

# “How Grandmother Spider Stole the Sun”

(art + history; art + social studies; art + literature)

This lesson plan will introduce students to the Native American folk tale “How Grandmother Spider Stole the Sun”, told by Joseph Bruchac. Students are then challenged to explore a visual narration of the legend 3-dimensional art media.

This myth comes from the Muskogee (Creek) Native Americans of Oklahoma, who told it as an explanation of the origin of sunlight. Not having the benefits of science to help them understand the natural world, the people would pass down stories and legends from one generation to the next that would explain the unexplainable. The complete narration is on page 2.

**Grade Levels** K-4

## Preparation

1. Read and discuss “How Grandmother Spider Stole the Sun”. Focusing on each animal’s individual characteristics and how its attempt to steal the sun changed the animal.

## Process

1. Students may work alone or as groups to create a 3-dimensional, sculptural piece of art (a diorama), illustrating a scene from the story. Each scene will include:  
**A Setting:** Use a box or build a stage-like setting for the scene to take place. Use paper, paint or clay to make grass, trees, rocks, hills, etc. Because this story was told by a plains tribe, the setting may be reflective of the Great Plains. It could also take place on the entire earth (remember - they didn’t know it was round!)  
**A Setting:** Have students select at least two of the characters in the story and sculpt them with Model Magic or clay. Feathers, beads,



## Materials

Crayola® Model Magic®, 2-lb buckets assorted colors (33214-1002) and Naturals (33214-1008), need approximately 2-oz per student

Blick Economy Construction paper, 12" x 18", (11420-1006), package of 50 sheets, distribute across the class

Blick Multi-Purpose White Glue (23872-1065), 8-oz bottles, share one bottle between two students

3M Scotch #810 Magic Transparent Tape, 3/4" (23012-1100), share one roll between four students

Blick Premium Tempera (00011-), assorted colors, share across the class

Optional

Natural Feather Assortment (61432-1005), share one bag across class

Trait-Tex® Cotton Warp (65211-1375)

Indian Seed Beads, multicolor (60725-1000)

Recycled materials and found objects

## Process, continued

tempera paint, yarn and other materials can be incorporated into each character to give them personality.

**Action:** Instead of trying to tell the entire story in one scene, have students select one moment and capture it in the interaction of the characters. Some ideas:

- The beginning of the story, as the creatures sit in the dark and wish for the light
- The middle of the story, when Grandmother Spider hauls the sun away in her bag
- The end of the story, as the feathers burn away from the poor buzzard's head.

## Options

- Make puppets out of the characters, and tell the story using motion and movement

### Lesson Plan and Artwork submitted by Debbie Gershman, West Hartford, CT

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## National Standards

Content Standard #1 — Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes

**K-12** Students use different media, techniques, and processes to communicate ideas, experiences, and stories

Content Standard #3 — Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

**K-12** Students select and use subject matter, symbols, and ideas to communicate meaning

Content Standard #4 — Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

**K-12** Students demonstrate how history, culture, and the visual arts can influence each other in making and studying works of art

## HOW GRANDMOTHER SPIDER STOLE THE SUN

A Muskogee (Creek) Story

From Native American Stories by Joseph Bruchac

*When the Earth was first made, there was no light. It was very hard for the animals and the people in the darkness. Finally, the animals decided to do something about it.*

*"I have heard there is something called the Sun," said the Bear." It is kept on the other side of the world, but the people there will not share it. Perhaps we can steal a piece of it."*

*All the animals agreed that it was a good idea. But who would be the one to steal the Sun?*

*The Fox was the first to try. He sneaked to the place where the Sun was kept. He waited until no one was looking. Then he grabbed a piece of it in his mouth and he dropped it. To this day all foxes have black mouths because the first fox burned his carrying the Sun.*

*The Possum tried next. In those days, Possum had a very bushy tail. She crept up to the place where the Sun was kept, broke off a piece and hid it in her tail. Then she began to run, bringing the Sun back to the animals and*

*the people. But the Sun was so hot it burned off all the hair on her tail and she lost of it. To this day all possums have bare tails because the Sun burned away the hair on that first possum.*

*Then Grandmother Spider tried. Instead of trying to hold the Sun herself, she wove a bag out of her webbing. She put the piece of the Sun into her bag and carried it back with her. Now the question was where to put the Sun.*

*Grandmother Spider told them, "The Sun should be up high in the sky. Then everyone will be able to see it and benefit from its light".*

*All the animals agreed, but none of them could reach up high enough. Even if they carried it to the top of the tallest tree, that would not be high enough for everyone on the Earth to see the Sun. Then they decided to have one of the birds carry the Sun up to the top of the sky. Everyone knew the Buzzard could fly the highest, so he was chosen.*

*The Buzzard place the Sun on top of his head, where his feathers were the thickest, for the Sun was still very hot, even inside Grandmother Spider's bag. He began to fly, up and up toward the top of the sky. As he flew the Sun*

*got hotter. Up and up he went, higher and higher, and the Sun grew hotter and hotter still. Now the Sun was burning through Grandmother Spider's bag, but*

*the Buzzard still kept flying up toward the top of the sky. Up and up he went, and the Sun grew hotter. Now it was burning away the feathers on top of his head, but he continued on. Now all of his feathers were gone, but he flew higher. Now it was turning the bare skin of his head all red, but he continued to fly. He flew until he reached the top of the sky, and there he placed the Sun where it would give light to everyone.*