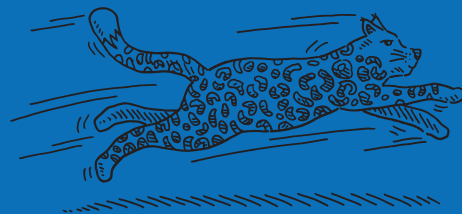


Exploring Myths & Legends

- Recommended children's books
- Writing activities
- Drawing, mask-making and other creative activities
- Ideas for sharing children's stories and writing
- Writing organizers and templates





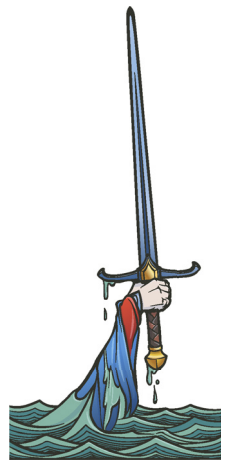
Myths & Legends

Myths are stories told aloud that were passed down from generation to generation for thousands of years. Myth is from the Greek word, “mythos” — which means “word of mouth” — oral stories shared from person to person.

Myths have helped people from different cultures to make sense of the natural world, before scientific discoveries guided our understanding. Myths explained the reason for an erupting volcano, or thunder and lightning, or even night following day.

Many myths feature gods, goddesses or humans with supernatural powers. Kids may be familiar with Zeus, the king of all gods in Greek mythology, who could throw lightning bolts from the sky down to Earth. Myths often include a lesson, suggesting how humans should act.

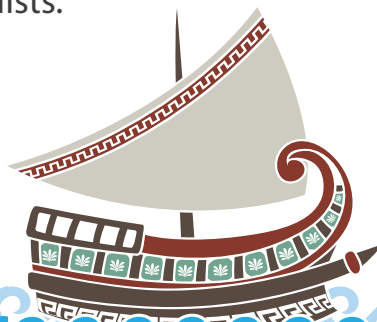
A legend is a traditional story about a real place and time in the past. Legends are rooted in the truth, but have changed over time and retelling and taken on fictional elements. The heroes are human (not gods and goddesses) but they often have adventures that are larger-than-life. The tales of Odysseus from Ancient Greece and King Arthur from Medieval England are two examples of legends.



Myths and legends can be found throughout the world. Many of these traditional stories feature similar subjects, but express the unique culture and history of the regions where they are from. There are flood myths from India, aboriginal legends from Australia, Taino creation stories from Puerto Rico, the legend of the Chinese zodiac, Norse myths, and many more.



We'll be exploring a certain kind of nature myth or folktale called a pourquoi tale and helping kids learn to write their own nature myth. There are many Native American pourquoi stories and we've included a selection in one of our booklists.





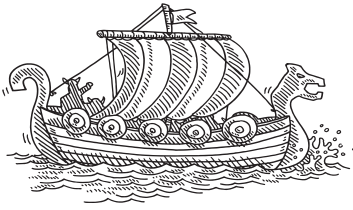
Myths & Legends

Discover more about myths and legends at Start with a Book, by browsing our booklists, kid-friendly websites, apps, and podcasts: [Folktales, Fairy Tales and Myths](#).

Writing activities

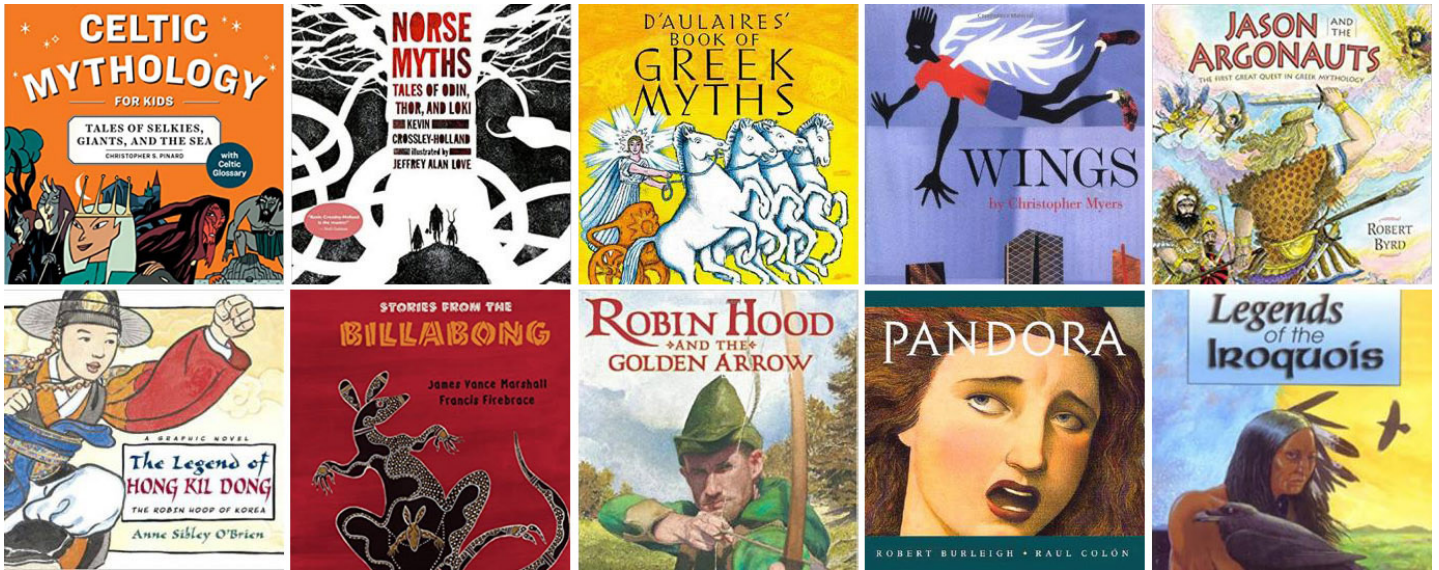
Here are two writing activities to try after reading a selection of myths, legends, and pourquoi tales together:

- **Letter to a Local Hero** (see page 6)
- **Write Your Own Pourquoi Tale** (see page 9)

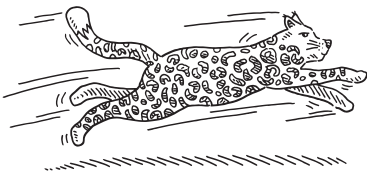


Myth & Legends

Selected Children's Books

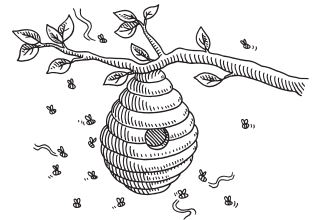


- **The Adventures of Thor the Thunder God** by Lis Lunge-Larsen, illustrated by Jim Madsen
- **Celtic Mythology for Kids** by Chris Pinard
- **D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths** by Ingri Parin d'Aulaire and Edgar Parin d'Aulaire
- **Greek Myths** by Ann Turnbull, illustrated by Sarah Young
- **Jason and the Argonauts: The First Great Quest in Greek Mythology** by Robert Byrd
- **Legends of the Iroquois** by Tehanetorens (Ray Fadden)
- **Legend of Hong Kil Dong: The Robin Hood of Korea** by Anne Sibley O'Brien
- **Norse Myths: Tales of Odin, Thor and Loki** by Kevin Crossley-Holland, illustrated by Jeffrey Alan Love
- **The Odyssey** by Gareth Hinds
- **Pandora** by Robert Burleigh, illustrated by Raul Colón
- **Robin Hood and the Golden Arrow** by Robert San Souci
- **Sir Gawain and the Green Knight** by Michael Morpugo, illustrated by Michael Foreman
- **Stories from the Billabong** by James Vance Marshall, illustrated by Francis Firebrace
- **The Gods and Goddesses of Olympus** by Aiki
- **The Legend of the Caribou Boy / Ekwò Dozhia Wegond** by George Blondin, illustrated by Ray McSwain
- **The Woman Who Outshone the Sun / La mujer que brillaba aún más que el sol** by Alejandro Cruz Martinezula
- **Treasury of Egyptian Mythology** by Donna Jo Napoli, illustrated by Christina Balit
- **Treasury of Greek Mythology** by Donna Jo Napoli, illustrated by Christina Balit
- **Wings** by Christopher Myers
- **Young Zeus** by G. Brian Karas

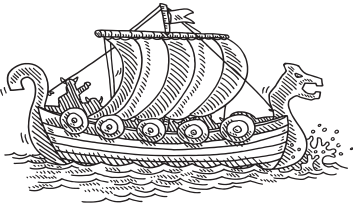


Pourquoi Tales

Selected Children's Books



- **Beaver Steals Fire: A Salish Coyote Story** by Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes
- **A Big Mooncake for Little Star** by Grace Lin
- **The First Strawberries: A Cherokee Story** by Joseph Bruchac, illustrated by Anna Vojtech (Cherokee)
- **The Flute Player** by Michael Lacapa (Apache)
- **The Golden Flower: A Taino Myth from Puerto Rico** by Nina Jaffe, illustrated by Enrique O. Sanchez (Puerto Rico)
- **The Great Race: The Story of the Chinese Zodiac** by Dawn Casey (China)
- **The Green Frogs: A Korean Folktale** by Yumi Heo (Korea)
- **Her Seven Brothers** by Paul Goble (Cheyenne)
- **How Chipmunk Got His Stripes** by Joseph Bruchac, illustrations by Jose Aruego and Ariane Dewey (Native American)
- **How Raven Stole the Sun** by Maria Williams, illustrated by Felix Vigil (Tlingit)
- **The Legend of the Bluebonnet** by Tomie dePaola (Texas, Comanche)
- **The Legend of the Poinsettia** by Tomie dePaola (Mexico)
- **The Legend of Lightning and Thunder** by Paula Ikuutaq Rumbolt, illustrated by Jo-Ann Rioux (Inuit)
- **The Milky Way: A Cherokee Tale** by Joseph Bruchac and Gayle Ross, illustrated by Virginia Stroud (Cherokee)
- **The Origin of the Milky Way and Other Living Stories of the Cherokee** by Barbara Duncan (Cherokee)
- **Pattan's Pumpkin: A Traditional Flood Story from Southern India** by Chitra Soundar, illustrated by Frané Lessac (India)
- **Why Leopard has Spots: Dan Stories from Liberia** by Won-Ldy Paye and Margaret Lippert, illustrated by Ashley Brian (Liberia)



Myth & Legends

Selected Children's Books

When the library is closed

Is your public library closed? See if your public library offers [OverDrive](#) where you can borrow and read free ebooks, audiobooks, and magazines on your phone or tablet. All you need is your library card to get access (and check out their [Libby app](#) for Android or iOS phones or tablets).

There are also a number of online services that offer high-quality audiobooks and ebooks: [Audible for Kids](#), [Tales2Go](#), and [Epic!](#).

Here are some ways to explore myths and legends online:

- [Myths and Legends](#): texts of well-known and not-so-well-known stories (American Folklore)
- [Myths and Legends from Around the World](#): historical and geographic adventure (Google Earth Voyager Story)
- [Ancient Greek Mythological Stories](#): animated videos (Geethanjali Kids)
- [Myths and Legends from Around the World](#) animated read-alouds (Myths and Legends)
- [Myths and Legends](#) audio stories, recommended for older kids (Myths and Legends Podcast)

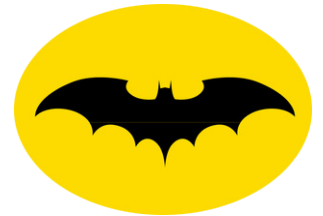


Myths & Legends

Local Heroes

Get kids thinking

- Talk with kids about a kind of story that we call a legend. Legends are stories about a real place and time in the past. They may have been based in truth, but have changed over time and become a mix of truth and fiction. They often feature a main character who is known for acts of bravery and heroism.
- Tell the kids that the heroes in legends are human (not gods and goddesses) but they often have adventures that are larger-than-life. Ask the kids if they can think of any legendary characters in stories they've read or heard or seen in the movies.
- Ask the kids, have you ever heard of Robin Hood? What makes him a hero? Robin Hood became a popular folk hero because of his generosity to the poor. He represents the common man standing up against injustice.
- Batman is another heroic figure, a legendary comic book super hero and the defender of fictional Gotham City. Batman doesn't have any superpowers and yet he has the courage to face all kinds of villains.



Writing activity

For this activity, kids will write a personal letter to a local hero.

Individual: each child chooses a person they consider to be a hero and works independently.

Small groups: pairs of kids choose one person they consider to be a hero and work collaboratively.



Myths & Legends

Local Heroes

Supplies

- Pencils, pens, or other writing tool of choice
 - 8-1/2 x 11 paper, letter-sized envelopes, first-class stamps
 - Access to the Internet
-

Let's get started

Gather the kids together in a circle to talk about their community and the strengths of the people that live there. Ask the kids if they can think of people who they think are heroes for standing up for what's right and helping their communities. This can be a friend, a family member, a spiritual community leader, a teacher ... it could also be someone well-known like an [elected official](#) or an [activist](#) or children's author who has had a positive impact on you and others.

Here are some things to think about:

- What kind of work does your hero do?
- What qualities or strengths does your hero have?
- How does your hero help make the community (or the country or the world) a better place?
- How has your hero affected your life?
- What would you like to say to your hero?
- Do you have a question you'd like to ask your hero?
- Do you want to share an example of something you've done to make your community stronger?
- How can you express thanks to your hero?



Myths & Legends

Local Heroes

Suggest to the kids that they write out a draft of their letter and share it with you. Adults can provide gentle feedback, but the letter should really be an expression of what the child at that age wants and needs to say.

Younger kids who aren't yet writing can dictate their stories to an adult.

Next, give kids time to write out a final copy of their letters. Show them an example of how to format an informal letter.

Using the Internet, adults can help find the correct addresses for each hero letter. After kids have shared their letters with the group, show them how to fold their letters, insert in the envelopes, address the envelopes (adults may need to help), and add the stamp.

Your full address here
on 3 lines

Today's date here

Dear _____

All the best,
Your signature here

Take a little walking "field trip" to your local mailbox or post office to mail the letters!

Sharing our work

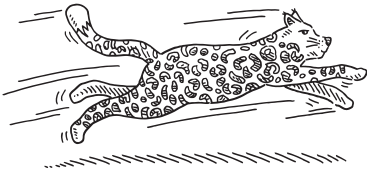
Once the letters are finished, gather everyone together in a circle to read their letters out loud and give their friends a chance to ask any questions about their heroes.

Try this!

Record It: Using a smartphone camera, make a video of each child reading their hero letter out loud to share with family, friends, and the local community.

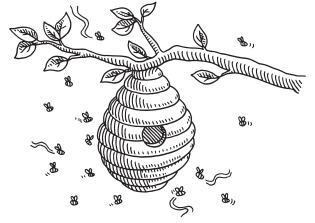
For more reading, writing, and learning resources, visit www.StartWithABook.org





Myths & Legends

Pourquoi Tales



Get kids thinking

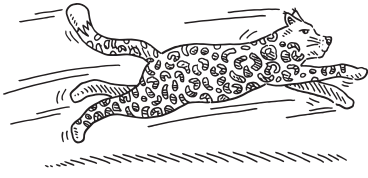
- Have you ever wondered about some of the things you see in nature — how did anteaters get such long snouts, where does thunder and lightning come from, or why are there constellations (star pictures) in the night sky? In older times, we didn't have the scientific knowledge to explain these things, so people made up stories to explain what they observed.
- These are called "pourquoi tales." Pourquoi means "why" in French. In Spanish, we could call them "por qué" tales. What would we call them in your home language?
- Together, watch this animated video of a West African pourquoi tale, narrated by James Earl Jones: [Why the Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears](#).
- Read some pourquoi tales together. See a selected list of books on page 4, or visit [Start with a Book: Folktales, Fairy Tales and Myths](#) for more recommended books. If you are having trouble finding books, you can read one or more of the short tales reprinted on pages 10–11.
- Talk about the characteristics of pourquoi tales — talking plants, animals, and celestial bodies (sun, moon, planets, and stars), a story that begins "long, long ago," and an ending that explains why something is the way it is today.
- Talk about the beginning, middle, and end of the pourquoi tales you read together.

Writing activity

For this activity, kids will write an original pourquoi tale based on animals, the night sky, or something else in nature.

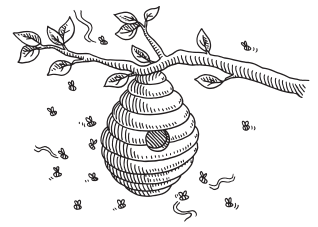
Individual: each child works independently on their pourquoi story.

Small groups: pairs of kids can work collaboratively on their pourquoi story.



Myths & Legends

Pourquoi Tales

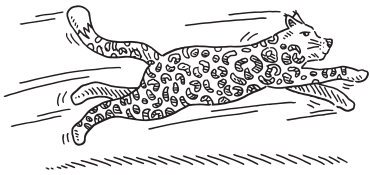


How the Leopard Got His Spots (A South African Story)

A long, long time ago, Leopard was the plain, solid brown-yellow color of the desert. He was so plain he was almost invisible against the brown-yellow desert. When he headed out to hunt, Giraffe and Zebra and the other animals didn't know which way to jump. To escape Leopard's appetite, Giraffe and Zebra headed into the great shadowy forest. When Leopard tried to follow them, he stood out like a bright-yellow sunflower against a dark fence. He could not hunt at all. Giraffe and Zebra saw yellow Leopard right away, and ran off deeper into the forest. Leopard had to do something. He asked his human friend to help him. So the Man carefully dipped his five fingertips in black ink and painted spots all over Leopard's fur. Now Leopard could blend into the shadows, and once again he became a great and powerful hunter!

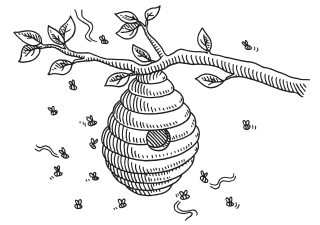
Why the Sun and Moon Live in the Sky (A Zuni Legend)

A long time ago, there was no day. It was always dark and always summer. This was because the Kachina, a very powerful people, had stolen the Sun and the Moon and locked them away in a box. In the dim light, Coyote and Eagle, two friends, wandered the desert. Coyote and Eagle had always hunted together, but Coyote could not hunt anymore because he could not see at night. Coyote suggested that they go to find the Sun and Moon and make them light up the world. Eagle was worried. He reminded Coyote that the Sun and Moon were very strong, and it was dangerous to try to trick them. In the end, Eagle agreed to help Coyote. While the Kachina were sleeping, Coyote and Eagle crept into their village, stole the Sun and Moon, and headed into the hills. Coyote told Eagle that he wanted to open the box containing the Sun and the Moon. Eagle said no. They must wait until after their travels and open it with their eyes closed. Coyote grumbled. He couldn't wait to see what was in that box. Finally he grew so curious that he threw it open. The light of the Sun was so bright it blinded Coyote's eyes. The Sun and Moon laughed and flew far away, up into the sky where they are today.



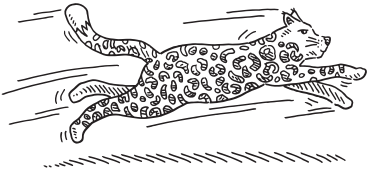
Myths & Legends

Pourquoi Tales



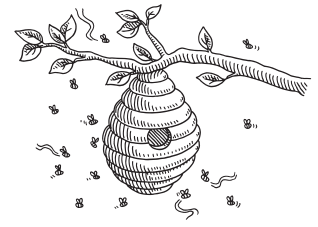
Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears (A West African Tale)

A long, long time ago, Mosquitoes didn't buzz, they talked. And talked and talked and talked. One day, Mosquito was talking to Iguana, telling him about his vacation, about every minute of his vacation. Mosquito would not let Iguana say one word. Iguana was so annoyed that he walked away, leaving Mosquito still talking. Iguana grumbled and waved her tail. She was still grumbling when she passed her friend Snake, and forgot all about saying hello. Snake's feelings were hurt. He felt so sad that he slithered down a rabbit hole. "Help," yelled Rabbit as she scurried out of the hole, terrified of Snake. "What's wrong?" cawed Crow as he saw Rabbit racing. Danger must be near. "Run for your lives!" cawed Crow. Monkey heard Crow's warning and took off through the treetops, leaping branch to branch. When Monkey landed on Owl's branch, high up in a leafy tree, Owl's nest tipped off the branch and fell to the ground, breaking Owl's eggs. Owl was heartbroken, so much that she didn't hoot for the sun to come up. The whole jungle was in darkness. Everyone was mad at Mosquito. Finally Owl hooted for the sun to come up and when it did, Mosquito lost his voice. All he could do was buzz in everyone's ears: "Zzzzzz! Is everyone still mad at me?"



Myths & Legends

Pourquoi Tales



Supplies

- Pencils, pens, and art supplies: colored pencils, markers, crayons
- Index card (1 per child)
- Drawing paper or construction paper: 8-1/2 x 11 or larger (2 sheets per child)
- Construction paper or cardboard, felt, yarn, and other decorative materials (optional)
- Scotch tape, scissors, school glue (optional)
- Story maps (included in packet)

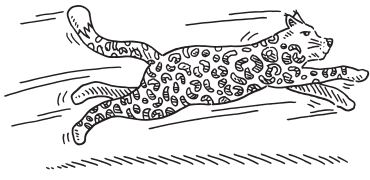
Let's get started

Together, take a walk outside and tell the kids to think about what animal, plant, or other observation about nature they want to write about. Encourage the kids to jot down observations and ideas on their index cards. Younger kids who aren't yet writing can sketch what they see.

If an outdoor walk is not possible or doesn't generate enough ideas, you can instead have a group brainstorming session and come up with a list of interesting things in nature. Make sure each child chooses something to write about!

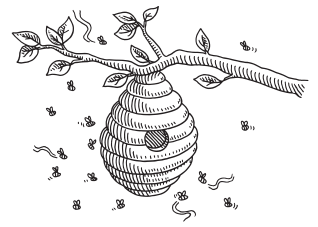
Here are some things to think about:

- What is your pourquoi tale going to explain?
- Who are your main characters?
- Where does your story take place?
- What is the main problem of the story?
- How is it solved?
- What happened as a result of this solution? (This is where your question is answered)
- Is there a lesson or moral taught through the story?



Myths & Legends

Pourquoi Tales



Remind the kids that every pourquoi tale begins with a question, such as "why do mosquitoes buzz in people's ears?" or "how did the leopard get his spots?"

Next, give each child a copy of the **story map** found in this packet. Tell the kids to think about and write down the question they are going to answer in their story. If kids are still stuck and don't know what to write about, you can use the suggested topic ideas on page 15 — they are already in the form of a question.

The story map has guiding questions to help kids work out the parts of their tales. Let the kids know that they can let their imaginations run wild as they think about why that animal, plant, or other natural thing came to be or look the way it is — and how the action in the story is described.

Show the kids how to use the **beginning-middle-end story map** in this packet to write the draft of their pourquoi tales. Remind the kids to use **descriptive words** to bring their stories to life. The last sentence in the story should begin with "And that's why ..."

With younger kids, you may need to guide them through the whole process, and they can tell you their ideas as you write their story down.

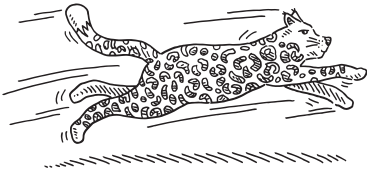
Once the kids are satisfied with their stories, tell them to write out a final, polished version on a fresh sheet of paper.

Option: We've provided a set of decorative templates that kids can use for the final versions of their pourquoi tales. They are included at the end of this packet.

Encourage kids to include a drawing with their pourquoi tales; these can be embellished with collage materials if they like. Don't forget to add a title!

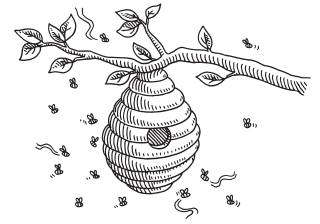
Try this!

Comic Strip: Some kids love comics and may even be talented comic strip artists. Tap into that interest by offering this alternative format for the pourquoi tale. Kids should still go through the thinking process with their story maps, but in addition to written text they can also sketch out their illustrations. Use plain paper or the comic strip template in this packet.



Myths & Legends

Pourquoi Tales



Mask making

Storytellers and actors from all over the world have used masks for thousands of years to help tell their stories. Invite kids to make masks of the characters from their pourquoi tales. You can use ordinary household items or recyclable materials, or make one with papier maché. Find directions at the links below:

- [Milk jugs](#)
- [Cardboard](#)
- [Egg cartons](#)
- [Paper plates](#)
- [Paper bags](#)
- [Papier maché](#)



Sharing our work

Once the pourquoi tales are finished, gather everyone together in a circle to read the stories out loud. Kids can be as dramatic as they like in sharing their stories. Kids can also choose to memorize their stories and present them without notes — in keeping with the oral storytelling tradition.

Tell kids to share their pourquoi tale with family and friends. They can invite listeners by asking, for example “*Do you know why the raccoon wears a mask?*”

Try this!

Record It: Help kids to record their tall tales on a smart phone (audio or video) and share with their extended families!

For more reading, writing, and learning resources, visit www.StartWithABook.org



Myths & Legends

Pourquoi Tales

Topic ideas

If kids are having a difficult time thinking about a topic for their pourquoi stories, here are some ideas to jumpstart imaginations.

- Why does the moon change shape?
- Where does thunder come from?
- Where does lightning come from?
- Why do leaves change color in the fall?
- Why do roses have thorns?
- Why do squirrels bury their acorns?
- Why do caterpillars change into butterflies?
- Why do bees make honey?
- Why do snakes have no legs?
- Why does an owl hunt at night?
- Why does a seashell hold the roar of the ocean?
- Why is the ocean salty?
- Why does the raccoon wear a mask?
- Why is the raven black?
- Why do male peacocks have such colorful feathers?
- Why do turtles have a shell on their back?
- How did lizards learn to climb walls?
- How did porcupines get their quills?

Pourquoi Tales: Story Map

Who, what, why, when, and how?

Time and place (setting)

What does your story help to explain? That's the "why" or "how" question!

Who are the "characters" in your story?

(Plants, animals, or the moon and stars can all be characters)

Describe the problem

(Why did the feature change? Or if it's something new in nature, why was it created?)

The solution

(The answer to your "why" or "how" question)

Pourquoi Tales: Story Map

Beginning, Middle, End

At the beginning:

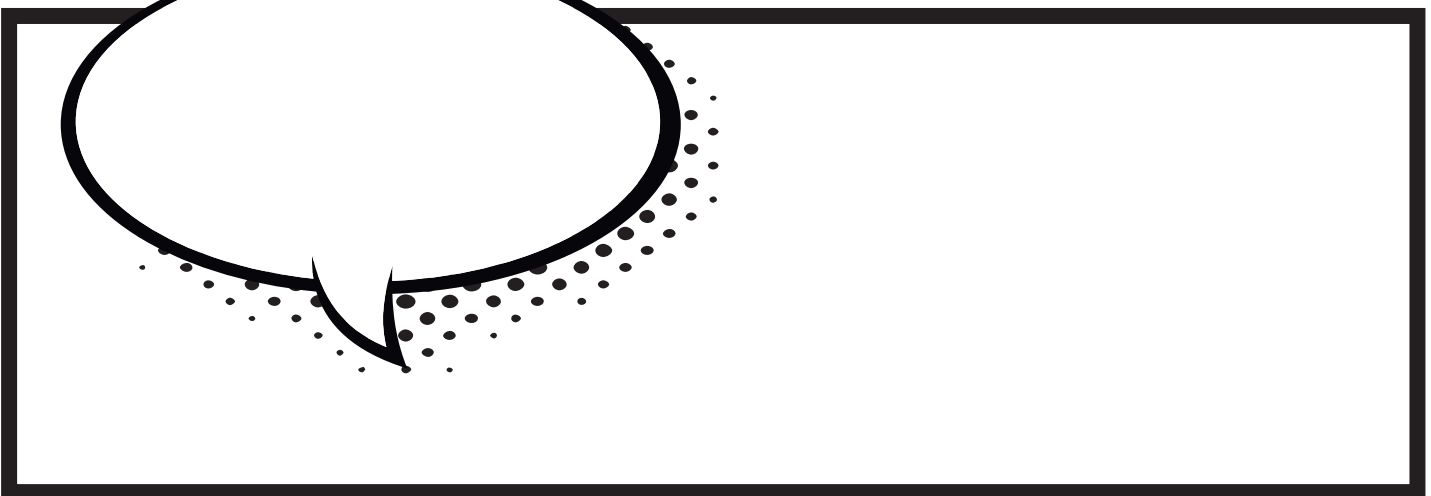
Then:

Pourquoi Tales: Story Map

Beginning, Middle, End

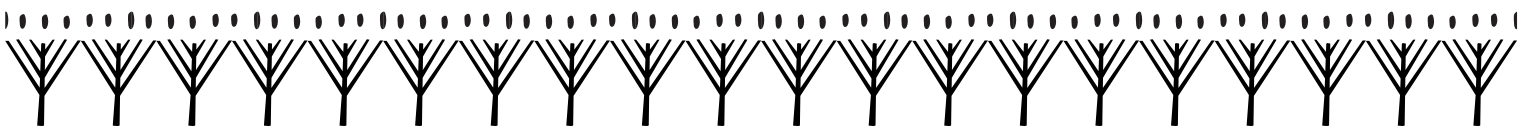
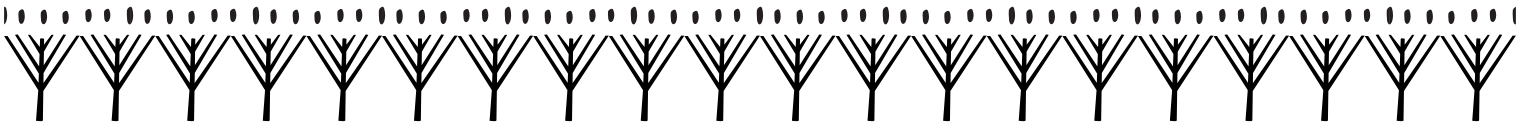
Finally:

And that's why ...



My Pourquoi Tale





My Pourquoi Tale



