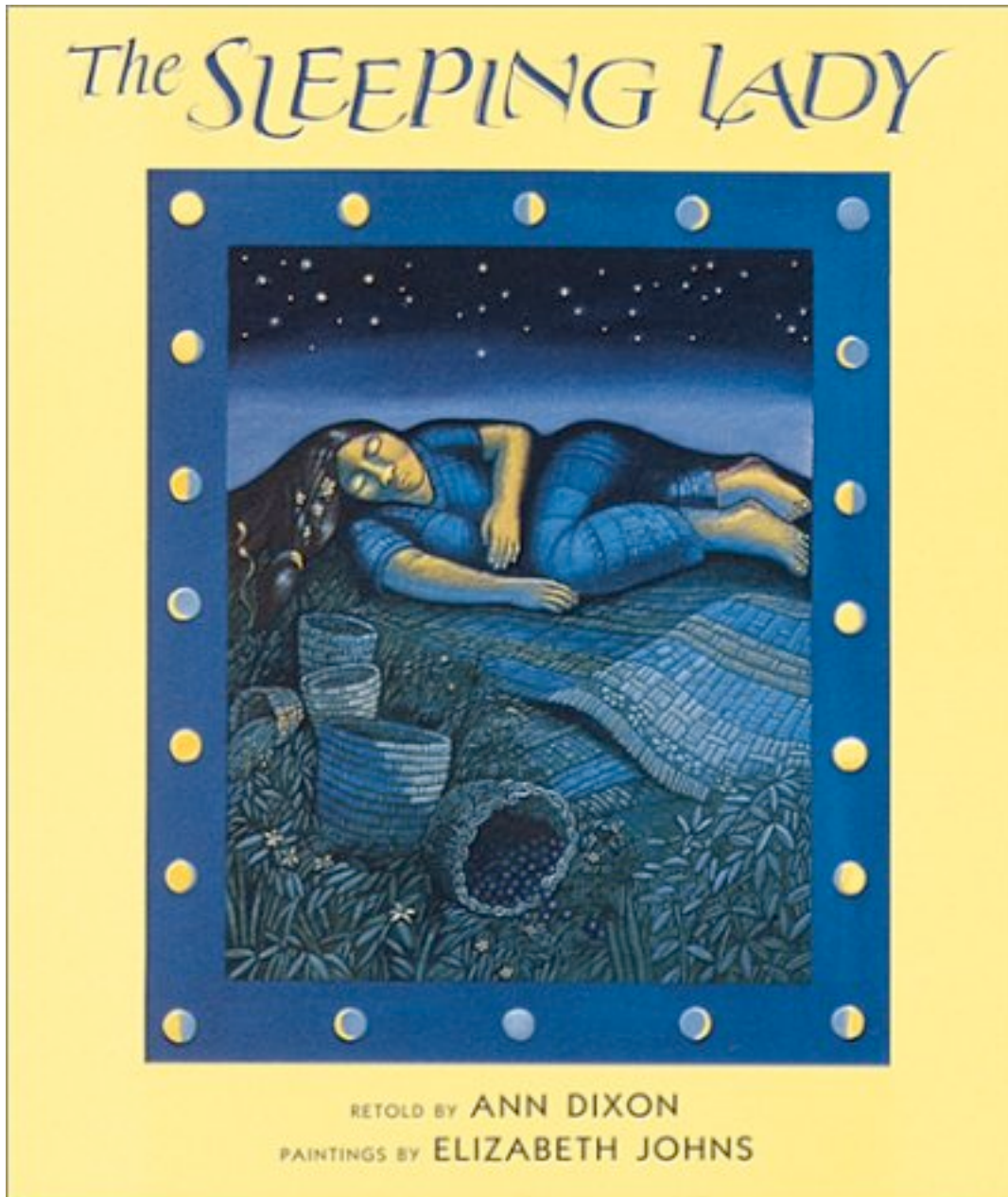


Lesson Plan:
The Sleeping Lady
Grades K-5



K. Guinotte

Introduction

I grew up reading the story of The Sleeping Lady and seeing Mt. Susitna on a regular basis. It is a beautiful story with wonderful pictures appropriate for many age groups. In addition to being a fantastic children's book, a lot of educational value can be derived from its content. I don't have any teaching experience beyond volunteering in elementary school classrooms but this lesson plan could be easily incorporated into a classroom. Depending on the amount of time available for the topic and the grade level of the class, a teacher could draw from a single lesson or from all five.

Goal

To provide students the opportunity to read a story that is culturally relevant to Alaska. And to explore the culture, geography and history behind the story and use the story to critically analyze actions that they take and the actions of their peers.

Overview

The story of The Sleeping Lady has traveled by word of mouth throughout the South-Central region since at least the 1930's. The source of the original story is unknown; however people have associated it with the Dena'ina Athabascans of the area. This version is the folktale as it was retold and published in 1994 by Ann Dixon, a librarian at the Willow Public Library in Willow, Alaska.

Listening to and reading the story is the basis of this lesson. Additional mini-lessons will include exploring the historical and geographical setting, a social discussion, and a writing activity.

Summary of the Book

"This retelling of a modern-day folk legend of unknown origin provides an explanation for Alaska's first snowfall and for the formation of Mount Susitna, known in South-central Alaska as the "Sleeping Lady." It is also a story about peace, love, the consequences of war, and the importance of living in harmony with nature and with one another. The oil on canvas illustrations capture the village life and spirit of the peace-loving, prehistoric giants who must choose how to face a group of warriors who threaten their home. The rich and vibrant colors, the patterns and intricate details, and the variety of artistic styles (some of the illustrations are reminiscent of Picasso, Rousseau, Gauguin, Matisse, Van Gogh) create visual images that are thought-provoking, intense, and sometimes more haunting than pleasurable to look at. Although the setting is unique to Alaska, the text, which focuses more on the story line and action than on description and detail, will hold the interest of

readers, storytellers, and listeners everywhere. A great introduction to or enhancement for units on war, peace, decision making, cooperation, love, or myths and legends.”

Roz Goodman, Bering Strait School District Media Center, Unalakleet,

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([http://www.amazon.com/Sleeping-Lady-Anniversary-Ann-](http://www.amazon.com/Sleeping-Lady-Anniversary-Ann-Dixon/dp/0882404954/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1312933459&sr=8-2)

[Dixon/dp/0882404954/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1312933459&sr=8-2](http://www.amazon.com/Sleeping-Lady-Anniversary-Ann-Dixon/dp/0882404954/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1312933459&sr=8-2))

Unit Outline

Lesson #1 Reading *The Sleeping Lady* and discuss cultural relevance

Lesson #2 Geography: maps and pictures of The Sleeping Lady

Lesson #3 Pre-History of Alaska

Lesson #4 Problem Solving Discussion

Lesson #5 Writing Activities

Lessons Outline

Lesson #1 Reading *The Sleeping Lady*

Choose the method most appropriate to the age level of the students that you are teaching for this unit.

1. Read aloud by the teacher.
2. Read aloud by the students as a class.
3. Read aloud by students in small groups.
4. Assigned as quiet individual reading.

Teacher’s notes: Oral traditions are a strong part of Athabascan culture. These oral traditions are being revived today in many different ways. It is important to keep in mind that this particular children’s story was written by a non-native. Make sure that the students know this fact so that they can critically read the story. It would be a good idea to have a native source come into the classroom and tell other native stories.

Ways to bring a native source to the classroom:

- Ask a storyteller from Chickaloon’s Ya Ne Dah Ah School to visit the classroom to tell a story and talk about Athabascan story telling traditions. (www.chickaloon.org)

- Look at Dimi Macheras' Athabascan graphic novels as another modern source of Athabascan story telling.



Quote from the book: "Danger!" he cried. "Warriors from the north are coming! They roam from village to village, killing people, stealing from them, and burning their homes!" – The Sleeping Lady by Ann Dixon

Teacher's notes:

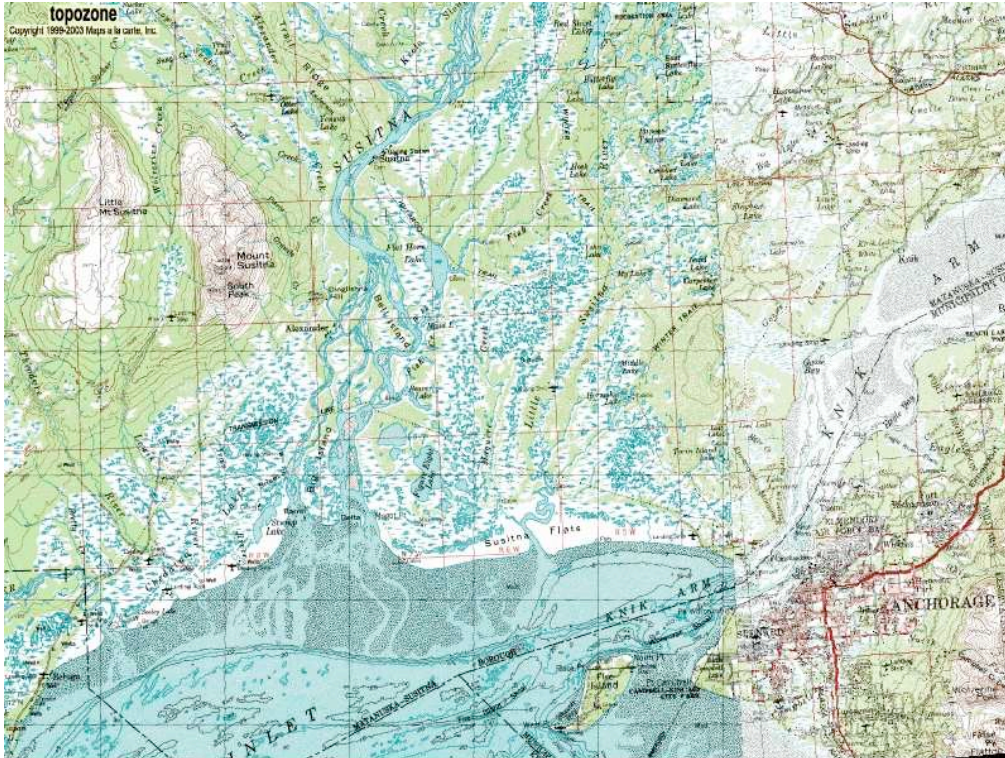
Relations between neighboring bands were not always friendly. Wars among people of different bands and between the Indians and neighboring cultures were quite frequent in pre-contact times. These wars took the form of surprise raids and ambushes rather than open, planned, hand-to-hand combat. (www.ankn.uaf.edu)

Discuss the main event in the book in relation to Athabascan culture with your students and ask them how this story helps us to understand this part of early Athabascan culture.

Lesson #2 Geography: maps and pictures

Teacher notes: The Sleeping Lady legend is a story about a real mountain in South-Central Alaska. Have your students look at maps of Alaska and of South-Central Alaska. Can they find Cook Inlet? Mt. Susitna? You can also choose

This is a topographic map of Mt. Susitna shown in relation to Cook Inlet and Anchorage. Have your students circle Mt. Susitna and Anchorage, locate the Cook Inlet and try to find where they live in relation to The Sleeping Lady.



This is Mt. Susitna as seen from Anchorage. Ask your students if they can see The Sleeping Lady? Have them outline and draw in where her head, body and legs would be.



Talk about its visibility from the greater Anchorage area and ask the students why they think this story exists.

Lesson #3 Pre-History of Alaska

Quote from the book: “Woolly mammoths and saber-toothed tigers roamed the forests and beaches but did not harm the gentle Inlet people.” – The Sleeping Lady by Ann Dixon

For this lesson students will learn about fossils and the pre-historic ages of Alaska. If a field trip to find fossils (i.e. Buffalo Mine Road Field Trip) isn't possible, bring in fossils for students to look at and sketch onto paper.

“Depending on what part of Alaska you visit, you can find fossils of marine invertebrates from the distant Paleozoic Era, Dinosaurs from the Cretaceous Period, or Ice Age mammals that disappeared just yesterday (in relative terms). Much of Alaska is underlain by permafrost. This is soil that is frozen year round. Therefore, it is not easy digging up fossils in Alaska. And fossils in tundra areas are generally covered with vegetation and muck.” (www.geoworld.com)

One of the greatest exhibits at the Museum of the North in Fairbanks is Alaska's best-preserved Ice Age fossil; a long-horned bison. It was discovered near Fairbanks in 1979 by a gold-miner. A mineral gave the skin a bluish color so the discovery was named Blue Babe.



Blue Babe at the Museum of the North

Lesson #4 Problem Solving Discussion

Focus on problem solving, both in the book and in the student's lives, with a discussion of these questions:

- Do you think Nekatla would have been successful in negotiating peace with the warriors if someone had not thrown a spear? Why or why not?
- Is it easier to start a fight or to stop one?

Lesson #5 Writing Activities

Teacher notes: Use the previous lesson's discussion on arguments and problem solving to create a writing assignment that has the students tell their own story.

Writing Assignment Suggestions:

- Write about a time when you were in a fight with someone, or could have been. How was your problem solved? Would you solve it the same way again, or can you think of a better way?
- Make up your own story about giants who turned into mountains. Explain why and how the change occurred.

Conclusion

This unit combines many aspects of Alaska to teach about native history, state pre-history, state geography and life skills. Much can be gleaned from Ann Dixon's book depending on the focus a teacher would like. As a unit it is useful to be able to draw all of this from a single source. Although I had read this book countless times growing up I never thought to use it in this way. It really shows how native stories can be used as teaching tools, whether it was in the traditional sense or in a Westernized school setting. One lesson of this unit specifies that Ann Dixon is not of native descent and that it is important to bring in native sources like a local storyteller or using modern Athabascan graphic novels. This is an important portion of this unit as it brings in genuine native opinion and experiences to a book that was not written by a native. I think that this book is still a functioning learning tool as long as these discrepancies are brought to the attention of students and teachers alike.

Potential Fieldtrips (dependent on school location)

- Museum of the North: Museum Science
Discover how museum collections represent millions of years of biodiversity and can teach us about our world. Examine and compare skulls to learn about animal characteristics and adaptations.
(www.uaf.edu/museum/education/field-trips/)
- Buffalo Mine Road
“The plant fossils found at the end of Buffalo Mine Road can be very impressive. Excellent specimens of complete leaves up to 5 inches long with fine detail can be recovered...the best fossils appear to be loose at the base of the exposure.” (Rockhounding Alaska by Montana Hodges)
- Wolf Lake, AK 99687 (Just off of Wasilla Fishhook Rd.)
“My children grew up in the Valley and when they were in the fourth and fifth grades they would have a fieldtrip every spring to Wolf Lake where they would hunt for fossils. My flower beds were very well decorated with fossils of leaves and such!” –Heather Roehl
- Alaska Native Heritage Center:
Native Dance and Drumming
Native Stories and String Stories
Native Games and Yo-yos
Whales and Whaling
Hall of Cultures Tour
Village Site Tour
(www.alaskanative.net)
- Alaska Museum of Natural History
Living in the Ice Age: Examine and learn about ancient Alaska’s ice age artifacts and animals. Try mammoth hunting, mitten sowing, an ice age fashion show, and more. (Pre-K, All grades)
OR
Rocks & Fossils: This workshop offers a more generalized view of rock types and focuses on the formation of fossils. Compare and contrast fossils through time and discover living fossils. (Grades 3-6)
(www.alaskamuseum.org)

State Standards

English/Language Arts

A student who meets the content standard should:

- in writing, demonstrate skills in sentence and paragraph structure, including grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation;
- in speaking, demonstrate skills in volume, intonation, and clarity;

Geography

A student who meets the content standard should:

- use maps and globes to locate places and regions; and
- discuss how and why groups and individuals identify with places.

History

A student who meets the content standard should:

- understand that history is a narrative told in many voices and expresses various perspectives of historical experience; and
- know that history is a bridge to understanding groups of people and an individual's relationship to society.

Skills for a Healthy Life

A student who meets the content standard should:

- resolve conflicts responsibly;
- evaluate how similarities and differences among individuals contribute to relationships; and
- understand how attitude and behavior affect the well-being of self and others.