

]Thresh[

# FIRST VOICES

## Two Tsitsistas/Suhtai Stories (Northern Cheyenne)



### Lesson overview: Telling your own story!

In this lesson, students watch two Tsitsistas/Suhtai (Northern Cheyenne) digital stories and then create their own story. *Tséhésenèstsestotse/The Big Dipper* tells the story of the children who became the constellation. *The Great Race* conveys how people came to be by challenging the buffalo to a race.

Students will discuss the two stories and then plot a story that is of importance to their lives using music, art, writing, movement or video. Depending on context, these may be Indigenous or non-Indigenous stories, from students' own background and/or experience, or beyond.

### Key lesson info

#### Subjects covered:

- ◆ Native American studies, specifically Tsitsistas/Suhtai (Northern Cheyenne) culture and language in Montana
- ◆ Storytelling
- ◆ Can be integrated into history, ELA (language arts), visual arts, music composition and sound design, choreography, dance, and film

#### Grade levels:

Grades 8 – college level

#### Duration:

2 classes of 60 minutes or more  
(which can be expanded)

### Preparing for the lesson

Ensure you have the video, sound, and internet connectivity for all students to view the stories below. If connectivity is an issue, contact First Voices ([info@threshdance.org](mailto:info@threshdance.org)) to request downloads. See our website for troubleshooting video.

## Discussion Questions Before Viewing

Ask your students what they already know about the Tsitsistas/Suhtai (Northern Cheyenne) tribe? What would you like to share?

- If the group is familiar with Tsitsistas/Suhtai (Northern Cheyenne) culture, ask if anyone knows any history, stories, or the language. Where have they learned these things? Who shared the knowledge?
- If the group is not familiar with Tsitsistas/Suhtai (Northern Cheyenne) culture, ask students what they know about Indigenous culture(s) in their area or more broadly.
- If students are unfamiliar with Native cultures, ask where they have gained what knowledge they do have (internet, movies, TV, songs, social media). Do those sources specify a tribe or depict all Indigenous people broadly? Do students think their sources are reliable? Why or why not?

If you, as an educator, are not familiar with Native American cultures, [click here](#) for some helpful resources.

## Watching the Stories

Screen both stories and ask students to compare them or consider them together.

**Story 01:** Tsèhésenèstsestotse/The Big Dipper (9 min 14 sec)

Tsèhésenèstsestotse/The Big Dipper is narrated by two Tsitsistas/Suhtai (Northern Cheyenne) Elders with elements of music, visual art, choreography, filmmaking, and dance.

**Story 02:** The Great Race (8 min 40 sec)

The Great Race is depicted by Lame Deer High School students in their own words using the same elements.

## Discussion Questions After Viewing

Give the students a few moments for reflection. See if they are speaking among themselves, seem eager to share, or are quietly considering the stories. Utilize the questions below to start the discussion. Always leave some time for students to think before answering. Those 30-60 seconds of thinking time often lead to thoughtful responses.

### Tsèhésenèstsestotse/Big Dipper Discussion Questions:

- What did you think was going on in The Big Dipper story?
- What did you see or hear that makes you say that?
- What else did you notice from the story?
- What was one way that the story was told that stood out to you? Why?
- Why do you think music, painting, animation, and movement were part of telling the story? Do you think it helped tell the story?
- Why do you think this story was told in the Tsitsistas/Suhtai (Northern Cheyenne) language?

If there is interest in language, you can show the [“Difference Between Speaking Cheyenne and English”](#) video.

### The Great Race Discussion Questions:

- What did you think was going on in The Great Race story?
- What did you see or hear that makes you say that?
- What else did you notice from the story?
- What was different about hearing the story from high school students after hearing an elder tell a story?

### Discussion Questions: Both stories

- What did you learn about Tsitsistas/Suhtai (Northern Cheyenne) culture from these stories?
- Did you learn about the past, present, future, or a combination?

[Click here](#) for resources with information about Tsitsistas/Suhtai (Northern Cheyenne) culture.

## Students Create their Stories

Students will create one scene from their own story based on an experience, stories they have been told, or stories that have a special meaning to them. Students can work alone or collaborate.

Ask students what stories about their own culture or life experiences are meaningful to them: Stories about family or friends? Something from a book or movie?

Choose a storytelling strategy from the box on the right that incorporates the subject(s) of your class.

Ask students to choose one meaningful scene from their own story that they can convey to an audience (one place, one person, one image, one emotion, etc.) How will they show why it is important? (Examples: exaggeration, contained body language or wild movements, choice of colors, a repeated phrase, etc.)

**Dance/Movement:** How could simple gestures or movements tell your story?

**Visual Art:** Will you create something representational or use colors and techniques to create a feeling? Suggest using watercolor paint or drawing with basic pencils and sharpies.

**Writing (ELA):** Write a short paragraph or several lines of a poem that encapsulate the scene from your story.

**Music/Sound Design:** Create 30 second worth of music or sound that conveys your scene

**Filmmaking:** Use your phone to create a 30 second scene. Will you recreate something literal or convey a mood or emotion using your phone's camera?

## Students Share their Stories

*Only* if students are comfortable, ask them to present or perform their story. Ask them about specific influences of the Tsitsistas/Suhtai (Northern Cheyenne) digital stories on their scene.

## Conclusion (or Continuation)

Ask students about similarities and differences between telling their own stories and the Tsitsistas/Suhtai (Northern Cheyenne) digital stories. Are there connections between their stories and the Tsitsistas/Suhtai stories?

If there is interest, explore the following videos.

- [Why Is Storytelling Important?](#) (Knowledge-keepers Ruthie Shoulderblade and Alaina Buffalo Spirit)
- Why Is [the Tsèhésenèstsestotse Story](#) Meaningful to the Northern Cheyenne People? (Ruthie Shoulderblade and Alaina Buffalo Spirit)

There are also videos from the artists involved in creating the stories, who come from tribes and cultures other than the Tsitsistas/Suhtai (Northern Cheyenne).

- Sammy Jo Bird ([Blackfeet Artist and rodeo champion](#))
- Chontay Standing Rock ([Chippewa Cree musician and composer](#))
- Preeti Vasudevan ([dancer, choreographer, Artistic Director of Thresh](#))

If students are engaged, the lesson can continue—building multiple scenes to tell a longer story.



## Assessment

Indicators	Not Engaged	Somewhat Engaged	Extremely Engaged
Did students discuss elements of the story connected to Tsitsistas/Suhtai (Northern Cheyenne) culture?	Not mentioned.	Some discussion.	Discussion based on previous knowledge or content of the digital stories plus desire to learn more.
Did students make observations about the stories being told in the present-day or being connected to contemporary culture or their own lives?	No observations related to the story being told and created in the present day.	Observed that people and places were contemporary.	Observed that people and places were contemporary and that elements of the stories connect to contemporary life.
Did students incorporate elements of storytelling from the two digital stories in their own story?	Not incorporated.	One or more of 5 artistic disciplines (movement, music, visual art, writing, and filmmaking) were used.	One or more of 5 artistic disciplines (movement, music, visual art, writing, and filmmaking) were incorporated.  Storytelling strategies from the stories were incorporated (pacing, humor, etc.)
Are students interested or in need of more resources on Tsitsistas/Suhtai (Northern Cheyenne) culture or Indigenous ways of telling stories?	Did not indicate interest.	Asked questions leading to the need for more resources on Native American culture, Northern Cheyenne culture, or both.	Students specifically asked for more resources on Native American culture, Northern Cheyenne culture, or both.

For more information, please get in touch with us at [info@threshdance.org](mailto:info@threshdance.org)

[www.firstvoices.net](http://www.firstvoices.net)

