



CHILCOTIN
STUDIES;

ATHABASKAN
LEGENDS.



ATHABASKAN LEGENDS:

Chilcotin Studies: Legends (Old Stories).

Many legends explain how something in nature came to be the way it is. We sometimes call these legends "nature legends". Nature legends might explain why fawns have white spots, or why some trees lose their leaves in winter.

Some legends explain how a certain group of people (like a band or a tribe) arrived at the place they now live. We sometimes call these legends "origin legends". Some origin legends explain how a tribe came down from the stars, or how some famous ancestor captured the sun and gave his people daylight.

We are going to read 3 Chilcotin legends, and one Carrier legend. The first Chilcotin legend, "Raven Brings Daylight To The People", explains why there is night and day. The second Chilcotin legend explains why rabbits have black spots on their feet, why wood burns and how fire can be made. The third explains why fish are slimy. All 3 Chilcotin legends have a trickster in them. A trickster is a person, animal or supernatural creature who plays tricks on others.

The Carrier legend, "The Orphan Boy Who Became A Hero", explains several things. Firstly, it explains why it is very important for young people to be properly trained. It also explains about the kinds of food eaten by the Carrier people. This legend also looks at the importance of telling the truth, and explains how the main character (a boy with no parents) becomes an important man in the tribe.

CHILCOTIN LEGEND # 1.

Raven Brings Daylight to the People

A long time ago there was no daylight. Darkness covered everything. The only person in the world who had any light was a man who was mean and kept it all to himself in a box.

This, of course, made most people unhappy as it was so dull to live in a world without any light.

One day Raven thought of a trick he could play to get the light.

The man who kept the light had a wife and one day as she was collecting some water to drink, Raven turned himself into a fir needle and dropped into the water.

When the woman drank the water, she swallowed the needle and in a few months gave birth to a baby boy.

This was all clever trickery because the baby was really Raven in disguise.

CHILCOTIN LEGEND # 1.

As he grew older Raven started to cry for the box with daylight in it. The crying made the man so tired that one day he gave Raven the box. "There," he said, "now be quiet."

Oh, how happy Raven was. He rolled around the floor clasping the box and singing, while the man went on with his work, not knowing that Raven was about to play his final trick.

Very carefully, Raven pushed the box so that it rolled out of the door. Then, turning himself back into a bird, he flew into the sky, while the man watched in dismay.

What a shock it was to the man when he saw his little boy was really a bird. And an even bigger shock to lose the daylight!

"But why should he have it?" yelled Raven as he flew through the air. "It belongs to everybody."

On and on he flew until he became very hungry. Then he saw a woman picking berries and flew up to her saying, "Please give me some berries, I am very hungry."

"No," said the woman.

"If you will give me some berries, I will give you daylight."

"I do not believe you. Show me first."

So Raven opened the box a little way and slowly everything grew lighter. "Here, take the berries," cried the woman who could not believe her eyes. She could hardly keep her eyes open in fact, for they were unaccustomed to light. News travelled fast and soon other women came with great excitement to see the light, bringing berries with them.

Finally Raven broke the box, and everywhere there was bright shining light.

However, daylight all the time, without any night at all, can be tiring too. Raven said to the light: "Half the time you are to be dark and half the time light."

And this is the reason, so they say, that first it is night, and then it is day.

ATHAPASKAN - CHILCOTIN

These legends are borrowed from an excellent book that is available from the Co-ordinator of Indian Education (Alan Haiq-Brown), School District #27 Admin. Offices, Williams Lake, B.C., or from the publisher. Indian Tales Of The Northwest. Patricia M. Ellis, Editor (Victoria: CommCept Publishing Ltd., 1976) pages 27-42. (This very useful book comes with a teacher's guide).

CHILCOTIN LEGEND # 2.

Raven Brings Fire to the People

A long time ago there was no fire in the world and the people knew they were missing something important.

Raven knew of a man who kept fire in his house, and decided to try and get it. He gathered his friends and brothers together and said quietly, "Now listen carefully, I have a plan to obtain fire."

When they entered the house of the Fire-Man they saw a fire burning, and immediately started to dance very fast. When he thought the Fire-Man wasn't looking, Raven crept closer to the fire. He had tied shavings of wood in his hair and he wanted to set them alight. But the Fire-Man was no fool and he watched Raven very closely.

Raven was not one to give up easily, so he waited and watched for his chance.

The chance came two days later when everybody was so tired from dancing they had collapsed on the floor. Fire-Man was also tired and went to sleep. Without wasting any time Raven dipped his head into the fire and rushed out of the house.

And what a stir he caused as he ran around the country starting fires.

"Look, there goes Raven," shouted the people, "and he has given us fire."

When Fire-Man woke up he became very upset and tried to pick up all the fires which Raven had started. But it was hopeless. Raven had spread them far and wide.

Because fire had never been seen before, nobody knew how to handle it and there were a few nasty accidents before it was controlled. When the woods began to burn the animals started to run, and fortunately they all got away, all, that is, except Rabbit, whose feet got caught in the fire. Although this happened a long time ago, rabbits still have black spots on the soles of their feet.

It is said that after the trees had been alight, the fire stayed in the wood and this is the reason why wood burns today, and why you can get fire by rubbing two sticks together.

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CHILCOTIN LEGEND # 3.



Raven and the Salmon

Winter was coming and Raven thought he had better store some food. "That way, I can sit inside and not have to go out into the cold for food," he said to himself. "I will go salmon fishing for they are easy to catch and there are plenty of them."

After fishing for some time, he had a great catch of salmon. He took them up to dry. Bored after all this, he wanted to dance. So he found some large roots and turned them into men. Then they all had great fun dancing.

As Raven danced he noticed one of the salmon banging its head against the roof. "Oh foolish salmon," said Raven and tearing it down he threw it outside.

Raven went on dancing, and quickly forgot about the salmon.

The salmon, which had hit the ground with a bump, suddenly came to life. And as it came to life, so did all the other salmon. Raven was shocked.

Try as they might Raven and his men could not catch them for they were too slippery with grease. One by one they slipped into the water and swam away. All that could be heard were sounds rather like, "Goodbye Raven, Goodbye Raven," and all that could be seen were faint ripples and bubbles on the water.

Suddenly a great snowstorm blew up and Raven had to stay indoors. His house was almost covered in snow and as there was no food inside, he was very hungry.

He was lying down, feeling very weak, when a small bird appeared in the window. Raven couldn't see it very well, as it was mostly hidden by the snowdrift, but he could hear it.

"Hello Raven," it said, "Why do you stay indoors all the time? You should come out."

Raven looked at the bird, whose mouth was stuffed with berries, and slowly he started to dig through the snow. It was hard work for he was very weak, but he didn't have to dig very far.

"Oh no," cried Raven.

Outside, the country was green and fresh, and everywhere berries were hanging in thick clumps on trees and bushes.

How silly Raven felt! He had been starving to death for nothing.