



Return of the Condor © Jackie Fawn

## The Beautiful Buzzard: Yurok Storytelling and Shadow Puppet Performance

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**NASMC**  
Native American  
Studies  
Model Curriculum

# The Beautiful Buzzard:

## Yurok Storytelling and Shadow Puppet Performance

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### Authors and Collaborators:

- Haley Davis, Teaching Artist
- Mimi Dojka, Teaching Artist
- Ernie Albers Jr., Yurok Storyteller and Cultural Bearer
- Laura Woods, Yurok Elder and Cultural Bearer
- Jacqueline Dandeneau, Director Arcata Playhouse
- David Ferney, Video Director and Editor
- Lesson Contributor/Editor/Format by Maggie Peters (Yurok/Karuk) NASMC Learning Specialist, Humboldt County Office of Education

**Grade Level:** TK-2

**Subjects:** Theatre and Visual Art, English Language Arts, Social Science and World Languages

**Time Frame:** Four sessions 30 - 90 Minutes (See below)



### Lesson 1 (45 minutes)

-  Lesson 1 Slides: The Beautiful Buzzard: Yurok Storytelling and Shadow Puppet Perf...
-  Lesson 1 Facilitation/Script: The Beautiful Buzzard: Yurok Storytelling and Shadow P...
-  Lesson 1 Student Response: The Beautiful Buzzard: Yurok Storytelling and Shadow...
-  Lesson 1 Rubric: The Beautiful Buzzard: Yurok Storytelling and Shadow Puppet Perf...

### Lesson 2 (30 minutes)

-  Lesson 2 Slides: The Beautiful Buzzard: Yurok Storytelling and Shadow Puppet Perf...
-  Lesson 2 Facilitation/Script: The Beautiful Buzzard: Yurok Storytelling and Shadow P...
-  Lesson 2 Student Response: The Beautiful Buzzard: Yurok Storytelling and Shadow...
-  Lesson 2 Rubric: The Beautiful Buzzard: Yurok Storytelling and Shadow Puppet Perf...

### Lesson 3 (60 minutes)

-  Lesson 3 Slides: The Beautiful Buzzard: Yurok Storytelling and Shadow Puppet Perf...
-  Lesson 3 Facilitation/Script: The Beautiful Buzzard: Yurok Storytelling and Shadow P...



-  Lesson 3 Student Response: The Beautiful Buzzard: Yurok Storytelling and Shadow...
-  Lesson 3 Rubric: The Beautiful Buzzard: Yurok Storytelling and Shadow Puppet Perf...
-  Beautiful Buzzard Color Pages.pdf
-  Beautiful Buzzard Storyboard.pdf
-  Yurok Language Integration Slides: The Beautiful Buzzard: Yurok Storytelling and Sh...
-  Yurok Language Integration: The Beautiful Buzzard: Yurok Storytelling and Shadow ...

#### Lesson 4 (90 minutes)

-  Lesson 4 Slides: The Beautiful Buzzard: Yurok Storytelling and Shadow Puppet Perf...
-  Lesson 4 Facilitation/Script: The Beautiful Buzzard: Yurok Storytelling and Shadow P...
-  Beautiful Buzzard Color Pages.pdf
-  Beautiful Buzzard Storyboard.pdf
-  Shadow Performance Script: The Beautiful Buzzard: Yurok Storytelling and Shadow ...
-  Lesson 4 Rubric: The Beautiful Buzzard: Yurok Storytelling and Shadow Puppet Perf...

#### Materials Needed:

- Projector, Screen, Speaker for videos
- Pencils
- Colored pencils or crayons

#### Lesson 4 only:

- Overhead projector (if available), or clip on light
- Transparency sheets
- Pencils, erasers, colored crayons, pencils and markers, scissors, hole punches, wooden craft sticks or bamboo skewers, glue sticks, clear and masking tape

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#### Curriculum Themes

- ☒ History
- ☒ Cultural Strengths
- ☐ Law/Government
- ☒ Relationship to Place
- ☒ Cross Curricular Integration



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## Lesson Overview

This engaging and culturally rich unit invites young learners to explore the power of storytelling through the lens of the Yurok Tribe, the largest tribe in California and a Native community with a deep presence in Northwestern California. Ernie Albers, Yurok Storyteller shares his story “The Beautiful Buzzard” to engage students with the traditional artform of storytelling, how stories carry important messages, teach life lessons, and keep cultures alive across generations. Across four interactive lessons, students will actively listen, discuss, and respond to the story—learning about story structure (beginning, middle, end), elements (character, setting, action), practice Yurok language for animals names and expressive storytelling techniques (facial expression, gesture, sound effects, and voice). As students explore and reflect on storytelling practices, they will develop their own feelings and ideas and discover how oral stories can inspire art and performance.

By viewing a student-created shadow puppet version of the story by students at Big Lagoon School in Humboldt County, and creating their own characters and puppets, students will deepen their understanding of Yurok culture, worldview, language and the art of storytelling. Students are introduced to ethical practices for studying and creating specific culture-based experiences (appropriation versus appreciation) to understand the importance of inclusion, participation and consent when creating artistic expressions about Native peoples. The unit culminates in a joyful classroom shadow puppet making and theater performance of either “The Beautiful Buzzard” or “The Hare and the Tortoise”, allowing students to express what they’ve learned in a creative and memorable way. This unit not only builds literacy and artistic skills, but fosters cultural awareness, community connection, and a sense of shared tradition.

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## Learning Goals

### Lesson 1:

- Recognize that the Yurok people are an established presence within their community (#7)
- Discover that storytelling is a means for communicating important cultural information (#2)
- Actively listen to a Yurok story and name the lessons/morals
- Identify: story structure - beginning, middle and end; story elements - action, character and setting/scene; and storytelling techniques - facial expression, gesture, sound effects and voice.

### Lesson 2:

- Retell the story, “The Beautiful Buzzard”, in their own words
- Identify story structure, story elements, lessons/morals, narration, Yurok language
- Share what they saw, heard, felt and thought after viewing a video recording of a



shadow play

- Recognize that stories can serve as inspiration for other means of expression
- Gain awareness of the existence of the Yurok tribe within their community

Lesson 3:

- Demonstrate understanding of story structure and elements, as well as storytelling techniques
- Create original drawings, or embellish existing illustrations (artwork sheets) based on characters from the story, “The Beautiful Buzzard”.
- Build their knowledge of the Yurok Language and awareness of the existence of the Yurok Tribe within their community

Lesson 4:

- Use their original drawings to create shadow puppets
- Apply the storytelling techniques of facial expression (narrator), gesture, sound effects and voice
- Perform a shadow puppet performance of “The Hare and the Tortoise” or “The Beautiful Buzzard”

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## Background for Educators

Teaching cultural arts in the classroom—especially from cultures we do not personally belong to—requires thoughtful preparation, humility, and a deep respect for the communities we are learning from. This unit offers an opportunity to explore the power of traditional Native American storytelling through a Yurok lens, highlighting the story “The Beautiful Buzzard” told by respected, and entertaining Yurok storyteller Ernie Albers Jr. For the Yurok people of Northern California’s Klamath River region, storytelling is a vital tradition used to pass down lessons, values, and a deep connection to the land, ancestors, and language. Stories like “The Beautiful Buzzard” provide moral teachings, offer cultural understandings/worldview, and continue to shape the identity of the Yurok people today.

The Yurok Tribe is currently the largest Tribe in California, with more than 5,000 enrolled members. Beyond storytelling, the tribe leads important work in environmental restoration, wellness, justice, and language revitalization. In 2020, the Yurok Tribe Wellness Coalition partnered with Playhouse Arts, a Local Arts Agency, to create Skue-yech Son-ee-nah (Yurok for “we are becoming well”), a program that brings traditional stories into classrooms through shadow puppetry. This collaboration includes Yurok elders and storytellers, cultural workers, and teaching artists who support students in turning oral stories into live performances. The program has reached TK–6 students across Humboldt and Del Norte Counties, the homelands of the Yurok people, fostering cultural pride, emotional well-being, and creative expression.

As educators, it’s important to approach this work with care. When teaching about cultures we are



not a part of, best practices include sourcing stories from cultural bearers or tribal-endorsed materials, preserving the integrity of the story, and discussing the cultural significance with students in ways that invite respect and appreciation—not imitation. Be clear about the origins of the story, emphasize that these are living traditions, and encourage students to see storytelling as a bridge between people, not something to copy or change. Resources such as the Yurok Language Program website and the included “Appropriation vs. Appreciation” guide can support teachers in navigating these conversations.

Equally important is the recognition that theater arts deserve more space in our classrooms. Despite being too often undervalued, theater builds essential skills in communication, empathy, creativity, and collaboration. Shadow puppet theater in particular is a rich, accessible medium for TK–2 learners to engage with literacy, visual art, and movement. Through this unit, students explore story structure (beginning, middle, end), story elements (character, action, setting), and performance tools like facial expression, gesture, voice, and sound effects. They listen, reflect, draw, create, and perform through interactive learning about storytelling as well as themselves and the first peoples of California.

You do not need to be a theater expert or a cultural insider to guide this unit successfully. What matters most is your openness to learning, your respect for the stories and people you are sharing, and your belief in the value of creative expression. This unit provides the tools, context, and inspiration to support both cultural learning and joyful performance in the classroom. By integrating Yurok stories, language and shadow theater, you are helping students recognize the importance of tradition, the beauty of difference, and the power of their own voices.


#### Appropriation vs Appreciation Resource

[Using a Tri-fold Presentation Board for a Durable Screen](#)

[How to Make a Portable Shadow Screen for the Classrooms](#)

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## Curriculum Standards

 Standards By Lesson: The Beautiful Buzzard: Yurok Storytelling and Shadow Puppet Perform...

### California Arts Standards for Theatre

- Creating – Anchor Standard 1: Generate and Conceptualize Artistic Ideas and Work
  - PK–2: 1.TH:Cr1a, 1.TH:Cr1b, 1.TH:Cr1c
  - K–2: 2.TH:Cr1Past Times History+4California Department of Education+4halsey.cofc.edu+4
- Performing – Anchor Standard 4: Select, Analyze, and Interpret Artistic Work for Presentations



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- PK–2: 1.TH:Pr4
- Performing – Anchor Standard 5: Develop and Refine Artistic Techniques and Work for Presentation
  - K–2: 1.TH:Pr5
- Responding – Anchor Standard 8: Interpret Intent and Meaning in Artistic Work
  - PK–2: 1.TH:Re8b
- Connecting – Anchor Standard 11: Relate Artistic Ideas and Works with Societal, Cultural, and Historical Context to Deepen Understanding
  - PK–2: 1.TH:Cn11.1b

### **California Arts Standards for Visual Arts**

- Creating – Anchor Standard 1: Generate and Conceptualize Artistic Ideas and Work
  - PK–2: 1.VA:Cr1.1, 1.VA:Cr1.2
- Creating – Anchor Standard 2: Organize and Develop Artistic Ideas and Work
  - PK–2: 1.VA:Cr2.1, 1.VA:Cr2.2, 1.VA:Cr2.3
- Connecting – Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and Relate Knowledge and Personal Experiences to Make Art
  - PK–2: 1.VA:Cn10

### **California Common Core State Standards – English Language Arts**

#### **Speaking and Listening**

- SL.1.3: Ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to gather additional information or clarify something that is not understood.
- SL.K.2: Confirm understanding of a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media by asking and answering questions about key details and requesting clarification if something is not understood.
- SL.2.2: Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.
- SL.2.3: Ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to clarify comprehension, gather additional information, or deepen understanding of a topic or issue.

### **California History-Social Science Standards**

- K.1: Students understand that being a good citizen involves acting in certain ways.
  - Follow rules, such as sharing and taking turns, and know the consequences of breaking them.

Learn examples of honesty, courage, determination, individual responsibility, and patriotism in American and world history from stories and folklore.

Know beliefs and related behaviors of characters in stories from times past and





- understand the consequences of the characters' actions.
- 1.1: Students describe the rights and individual responsibilities of citizenship.
  - Understand the elements of fair play and good sportsmanship, respect for the rights and opinions of others, and respect for rules by which we live, including the meaning of the "Golden Rule."

### California Ethnic Studies Outcomes

- 7: Supporting a community focus [California Department of Education+3California Department of Education+3California Department of Education+3](#)

### World Languages

- WL.CM1.N Students demonstrate understanding, interpret, and analyze what is heard, read, or viewed on a variety of topics, from authentic texts.
- WL.CL2.N To interact with cultural competence, students demonstrate understanding and use the target language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the relationships among the products cultures produce, the practices cultures manifest, and the perspectives that underlie them.
- WL.CL4.A Describe how products, practices, and perspectives change when cultures come into contact

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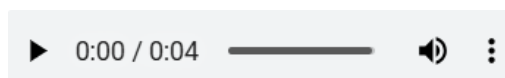
### Teacher Directions

- Open the slides presentation and have it ready to display for whole group instruction. Project in slideshow mode - the slides are designed to facilitate the lesson. Slides are animated, click slowly to gradually reveal text.
- Set up speakers so all students can clearly hear the song and pronunciation.
- Slides Projected in slideshow mode. Note: slides are animated to slowly provide written text - they will appear on click. This lesson is integrated with Yurok language, featuring audio links. To listen to each word or phrase, click the audio playback icons one at a time.



(image of playback icon)

There may be a slight pause while the audio loads after each click. Clicking the playback icon will reveal a playback bar that allows you to play, pause, adjust playback speed or fast-forward the audio.



(example image of playback bar)

You do not need to do anything with the playback bar to listen to the audio file.





- Optional: Preview the slides ahead of time to decide whether to do the full lesson in one sitting or break it into smaller segments.
- Each Lesson Script and Facilitation Tool is linked above for more specific instructions by lesson.

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## Scaffolding

Universal Design for Learning:

Engagement: Consider the following method to support with lesson engagement:

- Create cooperative learning groups
- Provide feedback that is frequent, timely, and specific
- Provide feedback that encourages perseverance, focuses on development of efficacy and self-awareness, and encourages the use of specific supports and strategies in the face of challenge

Representation: Consider the following method to support with multiple means of representation:

- Allow the use of Text-to-Speech and screen readers
- Embed visual, non-linguistic support for vocabulary clarification (pictures, videos, etc.)
- “Chunk” information into smaller elements

Action and Expression: Consider the following method to support in presenting their learning in multiple ways:

- Provide options for Physical Action
- Provide sentence starters or sentence strips

For additional ideas to support your students, check out the resources below:

- UDL Guidelines at CAST (2018) <http://udlguidelines.cast.org>
- Oakland University ENGAGEMENT: Universal Design for Learning Principle [ENGAGEMENT: Universal Design for Learning Principle TEACHING STRATEGIES](#)
- Oakland University REPRESENTATION: Universal Design for Learning Principle [REPRESENTATION: Universal Design for Learning Principle TEACHING STRATEGIES](#)
- Oakland University ACTION AND EXPRESSION: Universal Design for Learning Principle [ACTION & EXPRESSION: Universal Design for Learning Principle TEACHING STRATEGIES](#)



## Multilingual Learner Supports:

Emerging: Consider the following method to support with emerging students:

- Use group work and peer learning to allow students to learn from each other.
- Repeatedly model how to say or write a new word or phrase, and give students many opportunities to practice.

Expanding: Consider the following method to support with expanding students:

- Encourage students to practice using new vocabulary in conversation or group discussions, guided by structured prompts or pair work.
- Use context to help explain new vocabulary.

Bridging: Consider the following method to support with bridging students:

- Extend content vocabulary with multiple examples and non-examples.

Reaching: Consider the following method to support with bridging students:

- Reinforce academic vocabulary across content areas. Revisit new vocabulary frequently.

For additional guidance around scaffolding for multilingual learners, please consult the following resources:

- English Learner Toolkit of Strategies  
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/ujkdc2xp1dqjzrlq55czph50c3sq1ngu>
- Providing Appropriate Scaffolding  
<https://www.sdcoe.net/educators/multilingual-education-and-global-achievement/oracy-toolkit/providing-appropriate-scaffolding#scaffolding>
- Strategies for ELD <https://ucdavis.box.com/s/dcp15ymah51uwizpmmt2vys5zr2r5reu>
- ELA/ELDFramework  
<https://www.caeducatorstogether.org/resources/6537/ela-eld-frameworkHMONGHISTANDCULTSTUDIESMODELCURRICULUM>
- California ELD Standards  
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/vqn43cd632z22p8mfzn2h7pntc71kb02>

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## Additional Resources for Teachers

- The Kennedy Center for the Arts - Teaching Artists Present: [Storyteller's Toolbox with Sherry Norfolk](#)
- [Using a Tri-fold Presentation Board for a Durable Screen](#)
- [How to Make a Portable Shadow Screen for the Classrooms](#)
- [Yurok Tribe website](#)



- [Yurok Tribal Court - Yurok Tribe Wellness Coalition](#)
  - Judge Abby Abinanti ([video link here](#))
- [Playhouse Arts](#)
- [Yurok Language Project](#) (UC Berkeley Department of Linguistics)
- [Yurok-English Animal Vocabulary List with audio links](#)
- [Yurok Language App](#)
- [Artful Thinking Strategies](#)
- [The Ka'm-t'em - Indigenous Knowledge project](#)

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### **California Native American Studies Model Curriculum**

The California Native American Studies Model Curriculum (NASMC) will support the design and development of open-source lesson plans, primary source documents, planning resources, teaching strategies, and professional development activities to assist California K-12 educators in teaching about California Native American Studies. Per AB 167, the NASMC is defined as lesson plans, primary source documents, planning resources, teaching strategies, and professional development activities to assist educators in teaching about Native American Studies. The traditional cultural knowledge within lessons, including Native language, art, media and stories, are owned by the respective Tribal nations, Native knowledge keepers, artists, producers and authors of the curriculum as indicated in each lesson.

