

# Native American Folktales

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# *overview*

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- The First Americans themselves are a diverse collection of various social groups.
- These groups are made up of networking tribes of unique people.
- Most origin myths related by the different bands do have common attributes:
  1. often show the people emerging from out of the land itself; some explain that their ancestors arrived out of a labyrinth-like cave underground
  2. some tribes say the first people emerged from lake-beds to settle in nearby territories
  3. all of these stories establish a divisional hierarchy of nature and human
  4. all of these are anonymous stories told in an oral tradition, passed down from generation to generation
  5. very few First Americans developed written form of communication in North America

# *overview*

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- The system of oral traditions strengthened social knowledge for their individual structured cultures.

## **These traditions include:**

- myths
- rituals
- songs
- poems
- prayers
- parables
- legends
- narratives

(Kenneth Lincoln 88)

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To complicated matters: when white Europeans began the process of removing First Americans out of their territories, the natives were forced to relinquish their languages, their society structures, their religions, their oral traditions as well as their land. Many stories have been lost and entire cultures erased due to Spanish and English settlement policies—but also because *the people themselves did not want to have their culture bond by the printed word.*

In a manner of speaking, Native languages exist as a living, spiritual, *and* meditative practice. Those who were able to maintain their ancestral histories and folk tales did not want to translate their beliefs into English: an aspect of the holiness of the prayer would be lost. The living word, the spoken phrase, would become static and penned up. The original intentions of a love chant or death prayer would be lost.

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- The oral tales more often were chants, performance pieces, art recitations.
- Extreme amounts of cultural meanings are lost in the appropriations.

Critic Kenneth Lincoln proposes, the reality of the song-poems is altered since the original word does not lie flat on the page—the spoken word may be visually presented in one line of text, or broken into stanzas and restricted to form.

The original First American poems and stories were created specifically by an unknown author. The intentions was to leave the works anonymous. No one could “own” the work, nor own the idea. The idea itself “found” the chanter. The song-poem was intended for the tribe and for nature. Through performance the poet, or story-teller gives the song, prayer, chant, story back to the world. **The spoken word is a living thing; language is a sacred idea.**

# *overview*

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## **Story Tellers themselves serve as:**

- historians, record keepers
- educators of natural history and science
- a source of culture; a physical representation of art
- a means to establish sense of self for a collection of people
- educators of traditional customs

# Communication through Translation

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**Same Language Communication:**

Author > <the printed Word > < Reader

.....  
**the Word**

(spoken language / emotive prayer / living speech)

