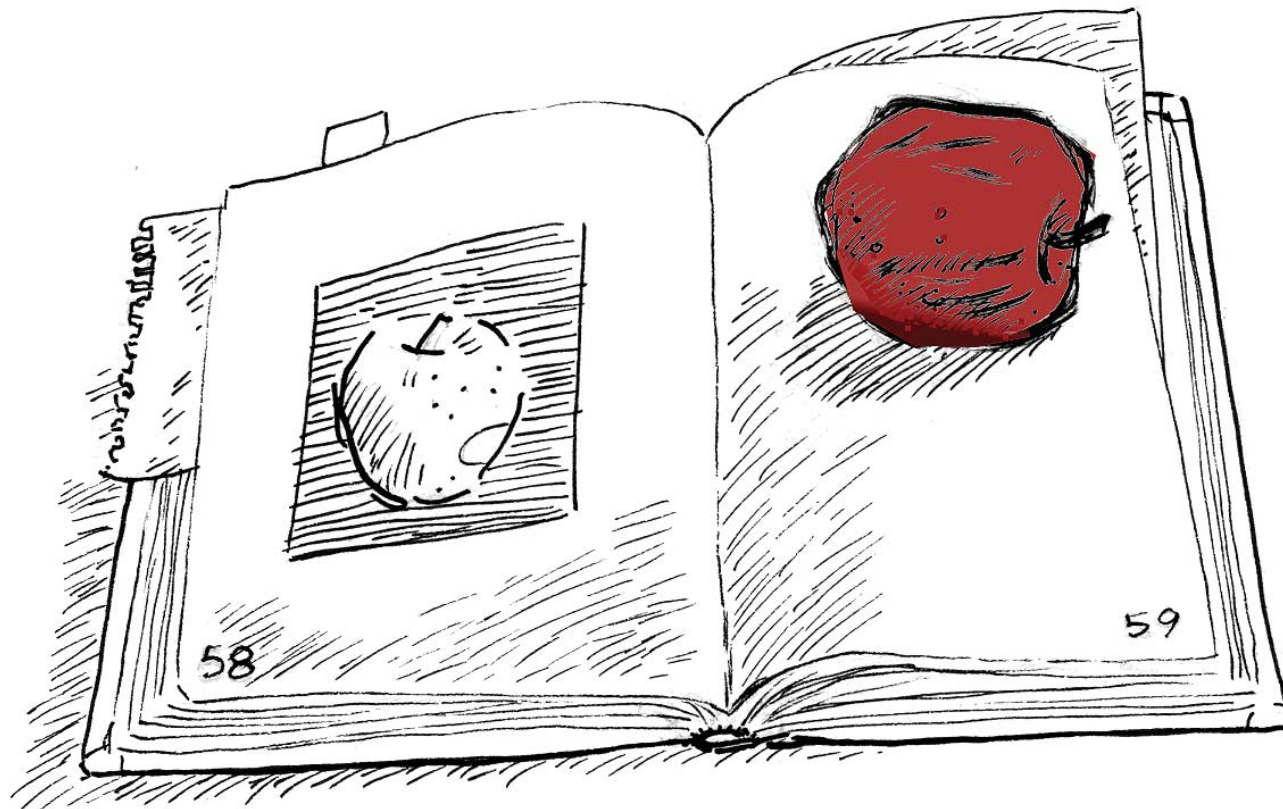


Native American Folktales



Creation Myths

Creation Folktales from the Alabama-Coushatta

Each of these tales collected here have no definitive version for the story.

- With oral traditions, each teller adds or subtracts details to suit their personality.

Story tellers use their own motifs and images to work with the basic plot formula. Likewise descriptions will not be consistent between two tellers,

even people from the same background will use unique variations in the story.

The audience expects some variation.

- Subconsciously and consciously the tales evolve and merge together.
- These stories exist as archetypes of a heritage.
- Likewise, outside influences from other tribes can be incorporated into a story.

This helps generate new material.

Creation Myths

Alabama-Coushatta Native American Folk Tales

The first grouping of stories are three short folk-tales from Native Americans living in the territories now known as Alabama, Louisiana, and East Texas.

- In the 1780's they settled in the Spanish controlled region of Big Thicket, a part of SE Texas, what is now Polk County.
- These people are a combination of two ethnic groups, two tribes with common history and languages. Intermarriage of the two groups frequent.
- They are a part of what is called the **Creek Confederacy**—the Muskogee are the dominant tribe of this confederacy of tribes.

Creation Myths

Creation of the Earth:

- utilizes one of the common formulas for folklore:
 - some stories begin with God or a Great Spirit or Animal Spirits;
 - the main deity is alone within a darkness or a vast universal water source
- land is shaped from the primordial void

In the case of the Alabama-Coushatta tale, the animal spirits are seeking land to ease their over-crowded log raft.

Creation Myths

Items of Importance:

- There is not one dominant figure in this version of the story; the animals are operating in a collection to resolve the lack of land—possibly these figures represent different clans of people working together against a greater threat—with the smallest, less expected member contributing the best results.
- Another common formula in these stories is to go through a litany of characters, who each try to resolve an existing drama—in this case the beaver, frog, crawfish each in turn try to bring up the land from under the water.

Creation Myths

- Notice in this case, the hierarchy of aquatic-based animals goes through a seemingly lessening of value, from mammal to small reptile to crustacean—this story proves all animals are of equal value, for different reasons.
We may not know of a use for the mud-dwelling crayfish, but some logic exists for his creation and preservation in nature. Likewise, he specifically was instrumental in the beginnings of our Earth.
- This myth confirms natural behaviors of the three animals—
beaver, a good swimmer and builder of dams
frog, another good swimmer is prey to the garfish
crayfish, ability to build mud tunnels and chimneys

Creation Myths

Origin of the Alabama-Coushatta Tribes:

- This translation does not name God (Abàalimikko) who created the people of from clay— he does exist in other stories as a central Father Figure.
- as with most cultures, humans were formed from Earth-based substances:
mud, clay, or rock.
- The cave itself could serve as nice symbolism for the birthing process itself; or a symbol for the process of moving from an innocence to experience of living; the gaining of knowledge, of awareness of the outside world.
- The translator shows a pattern number or three, rather than the expected four.

Creation Myths

The Alabamas and Coushattas **were made from clay** in a big cave under the earth. They lived in this cave a long time before some of them decided to go to the surface of the earth. After they started upward, **they camped three times on the way**. Finally they reached the mouth of the cave.

Here they saw that a large tree stood in the cave entrance. The Alabamas and Coushattas went out of the cave on opposite sides of a root of this big tree. **This is why these two tribes differ somewhat in speech, though they always have lived near each other.**

At first these people stayed outside only during the night, returning to the cave when day came. One night when they left the cave to play, they heard an owl hooting. Most of the people became so scared that they ran back into the cave and never returned to the surface of the earth. **This is why the Alabamas and Coushattas are so few.** Had the owl never hooted, all the people would have remained on the surface of the earth, and the Alabamas and Coushattas would be more numerous.

“Origin of the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes.” *Myths and Folktales Of the Alabama-Coushatta Indians of Texas*.
Ed. Howard Martin. Austin: Encino Press. 1977. Print.

Creation Myths

How Alabama-Coushatta Tribes Found Fire:

The Bears:

- Animals are in control of the world.

The bears represent figures of authority who become careless with their power.

- Often in such folk-tales as these, an animal spirit has been named in charge of a natural element such as water or fire, the sun and moon, or even death and sickness; some cases the spirit representative becomes miserly and hoards the object away—or they become very careless with their power, forgetful, as in this case.

Creation Myths

Fire

- In many different cultures fire represents the beginning of knowledge and technology and an establishment of house, home, civilization.
- Another Native North American people, the Haida, who lived along the Northwest coast of Canada have a story of how the folk-hero Raven steals the Sun from a miserly Old Man.
- Levels of similar psychological representations exist with the symbol of fire; he is shown with a sense of awareness.
- Because the people recognize his value and importance, they realize the manner in which to help rescue him.
- From Fire's simple statement: "I do not know the bears any longer," the story establishes how a civilized structure is provided to this specific collection of people.