

### **Cultural Context** **"The Osage Creation Account"**

emphasizes the relationship between nature and people. The Osage, who called themselves the "Children of the Middle Waters," migrated from the Atlantic coast to the woodlands of present-day Missouri and the Great Plains beyond. In religious ceremonies, Osage members were chosen to represent the sky, dry land, or water. The creation myth is a piece of traditional literature that explores the interweaving of these elements and their role in the origin of the universe.

**"The Navajo Creation Myth"** is another traditional story that reflects the interdependence between Native Americans and their environment. In the Navajo religion, there are four worlds, with our current world being the fourth "Glittering World." At each earlier level, the beings were combinations of gods and animals before becoming more human-like, but in each world, there was conflict, requiring removal to a higher world. In the excerpt here, Begochiddy, the Great God, is helping the people move from the third world to the fourth.



**Reader's Context** Think back to your earliest childhood memories of the natural world. What explanations did you create to explain natural occurrences such as rainbows and the changing phases of the moon?



***Tatanka—The Story of the Bison***, c. 2003. Peggy Detmer.  
This sculpture is located near Deadwood, South Dakota.

# THE Osage Creation Account

Way beyond, a part of the Wazha'zhe<sup>1</sup> lived in the sky. They desired to know their origin, the source from which they came into existence. They went to the sun. He told them that they were his children. Then they wandered still farther and came to the moon. She told them that she gave birth to them, and that the sun was their father. She told them that they must leave their present abode and go down to the earth and dwell there. They came to the earth, but found it covered with water. They could not return to the place they had left, so they wept, but no answer came to them from anywhere. They floated about in the air, seeking in every direction for help from some god; but they found none. The animals were with them, and of all these the elk was the finest and most stately, and inspired all the creatures with confidence; so they appealed to the elk for help. He dropped into the water and began to sink. Then he called to the winds, and the winds came from all quarters and blew until the waters went upward as in a mist.

At first rocks only were exposed, and the people traveled on the rocky places that produced no plants, and there was nothing to eat. Then the waters began to go down until the soft earth was exposed. When this happened,



**Hunting Elk**, c. 1837. Alfred Jacob Miller.  
Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming.  
(See detail on page 10.)

the elk in his joy rolled over and over on the soft earth, and all his loose hairs clung to the soil. The hairs grew, and from them sprang beans, corns, potatoes, and wild turnips, and then all the grasses and trees. ❖

1. **Wazha'zhe**. One of the names by which the Osage were known

**abode** (ə bōd') *n.*, where one lives or stays; home



Why do people want "to know their origin, the source from which they came into existence"? What do you know about your origin?

# The Navajo Creation Myth

**B**egochiddy went back to the Lukatso, bamboo, and found the people much excited, and they were very glad to see Begochiddy, and when he came back to them they called him Sechai (Grandfather). He told them that he had met many people above, and that the world was good. They were very glad to hear that, and then Begochiddy sent Badger up to see the world. When he reached the hole, he tried to jump onto the crust but he broke through, and that is the reason why his paws are black to this day.

Begochiddy asked how the wet earth could be dried, and they sent up to the fourth world white thunder (Iknee-lakai) from the white mountain, also white cyclone (Niholtso-lakai) and white hail (N'dlohe-lakai), and black, blue and yellow cyclones. When the hail and thunder and cyclones hit the petrified wood and

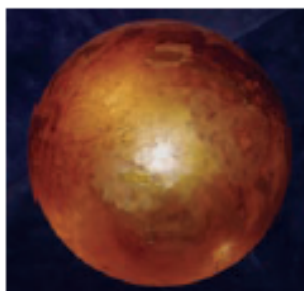
the mud columns which stuck up out of the mud, they were broken into pieces. Then the cyclones blew until they had dried the mud. And they sent five dust-devils, Nastoldisse, to trim up the rock pillars and make holes in them. After that five little whirlwinds were sent up, and they spread the tiny stones about smoothly.

Then the storms all went below to the third world from which they came, and the Lukatso began to grow again. And the people came up into this world led by the ants, with the turkey people coming last. Begochiddy pulled the bamboo up by the tassel on top and then threw the tassel back into the hole, which is why Lukatso, the bamboo, has no tassel now. This fourth world they called Hahjeenah. ♦

**pet • ri • fied** (pe' trə fīd) *adj.*, turned to stone



What does your culture or religion teach you to expect from life? Do you believe the past dictates the future? What is and is not under your control?



## Analyze Literature

### Myth and Chronological Order

These two creation myths start in distinctly opposite places: one in the sky, and the other in worlds below. What does this origin suggest about how each culture views its connection to the natural world? Use examples to support your answer.

Compare the lists you compiled of the chronological order of events that occur in the Osage and Navajo myths. How similar are the two narratives? Explain.

1. Which of the following is the best description of the relationship between the Osage and Navajo peoples and the natural world?
  - A. The Osage and Navajo view the natural world as frightening and filled with dangerous forces beyond their control.
  - B. The Osage and Navajo feel conflicted about the natural world. While they are thankful for the natural gifts provided by the gods, they also are concerned that the gods will punish them and take away these gifts.
  - C. The Osage and Navajo have different views of the natural world. The Navajo revere the natural world, and the Osage fear it.
  - D. The Osage and Navajo feel a close kinship with nature and celebrate its gifts.
  - E. None of the above
  
2. What problem do the early peoples have with the world in both creation accounts?
  - A. The animals have taken over.
  - B. There is too much wind.
  - C. There isn't any food.
  - D. The earth is too wet.
  - E. The land is too rocky.

3. What does "The Osage Creation Account" suggest is the origin of people?

- A. People came from the sky; the sun is their father, and the moon is their mother.
- B. People came from Begochiddy in the third world.
- C. The elk created people out of the soft earth.
- D. The ants and the whirlwinds worked together to create people.
- E. The mist that blew off the water created people.

4. How do the Osage regard the sun, moon, and wind, as shown in their story of creation?

- A. as animals
- B. as enemies
- C. as scary beings
- D. as forces of nature
- E. as humanlike gods

5. Find the phrase "and the winds came from all quarters" near the end of the first paragraph of "The Osage Creation Account." Which definition of *quarters* is correct in this phrase?

- A. coins
- B. divisions
- C. directions
- D. four equal periods
- E. living accommodations

**6.** What does “The Navajo Creation Myth” suggest is the origin of people?

**A.** People are from the bamboo.

**B.** Badger created people.

**C.** The sun and moon made people.

**D.** The white thunder, white cyclone, and white hail made people.

**E.** People came from out of the land in the world below.

**7.** In the second paragraph of the Navajo myth, what does the word *petrified* mean?

**A.** frightened

**B.** layered

**C.** turned to stone

**D.** historic

**E.** in full leaf



8. Why does the bamboo no longer have a tassel, according to the Navajo myth?
- A. Badger scratched it off when he tried to climb up to the fourth world.
  - B. The cyclones blew the tassels off.
  - C. The elk rolled over on the bamboo and broke it off.
  - D. Begochiddy pulled the bamboo up by the tassel and threw it in the hole.
  - E. None of the above

9. **Constructed Response:** Compare and contrast the role that animals play in each creation myth. What role might animals play in the culture of the Osage and Navajo? Explain.

10. **Constructed Response:** In the Navajo myth, the current world is the fourth world. What might the concept of multiple worlds indicate about the world view of the Navajo people? Support your ideas with evidence from the text.



1. D. Model how to evaluate the possible responses by saying "While there were frightening elements in the Osage account, that was not the main theme of the story, and the Navajo myth did not seem frightening for the people. Therefore, answers A and B are incorrect. The first part of answer C is correct, but the second part about the Osage is wrong. D seems like the best answer because both cultures felt close to nature and respected it."

2. D

3. A

4. E

5. C

6. E

7. C

8. D

9. The elk in the Osage myth and the badger in the Navajo myth both play important roles: The elk makes the world habitable for people, and the badger is sent to see the next world. In addition, in the Navajo myth, ants lead the way into the fourth world. The roles of the animals in these myths suggest that the Osage and Navajo peoples felt a kinship or respect for these creatures.

0. The concept of multiple worlds suggests that the Navajo believe the world is not perfect and can be improved. The people are excited by the idea of a fourth world. The bamboo (Lukatso) starts growing again once the new world is ready.