

ROGER FERNANDES STORY VIDEO

My name is Roger Fernandes. I am a Native American artist, storyteller and educator. I belong to the Lower Elwha band of Klallam Indians or Nəxʷsłáyəm! Nəxʷsłáyəm! is a tribal name that we have for ourselves. Klallam is the English pronunciation of Nəxʷsłáyəm! It means strong people. I am also Makah. My great grandmother was married into the Makah tribe as a young woman and so we are also related to the Makah people. I've been asked to talk about storytelling today and that is a very complex issue which is also very simple. So, I would like to approach it from a simple angle first.

Storytelling is one of the most basic ways we human beings have of communicating, and sharing, and learning and teaching. If you think about it, all the modern things we rely on today for education like books, writing, computers, videos, all those things are pre-dated by storytelling. Storytelling is the oldest way we have of doing all these things and so, I'm going to talk about storytelling in the context of learning, especially for children.

Storytelling is a way of explaining the things that can't be explained. Science is very, very important. Science has a very important role to play in helping us understand the world. For example, science can tell us how big the sun is. Science can tell us how far the sun is from the earth. Science can even tell us when the sun is going to burn out. But science cannot tell us why the sun is there, what is the meaning of the sun. How did it come to be? Science cannot explain those things although it's trying. Science tries to explain these things, but they fall short because as I was taught by my teachers, we have different ways of learning. We have a learning for here (pointing to his brain) that's reading, writing, arithmetic, computers, history, science, that's for the brain. That way of looking at the world is very important, and we need to have that to understand how to live in that world. There is another kind of learning and that is here (pointing to his heart), the Native people say. For your heart, for your spirit. That explains the meaning of things. That, again, why is the sun there? Why is there life on earth? Why do people die? All these big questions we ask, science can't explain, so we have stories to explain those things. But then again, they teach us, they assure us in here (point to heart) that everything has a meaning.

Everything is in an order that has been established and the stories explained. So, again, storytelling is a way to reach us here (pointing to heart) that hopefully works in concert with our linear, logical, cognitive mind that sees the world in one way, but our heart sees in another way. And we need them working together to really understand how this world operates, how it functions, and how we are supposed to live in that world. And often time the stories will allow us to see things in a life that allows us to make our own sense of them. So that we have the idea of a more order of the universe, you might say, that the world operates in a set of principles that storytelling allows us to see.

Storytelling, then, is not just for Native Americans. It's not something that just the Native American people do. When you think about it, all human beings are storytelling cultures. All stories that every culture tells are a way for us to understand that culture, for ways to understand how they see the world, and through their stories understand how you're supposed to live in that world. And storytelling, again, allows us to cross that cultural divide and find some common ground. There are stories that exist all around the world that are almost told exactly in the same way because that story goes around the world because the questions that the cultures ask, need the same answers.

Storytelling exists before all the modern things that we have. The modern things that we have like reading and writing and videos and cell phones and all these things are very important technological developments. They allow us to live in this world in a more convenient, easier way, but they are not necessarily improvements on storytelling. One of the powers of storytelling, it allows the listener to make their own judgements, their own determinations, their own discoveries, their own learnings by hearing that story. Storytelling is told in such a way that the listeners are invited to ask, what did that story mean? What do you learn from this story? Modern education has the idea that we all need to know the same thing. At the end of the lesson, everyone will know the same thing; that's why we have tests, why we have quizzes, that's why we have homework, to ensure that we all know the same thing. And that's powerful, that's important, within a certain context. But for Native culture, the idea that each listener divines or finds their own answer, their own meaning, their own teaching of the story, is equally powerful. That each person needs to be able to look at the world and define it for themselves within their

own culture, and also to find a way to live in that world according to the teachings of the people and their culture. So, storytelling has an open-endedness to it, but I guess you would say that allows the listener, a part, in the teachings of that story and finding the teachings for themselves and sharing the teaching of that story on their own. So, the stories we share in this curriculum are looking at concepts that we look at from different perspectives and allows us to maybe examine it in terms of the light of science, the light of storytelling and culture. And hopefully those things work together in concert that you can have science and deep cultural teachings working together. I was taught that storytelling and science are essentially the same activity. They are different points in a continuum of trying to find out, again, those big issues that confront human beings. How does the world work, how to the world come to be, how do we live in that world? And so, they are not at odds with each other at all. They are really meant to complement each other and work with each other. Neither one can live alone. Neither one can operate independent. So, we need the two things together, especially for Native children as we look at the struggles of Native children in the public-school system. I really believe that we need to look at the idea of giving them a cultural context to place all the academic work that they are asked to do. All the things they are asked to learn in the public-school system. They are asked to learn this out of the context of their culture. So, Native American children need a cultural context for all the academic things they are asked to learn, that the cultural context allows them to make sense of it, through the teachings of their own people. Science and culture do not need to be in opposition to each other. They need to find a way to work in concert. As you share these stories, listen to these stories, you can look for certain things that definitely have a relevance to scientific inquiry and study, things that explain natural phenomenon and how the world works, how things operate. So, that's one level of looking at these stories, you can certainly find that. But also, I think within in that, you might find some moral teachings of values that are taught, some ways of living in the world with other people and all other living things, that hopefully compliment that, balance that idea of just seeing a phenomenon and describing it. But also giving meaning to that phenomenon. So, things like the wind, things like the rain, things like the plants, like all the animals that are mentioned in these things. At one level you can just look at them through the scientific lens and see them as forces of phenomenon in nature. But if you

look at them through the story, you also see that they have a meaning in the world. There's a purpose that they are here for and the stories explain that. In concert, those things work together, and they give a fuller picture of the meaning of things in the world. So, hopefully looking at these stories you'll be able to make those linkages yourself, as to how this might apply to science and also how it might give a cultural context and meaning to the children who hear these things. So, I want to thank you (he shows his hands). This gesture means 'thank you.' The people around here say thank you for allowing me to share these thoughts with you as we use storytelling to reach the hearts of children and combine it with the, I guess we would call it, the brain work, the mind work, that the school asks of them, then we have a, I guess have a whole picture then, that we allow the children to understand these things in the way that they best learn. So, again, thank you very much (hand gesture). I hope you enjoy the stories.