

# FIRST VOICES

Digital storytelling creating next-level opportunities for Indigenous youth

## Resource for Educators



### First Voices Northern Cheyenne Stories

#### First Voices Logo Screenshot Tsèhésenèstsestotse (The Big Dipper) and The Great Race

#### Lesson Overview

Students will view two Northern Cheyenne ancestral stories. Tsèhésenèstsestotse (The Big Dipper) is narrated by two Northern Cheyenne Elders with elements of music, visual art, choreography and dance. The Great Race is depicted by Lame Deer High School students in their own words using the same elements.

Students will discuss the two stories and then plot a story that is of importance to their lives. Depending on context, these may be Indigenous or non-Indigenous stories, from students' own background and/or experience, or beyond.

#### Subjects:

- Native American studies, specifically Northern Cheyenne culture and language in Montana.
- Storytelling, which can be integrated into history, language arts, visual arts, music composition and sound design, choreography, dance, and theater.

**Duration**

Minimum of 60 minutes in one class. Can be extended to 2-3 class periods of 45 – 60 minutes each or longer.

Each story is roughly 9 minutes. Allow roughly 20 minutes for viewing the stories plus instruction and student interpretation.

**Grade Levels**

High School and college students (can be adapted for other grade levels)

**Indigenous Cultures Featured**

Northern Cheyenne Tribe of Montana

**First Voices Stories Featured**

Tsèhésenèstsestotse - The Big Dipper

The Great Race

**Student Learning Objectives**

- Students will gain increased knowledge of the culture of the Northern Cheyenne tribe
  - Appreciation and understanding of the cultural and ancestral relevance of The Big Dipper and The Great Race stories to Northern Cheyenne culture
  - Increased awareness of Indigenous language (Northern Cheyenne) and its continued use and relevance in the present day
- Students will understand an ancestral Northern Cheyenne story told in collaboration with Blackfeet, Chippewa Cree, and non-Native artists.
- Students will see the relevance of an ancestral Indigenous story in the current moment in contemporary life.
- Students will understand an ancestral Indigenous (Northern Cheyenne) story through the lens of their own experience.
- Students will increase their understanding of strategies for storytelling (use of written and spoken language, music, performance, movement, visual art, filmmaking, etc.).

**Essential Understandings (Montana Indian Education for All)****Essential Understanding 1**

There is great diversity among the twelve sovereign tribes of Montana in their languages, cultures, histories, and governments. Each tribe has a distinct and unique cultural heritage that contributes to modern Montana.

**Essential Understanding 3**

The ideologies of Native traditional beliefs and spirituality persist into modern day life as tribal cultures, traditions, and languages are still practiced by many American Indian people and are incorporated into how tribes govern and manage their affairs. Additionally, each tribe has its own oral histories, which are as valid as written histories. These histories pre-date the “discovery” of North America.

## Activities

### Preparation and Equipment Needed

Based on the number of students, the stories will be displayed on a large screen or projected. All students should be able to see the stories well and hear the sound clearly. Confirm internet connection to stream the story from First Voices website (<https://www.threshdance.org/fv-current-and-future>). If internet connectivity is an issue, contact First Voices ([info@threshdance.org](mailto:info@threshdance.org)) to request a downloadable copy.

### Introduction

Questions Before Viewing:

- What do you [students] know about the Northern Cheyenne tribe? What would you like to share? (If the group is very familiar with Northern Cheyenne culture, ask if anyone knows the language?) If group is not familiar with Northern Cheyenne culture, ask students what they know about Native culture in their area or more broadly.
- What do you know about the history of the Northern Cheyenne tribe? What stories do you know about Northern Cheyenne people or culture today?
- These questions, even if students do not have knowledge in this area, will be an indicator of students' understandings and attitudes before watching the stories.

Share that the focus will be to watch two Northern Cheyenne ancestral stories.

- Does anyone have any stories about their own culture that are meaningful to them that they would like to share? Any stories about their family or friends that are important to them? Any other types of stories (books, movies, etc.)
- This will get students thinking of stories they know as a point of comparison with the Northern Cheyenne stories.

### Viewing the Ancestral Stories

There are two options. Educators may screen both stories and ask students to compare them or consider them together. Each story could also be screened and studied separately.

#### Discussion Questions after Viewing Stories

Give the students a few moments after viewing. See if they are speaking among themselves, seem eager to share, or are quietly considering the stories. Utilize Visual Thinking Strategies questions to begin a discussion on each story with students.

[Tsèhésenèstsestotse \(The Big Dipper\) \(9 minutes 14 seconds\)](https://youtu.be/hzS4O34D9ko)

<https://youtu.be/hzS4O34D9ko>

- What did you think was going on in The Big Dipper story?
- What did you see or hear that makes you say that?
- What else did you notice from the story?
  
- Why do you think this story was told in the Northern Cheyenne language?
- Why subtitle it in English? Who benefits from the subtitling?

- If educational setting or students are focused on language, you can also show this behind-the-scenes video, “Difference Between Speaking Cheyenne and English” With Ruthie Shoulder Blade and Alaina Buffalo Spirit  
<https://vimeo.com/508314491>
- Who was someone in the video who stood out to you as a storyteller? Why?
- What was one way that the story was told that stood out to you? Why?

#### The Great Race (8 minutes 50 seconds)

<https://youtu.be/Olu9UvSUUc8>

- What did you think was going on in The Great Race story?
- What did you see or hear that makes you say that?
- What else did you notice from the story?
- What was different about hearing the story from high school students after hearing elders tell a story?

#### Tsèhésenèstsestotse (The Big Dipper) & The Great Race

- What did you learn about Northern Cheyenne culture from these stories?

Based on students’ responses, share information about Northern Cheyenne culture and the tribe from the resources listed below. Did students’ observations align with this information? This can be another topic for discussion.

#### **Student Activity**

Students will tell their own story based on their lives, or stories they have been told, using the media best suited for the class. This could be oral storytelling, written story, script, storyboard, song, visual art, performance, or a multimedia story (like what was just seen). In a less structured environment, ask students *how* they would like to tell their stories (music, film, etc.). Students can work alone or collaboratively.

Ask students to choose three storytelling strategies they observed that were used to tell the Big Dipper or Great Race stories. What part of the story did those elements convey?

Students will create their own story.

If students are comfortable, ask them to discuss or perform their story. Ask them to point out the elements influenced by the Northern Cheyenne digital stories.

#### **Conclusion**

Focus on storytelling and how passing down stories can create oral histories and sustain cultural knowledge. Discuss similarities and differences between telling their own stories and the Northern Cheyenne digital stories.

## Assessment

In class discussion, did students discuss elements of the story that were connected to Northern Cheyenne culture?

Did students make observations about the stories being told in the present-day or having connections to world events today or in their own lives?

Did students incorporate elements of storytelling in the two digital stories into their own story?

Are students interested or in need of more resources on Northern Cheyenne culture or Indigenous ways of telling stories? See below for more resources to continue the learning.

### Artists Who Created Stories:

#### Tsèhésenèstsestotse (The Big Dipper)

- Ruthie Shoulder Blade, Northern Cheyenne Elder, Northern Cheyenne storyteller/narrator
- Alaina Buffalo Spirit, Northern Cheyenne Elder, Northern Cheyenne storyteller/narrator
- Sammy Jo Bird, Blackfeet, visual artist
- Chontay Standing Rock, Chippewa Cree tribes, sound designer and composer
- Preeti Vasudevan, Artistic Director, Thresh, First Voices choreographer and cultural storyteller

#### The Great Race

- Lame Deer High School students, Northern Cheyenne storytellers, performers, and visual artists (*Names published or kept confidential?*) (*Were all students Northern Cheyenne?*)
- Susan Wolfe, Lame Deer High School visual arts teacher
- Seidel Standing Elk, Northern Cheyenne, Lame Deer High School Northern Cheyenne culture teacher
- Pete Tolton, filmmaker, Billings Open Studio
- Tami Haaland, poet, Montana State University Dean of the School of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences
- Ben Pease, Apsáalooke (Crow) and Northern Cheyenne, visual artist
- John Roberts, Department Chair & Associate Professor, Low Brass)
- Preeti Vasudevan, Artistic Director, Thresh, First Voices choreographer and cultural storyteller
- Joseph R. McGeshick, Assiniboine, Sioux, and Chippewa Cree, poet, educator, and Native American Studies Adjunct Professor, Fort Peck Community College

## **Resources on Northern Cheyenne Stories**

First Voices: Why Is the Tsèhésenèstsestotse Story Meaningful to the Northern Cheyenne People? Ruthie Shoulder Blade and Alaina Buffalo Spirit

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HmlR2YxSD10>

First Voices: Why Story Telling is Important. Ruthie Shoulder Blade and Alaina Buffalo Spirit

<https://vimeo.com/508314602>

## **Northern Cheyenne Tribe**

Indian Nations: Northern Cheyenne Video, Montana Office of Tourism

[https://vimeo.com/74944680?embedded=true&source=vimeo\\_logo&owner=1891228](https://vimeo.com/74944680?embedded=true&source=vimeo_logo&owner=1891228)

Native Knowledge 360: Homelands: Northern Cheyenne

<https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/plains-belonging-homelands/northern-cheyenne.cshtml>

## **Additional Resources**

Montana OPI Indian Education for All Website

<https://opi.mt.gov/Educators/Teaching-Learning/Indian-Education-for-All>

Map of Tribal Territories in Montana

<https://www.montana.edu/iefa/introductiontomtribalnations/tribalterritories.html>

Montana Indians: Their History and Location

<https://opi.mt.gov/Portals/182/Page%20Files/Indian%20Education/Indian%20Education%20101/Montana%20Indians%20Their%20History%20and%20Location.pdf>

## **Resources For Non-Native Educators**

What is the correct terminology: American Indian, Indian, Native American, Indigenous, or Native?

<https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/faq/did-you-know#category-1>

Evaluating American Indian Materials and Resources for the Classroom

<https://opi.mt.gov/Portals/182/Page%20Files/Indian%20Education/Indian%20Education%20101/Evaluating%20AI%20Materials%20and%20Resources%20for%20the%20Classroom.pdf?ver=2019-04-22-155858-340>