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# SKYWOMAN



**GRADE: FIFTH**

**SUBJECTS: ELA, DANCE, SCIENCE**

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# SKYWOMAN

## The Story of Sky Woman according to the Haudenosaunee

Long before the world was created, there was an island in the sky where the Sky People lived. One day, a tree toppled over and tore a hole in the sky. A pregnant Sky Woman grew curious about the hole. She came near – so near that she tumbled through the opening. She grabbed at the tree of life, but that didn't stop her fall. It took her a long time to fall, dancing like a seed on the breeze. She was still clutching the plants when a flock of geese swooped to catch her.

The birds set her down on the Great Turtle's back. Other animals dove to the ocean floor and brought mud up to the surface. They packed the mud on the Great Turtle's back. Over and over, they dove down until they had brought up enough mud to make room for trees and plants to grow. Then they dove some more. When they were finished, they had made a whole world on the Great Turtle's back.

Sky Woman circled the edges of the turtle's back and with each step the land swelled. She scattered the seeds from the tree of life that sank deeply into the mud. Up grew the towering oaks and sweetgrass, the vegetables and strawberries, and plants that give medicine. And now that there was plenty to eat, the animals came to live, each bearing their own gifts.

First came the long and slender cougar gripping with her claws and steering with her tail. With stealth vision she prowls the swamps alone at night, guarding her territory. Cautious, smart, and swift, she symbolizes a good hunter and protector.

Next came the long legged heron wading patiently in the slow moving water. Her long dagger like bill lets her pick for fish and dig in the sand for crabs. Herons have good natures and will often dance about on their long legs if they hear the right song. Such a very big bird, it was not easy for her to lift off the ground, but once she was in the air she could fly very well indeed. A good luck sign if you are fishing, the heron brings peace, stability, and harmony.

Out slithered the clever snakes. Agile and quick, they smell with their tongues, and blend masterfully into the leaves or when warming themselves on a sunny day. They can stay still for hours waiting for unsuspecting prey. There are many different kinds of snakes and they are said to make good friends and are used for healing and protection. The symbol for medicine is two snakes coiled around a staff. For some they are messengers, sent to bring vital rain for crops and water in harsh climates.

Dolphins keep our oceans in balance. Mammals, not fish, dolphins are social creatures. They make life-long friendships and live in groups called pods. Mamas can often be seen playing in the waves with their children; teaching them the skills they need to survive. They produce clicking sounds and echoes to find objects and prey. When they sleep, their mind is half awake so that they remember to come up for air. To see a dolphin near the shore is a good sign, meaning good luck or protection is coming.

Quick and nimble, deer can be our messengers. With eyes on the sides of their head, they can warn us of what is up ahead. Their cupped ears rotate in different directions, making them hard to sneak up on. Their feeding habits bring sunlight to the forest floor and help plants grow and thrive. Deer remind us that we should live lives that are balanced and graceful.

And that is how the animals and plants came to be with Sky Woman on Turtle Island. Sky Woman gave birth, and when she did, she became the mother of the two-legged people. The Haudenosaunee have told Sky Woman's story for countless generations. Turtle Island is what they call the land that was created thanks to Sky Woman and the Great Turtle.



# SKYWOMAN

**AUTHOR:** DR. AMY BRAMBLE

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## STANDARDS

### ELA

Writing Standard 2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Communications Standard 3: Communicate information through strategic use of multiple modalities and multimedia to enrich understanding when presenting ideas and information.

### DANCE

**Artistic Processes: Creating-** I can conceive and develop new artistic ideas and work.

- Anchor Standard 1: I can use movement exploration to discover and create artistic ideas and works.

### SCIENCE

**5.L.4A.2** Obtain and communicate information to describe and compare the biotic factors (including individual organisms, populations, and communities) of different terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.

**5.L.4B.3** Construct explanations for how organisms interact with each other in an ecosystem (including predators and prey, and parasites and hosts).

**5.L.4B.1** Analyze and interpret data to explain how organisms obtain their energy and classify an organism as producers, consumers (including herbivore, carnivore, and omnivore), or decomposers (such as fungi and bacteria).



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## MATERIALS

- chromebook
- informational texts
- writing paper
- writing utensils

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## INTRODUCTION

1. The teacher will introduce the Skywoman [video](#) to students and discuss how the dancers used their body and movement to present the story.
2. Students will discuss what was fiction and non-fiction in the details of the presentation. The teacher will relate to how folklore or stories from different cultures can include facts and fiction to teach a lesson.

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## LESSON

1. The students will watch the Skywoman [video](#) and create a fact and fiction chart as a class. For example: the facts about animals may include the heron having long legs or the dolphins living in pods.
2. The class will talk about why animals in different habitats have various adaptations to survive. For example, if the animals in the rainforest could survive in the boreal or temperate forests. Students will talk about the possible characteristics different animals may need to survive in different habitats.
3. The teacher will divide the class into four groups and assign each group a habitat. Examples include marshland, rainforest, desert, prairie, evergreen forest, tundra, grassland, ocean, coral reef. Each group will conduct research on their habitat including the animals that live there, their adaptations for surviving in the specific environment, and how



they interact with other organisms in the habitat. Teacher and students will discuss how to use different resources for their research including reliable internet sources, such as National Geographic and text resources (non-fiction texts).

4. The next steps can happen simultaneously:

- a) Writing component: Students will present their research in written form. Students will write about a minimum of three animals and their characteristics/adaptations that specifically help them to survive in their environment. Students will use descriptive writing to introduce their habitat and include details of how the specific adaptations help the animals thrive and interact with abiotic and biotic factors.
- b) The students will work together in their groups to create a dance or movement piece to portray three animals. The students can use the Skywoman video as a model. Students should think about using different levels (low, medium, high), space (front, middle, back), and actions (slither, crawl, reach, shake, jump, etc.). Students will present their group movement presentation to the class. The presentation can be done in two different ways. One, have the group give the name of the habitat and do the movements without any narration of description so that students in class can observe the movements and guess possible animals they are representing. Or, groups can do the presentation with a simple narration/description of the animals.

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## **CLOSURE**

The teacher will have the students reflect on their writing and movement activity. What did they enjoy? What would they do differently? What were some things they learned through either their own research or through watching others present? Was creating movements to represent their animals easy or difficult or did that depend on the creature?



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## **ASSESSMENT**

Students will be assessed on the informative writing piece and movement piece. A rubric can be used for just the writing piece, or include a section for the dance piece as well.