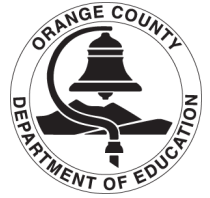




# What Legend Would You Tell? Classroom Activity



The Tongva and Acjachemen people used and still use stories to pass information from generation to generation and throughout time. A story that is passed on through time is called a **legend**. The Native American stories were not meant for entertainment, but for the education of young people, to pass on values, and for keeping the history of the people alive. These stories were often considered sacred. Some of them are lessons that teach people how to make wise choices, while some of the stories explain natural occurrences such as how the stars came to be, or why earthquakes happen.

## SYNOPSIS

Students will write their own story to explain something that happens in nature.

## OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- define legend
- create their own illustrated legend

## VOCABULARY

- legend

## MATERIALS

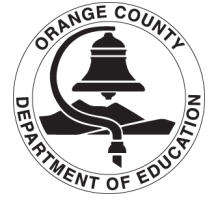
- 8.5" x 11" blank paper
- pens or pencils
- examples of modern and Native American legends:  
[www.ewebtribe.com/NACulture/stories.htm](http://www.ewebtribe.com/NACulture/stories.htm)  
[www.ilhawaii.net/~stony/loreindx.html](http://www.ilhawaii.net/~stony/loreindx.html)  
[www.angelfire.com/ca/Indian/stories.html](http://www.angelfire.com/ca/Indian/stories.html)
- markers or crayons
- Serrano legend (pgs. 3-5)
- ruled writing paper

## PROCEDURE

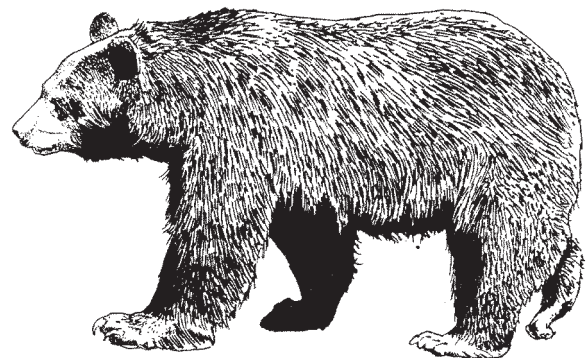
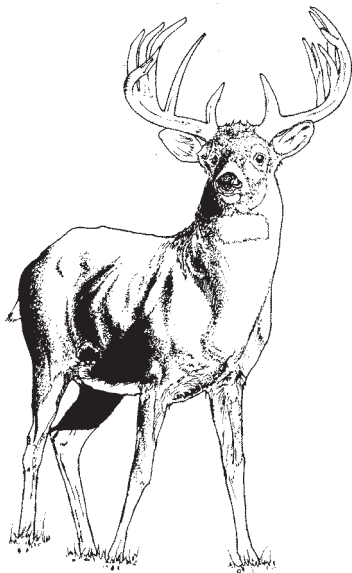
1. Define the word **legend** for students.
2. Ask the students to share legends with which they are familiar.
3. Read (or provide a synopsis of) the Serrano legend: "The Legend of Running Deer and Limping Bear" or another legend (see websites on previous page).
4. Discuss the lessons being taught in the legend with the students.
5. Tell the students they will each create and illustrate a legend that explains something in nature.



## What Legend Would You Tell? Classroom Activity (cont.)



6. As a class, brainstorm ideas for the students' legends. Some questions the students can answer for their legends, which will describe natural phenomenon, include:
  - Where mountains come from
  - How clouds came to be in the sky
  - How rivers were formed
  - Why trees have bark
  - How it came to be that most plants produce energy through photosynthesis
7. Provide the students with blank paper, a pen/pencil, and markers/crayons.
8. The students can write their legends on ruled paper first, and then transfer them (once proofread and corrected) to the blank paper to create an illustrated book.
9. Have the students share their legends with other students by exchanging legend books, through oral presentations, or another format suitable for your classroom.



## **Serrano Legend: The Legend of Running Deer and Limping Bear**

As told by Kevin Cavanaugh

Once upon a time, an old Serrano chief decided to choose a chief to succeed him at his death. He knew that he would not live much longer, and he did not want his death to cause any conflict. The old chief gathered the whole tribe together and spoke to his people.

“My people, I will not be with you much longer, and I want to know that a new chief has been selected before I die. I have devised a test to determine who is qualified to be your next leader, and I would like any person who wishes to attempt the challenge to come forward now.”

Immediately, a tall young man stoop up. His name was Running Deer, and no one was surprised that he wanted to be chief. He was an excellent hunter and a fine athlete. Then another man stood up. He was not tall or handsome or a good hunter, and many people in the tribe were surprised that he thought he was qualified to be chief. As a child he had been hurt by a bear, and he had walked with a limp ever since. Because of this, he was called Limping Bear. Many people were murmuring about Limping Bear, but the old chief raised his hand for silence.

“I accept these candidates. Tomorrow each of you will meet me at the council circle at dawn, and the test will begin.”

The next morning the two men were waiting when the old chief arrived at the council circle.

“Each of you will run to the top of Galena Peak and back, and each of you will carry two special objects. I have prepared two urns for each of you to carry. One urn is filled with coals from the council fire that always burns in the center of our village. The other urn is filled with water from the creek that runs through our valley. The coals represent our link with our ancestors, and the water represents our link with nature and its forces. You both must run to the top of the peak and back without spilling a drop of water and without losing one coal.”

Both men agreed to the test, and the chief gave the signal for the race to begin. Immediately Running Deer was far ahead. Limping Bear was so limited by his limp that it didn't seem as though he stood any chance at all. But he put his head down and ran as best he could without looking to see where Running Deer was. By the time that Limping Bear was halfway up the mountain, Running Deer was nearing the peak.

As Running Deer neared the top he turned to see where Limping Bear was. He saw that the other man was a long way back, but as he was looking down the mountain, he fell over a rock and twisted his ankle. As he fell, he spilled a few drops of water, and a few coals fell out of his urn. Running Deer was in extreme pain. He could barely put any weight on his ankle. He limped around on the top of the mountain, hoping that the pain would go away, but it did not subside. He looked at his urns, and he hoped that the little bit that he had spilled would not be noticed. He looked down the mountain and saw that Limping Bear was making steady progress, and he knew he could not wait any longer to start down, even though he could barely walk on his bad ankle.

Running Deer started down, and about a half a mile later he passed Limping Bear coming up. Neither man spoke to the other, but when Limping Bear saw that Running Deer was hurt, his spirit soared. He was not happy because Running Deer had been injured; he was happy because it was now an even race.

Halfway down the mountain Running Deer saw an old man sitting under a tall cedar tree. The old man was dirty, and his blankets were torn and ragged. The old man said, "My son, where are you going?"

Running Deer answered, "I am running a race, old father, to see who will be the next chief of our tribe."

The old man said, "I am so cold and so thirsty. If I could only have a few of your coals to build a fire and a bit of your water, I could make it through the next night."

Running Deer did not know what to do. The old man looked as though he needed help, but Limping Bear was gaining on him now that he had been slowed by his injury. He wanted to help the old man, but he wanted to win the race more.

"I'm sorry old man. I would like to help you, but I cannot spare anything." Running Deer limped off down the mountain.

Soon Limping Bear reached the same spot on the mountain and saw the same old man. The old man said, "My son, where are you going?"

Limping Bear replied, "I am running in a race, old father, to see who will be the next chief of our tribe, and I am gaining on my opponent."

The old man said, "I am so cold and so thirsty. If I could only have a few of your coals to build a fire and a bit of your water, I could make it through the next night."

Now Limping Bear was in a quandry. He had been steadily gaining on Running Deer, and he truly thought he had a chance of winning. He knew in his heart that he would be a better chief than Running Deer. He wanted so much to win, but this old man did not look as though he would survive another night without water or warmth. Limping Bear looked at Running Deer disappearing down the mountain, and then he looked back at the old man, and said: "I need these, old father, but you need them more than I do."

So Limping Bear built a fire with the coals and gave the old man all of the water in his urn to drink. The old man did not seem particularly grateful, and Limping Bear walked off down the mountain carrying his urns. He knew he had lost, and his heart was heavy with pain. He was not used to running, and he knew that he had been close to winning.

When he returned to the village, no one was in sight. He limped back to his shelter and collapsed. He was so tired and ashamed that he had done so badly in the race. No one would know why he had failed to finish.

Soon a young boy came to Limping Bear's home and told him that the chief wished to see him. Limping Bear got up and followed the young boy. He was afraid that the chief would scold him for having done so badly in the race.

When he reached the council circle, the whole tribe was present. Limping Bear walked to his regular spot, but the young boy brought him up to the seat at the chief's right hand. Running Deer was seated at the Chief's left hand. The old chief rose to address his people.

"My people, every test has many parts, and not all of the parts are obvious. Today a race was run, but the race itself was not the most important test. Limping Bear, why did you stop to help that old man on the mountainside?"

Limping Bear did not know what to say. Everything with the old man had taken place out of sight of the village, and Limping Bear could not understand how the chief knew about it. He rose to answer the chief. "I gave that old man what I had because he needed them more than I did. I thought he might die if I kept what I had from him. But please tell me, how did you know that I stopped for the old man?"

The chief answered, "Because I was that old man. I smeared my face with dirt and tore my blankets, and I waited there for the runners to go by. A good chief does not have to be a fine athlete or an excellent hunter or tall or handsome, but he must be compassionate, and he must put the needs of his people ahead of his own needs. Because of this, I give you the next chief of the Serrano people - Limping Bear."