Arrow Mountains. They believed that they should not be entered, but they are also where Plenty Coups, a Crow chief, received his greatest visions and prophecies.
 - c. **Chief Mountain (Glacier National Park region):** Sacred to the Blackfoot Indians, Chief Mountain lies within the Rocky Mountains, which they believed to be the 'Backbone of the World". It was a place where rituals and ceremonies were performed.
8. Have your students look at the images of the above mountains (or places near where you live). Discuss the following questions:
- a. Have any of you visited these sacred places?
 - b. What do you notice when looking at the pictures of these mountains?
 - c. Is there a feeling of awe or do these places look magical or beautiful or special?
 - d. Do you think these places are worth protecting? Who should take care of them?

Activity 2: Sacred Stories

Length: 20 minutes

Materials:

- *Downloaded copies of American Indian and Tibetan Folktales*
 - *Colored pencils, crayons or markers*
 - *Drawing paper*
1. Explain to your students that they are going to read two stories. One will be a Tibetan folktale and one will be of American Indian origin (Crow, Blackfoot, or another of your choice).
 2. Before students read the stories, tell them that they are going to be looking for similarities and differences and for the following elements of the two stories: **characters**, **purpose**, **problem** or **conflict**, **magic**, **solution**, and **moral** of the story.
 3. Read 'Creation' from the Tibetan tales (or another one of your choosing)
<http://www.crosby-lundin.com/tibet/culture/folktales/>
 4. Read 'Old Man Coyote Creates The World' from the Crow Folktale link below (or another tale of your choosing).
<http://www.native-languages.org/crow-legends.htm>
 5. Discuss with your students how the two stories are the same and different. (You may choose to list similarities and differences on the board, chart paper or as a Venn diagram.)
 6. Explain to your students that folktales are characteristically anonymous, timeless, and placeless tales that circulate orally among a people. All cultures, not just the Tibetan and American Indian cultures have folktales.

7. *Optional: If you have children from another culture in your class, ask them if they know stories or folktales from their culture.*
8. *Optional: Illustrate the two stories and share them with a younger class.*

Tibetan Folktales:

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/asia/tft/index.htm>

<http://www.crosby-lundin.com/tibet/culture/folktales/>

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/asia/tft/index.htm>

American Indian stories:

http://worldoftales.com/Native_American_folktales.html

Crow legends: (Montana):

<http://www.native-languages.org/crow-legends.htm>

Blackfeet legends (Montana):

<http://www.native-languages.org/blackfoot-legends.htm>

Chippewa Cree Why Stories (Montana)

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/nam/iwhys.htm>

Activity 3: Prayer Flags

Lesson Length: 20 minutes

Materials:

- *Construction paper cut into 6"x7" rectangles in the following colors only: yellow, green, red, white and blue*
- *Thin black markers*
- *String*
- *Glue or staplers*

1. Tell students that the vibrantly colored flags they saw in the Puja Ceremony are called Prayer Flags. They are hung to send messages of peace, harmony, compassion, wisdom and goodwill to all beings. Their colors represent the basic elements and are blue for space, white for air, red for fire, green for water and yellow for earth. The flags must be strung in that order as well, from left to right.
2. Ask your students to think about what messages they would like to send to the Everest Education Expedition team and other messages they would like to send out into the world.
3. Provide a pre-cut piece of construction paper to each student.
4. Have your students fill their entire 'flag' with messages and with symbols of their choosing. The common animal symbols on the Tibetan Prayer Flags are the dragon, garuda (a mythical birdlike creature), tiger and snow lion.
5. When your students are finished, fold the top inch of each 'flag' over a long piece of string and staple each square to secure it to the string. Hang the flags in your classroom or another place of your choosing.

Tying it All Together:

Use the following ongoing activities to check for student understanding of each lesson's concepts. Grade for completion, management of data collection, effort and participation throughout unit.

1. **“Mount Everest and Me” Worksheet**

http://www.montana.edu/everest/resources/worksheets/Worksheet_EverestandMe.pdf

This worksheet will be an ongoing activity for your students. In a table format, the “Mount Everest and Me” Worksheet compares Mount Everest, Granite Peak (the highest peak in Montana), and your hometown. Using comparisons, the worksheet reinforces the lesson's content while helping students put this knowledge into perspective by comparing their home state and hometown. Have your students fill in the correlating rows of the table after completing each lesson. This can be completed as a class or individually.

2. **Everest Education Expedition Vocabulary Crossword Puzzle**

http://www.montana.edu/everest/resources/worksheets/Worksheet_Lesson7Crossword.pdf

This crossword puzzle reinforces vocabulary presented in each lesson. Have your students fill in the correlating vocabulary words for each lesson's puzzle after each lesson.

Taking it Further/Assessment:

Write a folktale:

Have your class write and illustrate a folktale or legend including characters, purpose, problem, magic, solution and moral. Have your students share their stories with younger students.

Listen to a Story

Listen to one of Byrd Baylor's poems from her book *The Way to Make Perfect Mountains: Native American Legends of Sacred Mountains*.

<http://youtu.be/Vn302dn4oMI>

Book List

Goble, Paul; Goble, Paul, illus. *Buffalo Woman*. New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company; 1984. 28 pages. (elementary).

This Plains legend explains how buffalo and people are related, and the importance of the buffalo as a source of life. A young hunter marries a female buffalo in the form of a woman. When his people reject her, she returns to the Buffalo Nation with their son. The hunter follows but must pass tests to become a member of the Buffalo People. The author explains that telling these stories "had power to strengthen the bond with herds, and to encourage the herds to continue to give themselves so that the people could live." Beautifully illustrated.

Goble, Paul; Goble, Paul, illus. *Crow Chief*. New York, NY: Orchard Books; 1992. 27 pages. (elementary)

Falling Star, the Savior, shows Plains Indian hunters how to outwit a crow, whose loud calls frightened the buffalo away, leaving the people hungry. This charming and beautifully illustrated Plains legend explains how crow's feathers turned from white to black as a reminder from the Creator to share and live together like relatives. Sources

for the story are cited and an author's note describes buffalo hunting prior to the introduction of the horse.

Goble, Paul; Goble, Paul, illus. *The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses*. New York, NY: Bradbury Press; 1978. 27 pages. (lower elementary)

This is a story of a Plains Indian girl who joins a band of wild horses and eventually, the story implies, becomes a horse herself. Includes full-color illustrations on each page of this engaging story.

Goble, Paul; Goble, Paul, illus. *Love Flute*. New York, NY: Bradbury Press; 1992. 28 pages. (lower/upper elementary).

This charming book describes the history and use of the traditional courting flute played by Indian suitors (no tribe indicated) to attract young women. An example of the power of the flute is illustrated by the story of a shy young man, who nevertheless attracts the girl of his fancy by playing alluring melodies on his love flute. Includes beautiful full-color, full-page illustrations.

Goble, Paul; Goble, Paul, illus. *The Lost Children: The Boys Who Were Neglected*. New York, NY: Bradbury Press; 1993. 29 pages. (lower/upper elementary).

The Pleiades (the Bunched Stars) are traditionally believed by the Blackfoot to have been six neglected children who longed to live in the Sky World. This book retells the sacred story explaining the origin of these stars, sometimes called the Lost Children. The author's note explains that this particular retelling "follows the tone of the oldest versions" of the story, and references are included. The author also explains the inspiration and references for the tipi illustrations found in the book. The text is accompanied by intricate, full-color, full-page illustrations.

Goble, Paul; Goble, Paul, illus. *Star Boy*. New York, NY: Aladdin Books (Macmillan); 1983. 28 pages. (lower elementary).

This retelling of a Blackfoot legend describes how Star Boy obtained the secret knowledge of the Sun Dance for his people. The author provides his source for the legend and explains the significance of the Blackfoot painted tipi symbols used in the illustrations. A brief introductory note provides information on traditional Blackfoot lifeways. The final page contains quotations from Black Elk and Edgar Red Cloud in praise of the sun. Includes attractive, full-color illustrations.

Grinnell, George Bird. *Blackfeet Indian Stories*. Old Saybrook, CT: Applewood Books/The Globe Pequot Press; 1993. 214 pages. (secondary).

This facsimile edition of Grinnell's classic collection of Blackfeet stories, first published in 1913, includes legends of the Buffalo Stone, Cold Maker's Medicine, the Wolf Man, and others. A final section describes the traditional lifeways of the Blackfeet.

Hungry Wolf, Beverly (Blackfoot). *The Ways of My Grandmothers*. New York, NY: Quill; 1982. 256 pages. (secondary).

This volume of stories was collected from female friends and relatives of the author, a Blackfoot raised on the Blood Indian Reserve in Canada. Included in this interesting collection on women of the Blackfoot Nation are traditional stories as well as information on tribal history, personal histories, and traditional activities such as beading, sewing, tanning, quilling, and cooking. Illustrated with photographs from the author's family album, as well as archival photographs.

San Souci, Robert; San Souci, Daniel, illus.

The Legend of Scarface: A Blackfeet Indian Tale. Garden City, NY: Doubleday; 1987. 40 pages. (lower elementary)

In this retelling of a Blackfeet legend, a young man travels to the land of the Sun to ask for the Sun's daughter in marriage. The story stresses the values of fortitude in the face of adversity and the rewards for kindness and honesty. Includes attractive, full-color illustrations.

Goble, Paul; Goble, Paul, illus. *The Great Race.* Reprint of 1985 ed. New York, NY: Aladdin Books; 1991. 28 pages. (elementary) *.

This is a retelling of a Sioux and Cheyenne legend about long ago when buffalo ate people. The Creator saw how the people suffered, and with the help of a crow, brought all living things together for a race between the four-legged and the two-legged animals to determine who would win power over all the animals. Miraculously, Magpie, the slowest of all birds, won the race for the two-legged animals. Sources are cited for this legend, which includes appealing full-color illustrations.