

# NATIVE AMERICAN EDUCATION FOR ALL RESOURCES

Partnership of IllumiNative and the National Indian Education Association



ILLUMINATIVE



Grade Level

**3-5**

Subject

**Reading  
Writing**

Lesson Title

**Our Elders: Storytelling &  
Oral Traditions**

**Activity Description:** In this activity, students will learn about the importance of storytelling and oral traditions passed down from elders by listening to an audio recording from renowned storyteller, actress, and poet Geri Keams, who was taught the importance of passing on stories of the "Old Ones". In this audio recording, titled "The Quillwork Girl", she tells one story in her Native language about a girl with extraordinary talent for embroidering porcupine quills on buckskin. Students will then have the opportunity to talk to elders in their family or community, and recreate those stories to be passed down from generation to generation.

## MATERIALS NEEDED

- Wifi access (optional)
- Downloadable audio recording of ["The Quillwork Girl"](#)
- ["Songs and Stories of My People"](#) by Geri Keams lesson plan (printable PDF)
- Pencil and paper
- Your child will need to speak with at least one elder or family member.
- Props for your child to reenact the story they are told.

## STEPS

This activity is for children to do with a person from the family or community, especially the component that asks the student to talk with an elder.

### Activity Steps:

1. Read the [background and artist information about Geri Keams](#), a Navajo storyteller, actress and poet, noting that her grandmother taught her the importance of passing on the stories of the "Old Ones".
  - a. Note that Geri's stories are ones that she passes down orally from relatives or friends, or ones she has found, and she then brings those stories to life on stage, as she has done in the audio recording of the story, "The Quillwork Girl". The uniqueness of her stories, is her ability to make them her own.
2. Listen to one of these stories, the [audio recording of "The Quillwork Girl"](#).
  - a. What parts of the story do you remember most vividly?
  - b. What characters or symbols appeared in the story?
  - c. Did the story remind you of any stories from your own culture?
3. Sit down with an elder or family member and ask them to share a story in their life, or a myth/legend.
4. Now it is your turn to reenact that story on stage, and make it your own. Write down your story and scenes if needed.
  - a. What scenes do you want to recreate?
  - b. What symbols or props do you want to use?
5. Reenact the story you have listened to and recreated for your family and/or community.

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## HELPFUL TIPS

**Parents and caregivers:** This is an opportunity for your child to use their listening skills, and really pay attention to the details of the story they are being told. They may even want to hear additional stories, myths, and/or legends from various family members. Give them the opportunity to write down or draw some of the details in the story, so that they can remember the story when they recreate it.

- Your child may want to reenact multiple stories. This is a great time for them to put all of their energy to good use.
- Because it can be scary or intimidating to act out these stories in front of a group of people, or if your children is too shy to recreate and act out the story, give your child the opportunity to write down and illustrate the story instead. They can then read it to you or the family, or they may want you to read it to them.

## WANT TO LEARN MORE?

**Families and Educators:** Many cultures have stories, myths, and legends that are passed down from generation to generation. This can be a great opportunity to encourage your child to be creative and create their own stories that they may want to pass down to future generations.

Encourage your child to start journaling, writing poems, or drawing so that they can keep track of their own stories by giving them daily prompts to respond to. Here are some suggestions:

- [50 Writing Prompts for All Grade Levels](#)
- [Prompts by Grade](#)

### Activity Resource Links:

- Adapted by: Geri Keams - Native American Storyteller (background information and audio recording): <https://sharemylesson.com/teaching-resource/geri-keams-native-american-storyteller-264859>
- 50 Prompts for All Grade Levels: <https://www.edutopia.org/article/50-writing-prompts-all-grade-levels-todd-finley>
- Prompts by Grade: <https://www.journalbuddies.com/category/prompts-by-grade/>