American Indian Origin Stories
Resources for teachers

Background information for teachers.
Tribal Creation Stories

All the tribes in the state of Montana have oral histories that chronicle the beginnings of their people and the creation of the world. Tribal oral histories relate the order of creation and the place of human beings, describing a system of relationships between people and the natural world.

The beginnings of Indian people in America are most commonly explained through the Bering Land Bridge. The assertion that people crossed a temporary land bridge connecting Siberia and Alaska is still commonly taught as fact though it exists only as theory. The assumption being that a supposition informed by science is trust worthier than a spiritual origin embedded in a people’s oral history.

Current scholarship is now challenging the Bering Land Bridge theory, and providing new evidence for divergent possibilities for human presence in the Americas. Archeological evidence, tribal oral histories, linguistic research, and other studies are presenting alternative explanations for the origin of human communities in the Americas. Key points to be noted in these content topics are: the Bering Land Bridge explanation remains an unproven theory, and indigenous people in the America’s have their own explanations as to their origins and homelands. The following brief segment from the “Who Are the Salish” section of Challenge to Survive, History of the Salish Tribes of the Flathead Indian Reservation, Unit 1, From Time Immemorial: Traditional Life, Pre-1800, provides a brief discussion on this topic. The example of Salish and Pend d’Oreille oral history demonstrates congruity between traditional knowledge and contemporary scientific research and discovery.

The Salish and Pend d’Oreille tell of living in what is now Montana from the time when Coyote killed off the nalisqélixʷtn – the giants – and prepared the world for the coming of people. Many Coyote stories contain what may be considered fairly precise descriptions of the geologic events of the last ice age. Anthropologists and other non-Indians have been skeptical of this, thinking there was little “evidence” that Salish or Qíspé people had been here that long ago. But recently, archaeologists have found sites in the South Fork of the Flathead River dating back 12,000 to 14,000 years, about the time of the end of the last ice age. Many of the Coyote stories, passed down for thousands of years, describe what geologists have only lately deduced: the extension of glaciers about halfway down the Mission Valley, the flooding of Western Montana beneath Lake Missoula, the breaking up of the ice dam that contained those waters, the gradual retreat, advance, and then final retreat of the cold as the ice age came to an end.¹

For those interested in pursuing a more thorough treatment of the Bering Land Bridge theory, the late Vine Deloria Jr. provides an excellent evaluation in the essay titled “Low Bridge, Everybody Cross” in his book Spirit and Reason: The Vine Deloria, Jr. Reader.² Also, Charles C. Mann provides related and thought-provoking information in his book 1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus.³
Tribal oral histories chronicle the longest period of Montana history. Diverse languages, economies, political systems, and kinship systems represent immense bodies of knowledge spanning and integrating such disciplines as geography, pharmacology, astronomy, philosophy, and theology. This rich history has a significant contribution to the knowledge and understanding of the people and land of Montana. The tribal history projects of the seven tribal colleges present an opportunity to explore new narratives in a new study of Montana History.

If we travel back on a timeline to Time Immemorial, we would not find all twelve tribes currently residing on Montana’s seven reservations. Many tribes would be in Canada or the Great Lakes Area. The tribal history projects share not only their Creation stories; they also provide accounts of their journey to the place they now call home. Some of the journeys were directed by vision; others were motivated by a wave of change that brought pressure and dispossession.

The Salish, Pend d’Oreille, and Kootenai of the Flathead Indian Reservation are fortunate to be among the oldest inhabitants of the state. Salish and Kootenai place names describe the history and geography of Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Washington, and Western Canada. Many of these place names are some of the oldest words in the Salish and Kootenai languages. They recount an old tribal world and generations of occupation and relationship with a sacred landscape. Oral history and archeology have documented Salish, Pend d’Oreille, and Kootenai sites in the state that are thousands of years old.

Oral history of the Pikuni of the Blackfeet Reservation also includes a large geographic area, including Montana, and describes the Rocky Mountain range as the backbone of the world. The Pikuni are the southernmost band of the Blackfoot Confederacy of Canada. In the Blackfeet Creation Story, Napi (Old Man) creates the geographic features of the world as well as the plants, animals and human beings.

**Blackfeet: The Creation**

Our origination stories begin with the formation of the earth world (North American continent) and continue on through the present 21st Century. In 1949, Yellow Kidney in an interview with Claude Schaeffer about Origination stated: “The supernatural was an old man. Not a white man but he had gray hair and a beard. He is the person who treated the human beings and helped them. His name is White Beard.” White Beard is a different person from Napi and lives up in the sky. There are three or four of these persons of which White Beard is the leader. ⁴

Charlie Reavis, a respected spokesperson for our people in 1951 shared the following origination history. “The distinguishing ‘Above Medicine Persons’ are the Sun, who had a wife the Moon, and their only surviving child, a son called Morning Star. The Sun and Napi are both creators, although have a different function. Sun created the people and the animals, while Napi created the culture of the people.”⁵
Chewing Black Bones, a respected Blackfeet elder, told Ella E. Clark the following creation story in 1953. Clark later published the account in her book, Indian legends From the Northern Rockies. This story is available in its entirety in the Montana Office of Public Instruction's publication, *Montana Indians Their History and Location*, sent to school libraries and also published online (http://www opi mt gov pdf indians resources MTIndiansHistoryLocation pdf).

"Old Man came from the south, making the mountains, the prairies, and the forests as he passed along, making the birds and the animals also. He traveled northward making things as he went, putting red paint in the ground here and there—arranging the world as we see it today. He made the Milk River and crossed it; being tired, he went up on a little hill and lay down to rest. As he lay on his back, stretched out on the grass with his arms extended, he marked his figure with stones. You can see those rocks today; they show the shape of his body, legs, arms and hair." 6

Both the Assiniboine and the Gros Ventre Creation stories are presented in an oral history provided by Minerva Allen, part of the 2008 Fort Belknap Tribal History Project. The Assiniboine (Nakota) Creation story, as told by Minerva Allen, is available as a segment selected from the Fort Belknap Tribal History Project on the Companion DVD. Here is a portion of that story:

"Ik-tomi, to the Assiniboine is a legendary character who created the world. He is not to be confused with the Great Spirit, God-Wakan-Tanka. Ik-tomi made the waters and the land. He made heaven as well as the night and the day...Seven men and women he made from the earth...he felt that the land that they were on was not the right place for them, he wanted to find another place." 7

And so the story continues with Ik-tomi and the seven people traveling on oyster shells on the water, beginning the journey to a new place. The "new place" was to be created from mud recovered from underneath the water.

The Gros Ventre Creation story, as well, involves water in the form of a great flood.

"The Keeper of the Flat Pipe (Tha Ee Tsa), known as Earthmaker, knew in some way that the earth was going to be covered with water...The Keeper made a big raft of logs and took the pipe and put it on the raft. In the course of time, the whole earth was covered with water." 8

The story unfolds with Earthmaker instructing many animals to dive down and bring back some earth from the bottom of the water. The earth finally recovered was used by Earthmaker to make ground on top of the water.

The story "How the Earth Was Made," is the appropriate beginning in their new Northern Cheyenne history text. The late Cheyenne historian, John Stands In Timber, shared a brief version of this Cheyenne Creation Story and also talks about the land and the people's movements to find a suitable place for living.
Among my grandparents’ relatives were two old women, Yellow Haired Woman and White Necklace. When I was small, they used to tell us how the world was created, and when I returned from school in 1905 they were still alive, so I visited them to write the story down.

They said the Creator took dirt or mud and made a person, and blew breath into this person’s mouth and he became alive. They did not remember what happened right after he was made. But after a time there were more people, and the Creator taught them how to live, using small animals for their food, and wild fruit. They mentioned Indian turnips and many other foods and ways to prepare them. And he taught them to make and use spears, and to hunt game.

All this took place in another country, where great waters were all around them. They thought it could have been an island in the ocean. They lived mostly on fish and birds there, and they had a hard time as they were often hungry. But they were able to travel, and at last they came to a place where they found large animals. That encouraged them to go on farther to find a better country where they could live.9

The Northern Cheyenne tell of a time when their people were far to the northeast, living along the Great Lakes and Hudson Bay as a fishing people. Tribal members today relate that some of their fishing songs from this time are still remembered. Oral history follows a tribal movement by canoe, across a large marshland, which is thought to be along the northern border of Minnesota and southern Ontario. The Cheyenne then settled along a lake, thought to be near the headwaters of the Mississippi, and practiced fishing and hunting small game. Documentation of the Cheyenne on a 1673 map locates them on the eastern side of the Mississippi, around the Great Lakes, south of Lake Superior and west of Lake Michigan. At this location, they had built permanent villages of earth lodges and had begun to grow corn as a significant addition to their diet of dried meat and other plant foods. It was also during this time that the Cheyenne began to travel west to hunt buffalo.

The Crow Tribe too relates the story of a migration journey, traveling from the east to the west and arriving in Montana sometime in the 1600s. The Crow or Apsáalooke, were once part of the Hidatsa Tribe living along the Missouri. Earlier history traces tribal movement from the Northeast. The Tribe sent out several hunting parties for buffalo. All but one returned empty-handed. The hunters that traveled west returned with packs filled with buffalo. It is said that this event influenced the Tribe’s movement west to perhaps northern Minnesota and southern Manitoba, and later to northeast North Dakota. It was at this location that the story of the two Chiefs is told – Red Scout and No Intestines (No Vitals). Both Chiefs fasted, seeking guidance for their people.

Red Scout received from the Great Spirit a kernel of corn and was told to settle down and plant the seed for his sustenance. No Vitals received a pod of seeds and was told to go west to the high mountains and there plant the seeds in the pod. These seeds were sacred and the proper way to use them would be revealed to the people someday. The journey was resumed and by about 1600 – 1625 A. D., the group reached the Missouri River and moved in with the Mandan whose village was on the west side of the river near the mouth of Heart River.
Later the newcomers built their own village of earthen lodges. It was during this period and place that Chief No Vitals, using a woman's quarrel over meat as an excuse, left for the western mountains with around 400 people. It is said that No Vitals remarked that day, 'It is time I heed the Great Spirit's instructions, I have tarried too long.'

Two versions of the Crow migration story are included in their tribal history document sent to all school libraries - *The Apsáalooke (Crow Indians) of Montana: A Tribal Histories Teacher's Guide.* The Crow migration stories are also available on-line at the Little Big Horn Tribal College website (http://lib.lbhc.cc.mt.us/).

Tribes of the Fort Peck Reservation, the Assiniboine and Sioux, share a history marked by a dispossession from their homelands. As the country was being colonized and eastern tribes were moving west, boundaries of tribal territories shifted as dislocated tribes were forced to leave their homelands. Tribal procurement of modern weapons had a heavy impact on tribal movements through shifting military power and pressure as Indian people searched for new land and alliances. Persistent pressure brought the Assiniboine and Sioux down from Canada into the Milk River country.

Consequently, the Assiniboine of the Fort Belknap Reservation, like many other Montana tribes, tell of a pilgrimage from their ancestral homelands to the west, eventually ending in present day Montana.

"In recorded history, the Assiniboine, who call themselves Nakoda's people, meaning people not at war, are mentioned by the early Jesuits as a distinct and robust tribe living in the forest and lake regions around Lake Winnipeg in 1610."

"The Assiniboine were once part of the Yanktonai Sioux, living as one people with them in the Lake Superior region of what is now northern Minnesota and southwestern Ontario. The Assiniboines split off from the Sioux in the 1600s. They migrated westward onto the northern Plains, first settling west of Lake Winnipeg in what is now the province of Manitoba. Some bands later moved farther west to the banks of the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan."

The Gros Ventre (White Clay People) of the Fort Belknap Reservation have a parallel history of leaving their homelands for a new country.

"Long ago we were one with the Arapaho. In the early 1700s in North Dakota, the tribe divided, with the Arapaho moving southwest and the White Clay People moving northwest into Canada... We journeyed north past the forks of the Saskatchewan Rivers, then moved west and became a part of the feared Blackfeet Confederacy... Heavy pressure from more numerous and better-armed tribes forced us south to the Missouri by the first decade of the nineteenth century. Before moving permanently out of Canada, we destroyed another fort, the Chesterfield at the mouth of the Red Deer River, in 1826."
History of the Chippewa and Cree of Rocky Boy’s Reservation is replete with journeys and expeditions as they made their way from homelands in the northeast to the west.

“A long time ago, the Indians came from far back East (Sali-kahs-te-nok). The white men say that the Indians came from across the ice, from out of the Northwest, but this isn’t true. The Indians came from the East not from the West (Pah-ki-si-mo-tahk). This wasn’t very fast. I don’t know how many years it took for the Indians to move West...Many Chippewa and Cree in Montana, accustomed to moving throughout Montana, Idaho, Saskatchewan and Alberta, came to Rocky Boy’s Reservation to settle permanently.” 16

The Creation and Migration stories of Montana tribes provide us a window into ancient worldviews and an incredibly expansive landscape that Indian people occupied. At times, people made decisions to move to find a home with better resources. In other circumstances, tribes moved fleeing invasion and violence. In these situations, people endured a deep sense of loss, being separated from revered landscapes that had supported their families for generations.

Traditional Life

A long time ago...all over this land, the people’s medicine was put here...It was good! Their home life was good, they were growing up in a good way, the children of the long-ago people. The land was clean, the air was clean, everything was good.17 Pete Beverhead

Montana tribes all practiced subsistence living that was seasonally driven. Spring, summer and fall harvest of plants for foods, medicine, and utility added diversity to a diet of meat. Some tribes were more heavily dependent on bison and some utilized fish more than others. The resources available in a tribe’s territory were the primary influence on diet.

“The force that most strongly influenced the gathering of Apsáalooke people was the availability of game and edible plants. Beginning in the spring, the Apsáalooke would gather in larger and larger groups until the early fall buffalo hunt. This was possible because of the availability of roots, berries, and game in spring and summer.”18


Montana Tribal Histories: Educators Resource Guide 11
Who Are the Salish?

This course will use the name “Salish” to refer to all the Salish tribes on the Flathead Reservation with special emphasis on the Bitterroot Salish—Scliš—and Upper Pend d’Oreille people—Qlispé. Flathead will be used to refer to the reservation, not the tribal people. The term Flathead is a misnomer and there are no “Flathead” Indians.

Tribal oral history says that at one time all of the Salish speaking peoples were one large tribe. As the tribal population grew, it became difficult to live together in one place. Out of necessity, the tribe split into smaller bands that were easier to sustain through their traditional hunting and gathering economy.

The Salish Indians of the Flathead Reservation in western Montana were formed from four tribal groups: the Bitterroot Valley Salish, the Upper Pend d’Oreille or Upper Kalispel, a portion of the Lower Pend d’Oreille or Lower Kalispel, and a portion of the Spokane. These tribes lived in what is now Montana, northern Idaho, and northeastern Washington. They all speak different dialects of the Salish language.

Before the coming of whites, the Tunáx̱n also lived in Montana. This tribe was destroyed by smallpox and warfare. Survivors scattered among the other tribes in the region. The Salish tribes would often combine for protection or divide into smaller groups or bands for more effective hunting or gathering. The size and membership of the band would vary as individuals or families felt the need to secure different foods and supplies. Some people would need to join another band or tribe because of their marriage choices or limited resources. Bands of Salish and Pend d’Oreille occupied land on both sides of the Continental Divide.

The Salish and Pend d’Oreille tell of living in what is now Montana from the time when Coyote killed off the natisqélix”—the giants—and prepared the world for the coming of people. Many Coyote stories contain what may be considered fairly precise descriptions of the geologic events of the last ice age. Anthropologists and other non-Indians have long been skeptical of this, thinking there was little “evidence” that Salish or Qlispé people had been here that long ago. But recently, archaeologists have found sites in the South Fork of the Flathead River dating back 12,000 to 14,000 years, about the time of the end of the last ice age. Many of the Coyote stories, passed down for thousands of years, describe what geologists have only lately deduced: the extension of the glaciers to a point about halfway down the Mission Valley, the flooding of Western Montana beneath Lake Missoula, the breaking up of the ice dam that contained those waters, the gradual retreat, advance, and then final retreat of the cold as the ice age came to an end.¹
The 2008 edition of *Challenge to Survive* has been made possible through an initiative of Governor Brian Schweitzer that was funded by the Montana State Legislature. Funding for the Salish Kootenai College Tribal History Project was administered through the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education. Julie Cajune coordinated the project. Unit 1 has been totally rewritten for the 2008 edition and Unit 2 has been revised and expanded from the 1981 edition. Julie Cajune wrote unit 1, *From Time Immemorial*; and Robert Bigart wrote Units 2 and 3. Units 4 and 5 are in progress and scheduled for completion later in 2008.

Coyote stories are used throughout Unit 1. It is the tradition of the Salish and Pend d’Oreille to take these stories out only during the winter. It is respectfully requested that this unit be started in the winter months in consideration of this tradition. The Salish and Pend d’Oreille people have honored this tradition for generations and continue to do so today.

Johnny Arlee provided a significant amount of the content for the course material in Unit 1. Additional supplements came from anthropologist Claude Schaeffer’s interviews with tribal elders in the 1930s.

Today’s young Salish and Pend d’Oreille continue to examine their heritage and determine what it means to them as young Indian people in twenty-first century America. Elders have often told us that to know who we are today as Seliš and Qlispé, we need to know our past and our traditions. Those of us who worked on this course hope it will be of assistance to young tribal members in adding to the story of their ancestors and relatives. Young non-Indians can improve their knowledge of the Indian community on the reservation and better understand the origin of the conflicts that now separate Indian and non-Indian on the Flathead Reservation.

Tribal History Project
Salish Kootenai College
Pablo, Montana, 2008
Chapter 2: The Beginning of the Apsáalooke

As most people, the Apsáalooke trace their origins to the creation of the world. Their creation story states that they were not only chosen by God, First Maker, because of their bravery, but that they were placed in the center of the world out of His appreciation. The divine origin of the Apsáalooke is complemented by the historic account of their migration to the promised land. Oral tradition states that the Apsáalooke were originally part of the Hidatsa tribe; the process of becoming Apsáalooke is significant as it is the beginning of a tribal identity. There are many stories throughout the world that begin with a migration, people searching for something that signifies their home. This story is not so different.

The following chapter will present one version of the Apsáalooke creation story and two variants of the migration story. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the most recent archaeological findings about the ancestors of the Apsáalooke people.

Creation Story

First Maker, Iíchikbaalia, our Creator was wandering around. There was nothing but water everywhere. He wandered over the water looking around. Out of nowhere he heard voices. They were saying, “I guess we are the only ones, I am sure we are the only ones.” The First Maker saw that it was four ducks. He walked over to where the ducks had gathered and said, “No you are not the only ones, I am here. Did you really truly believe that you were the only ones?” he asked.

The first duck said, “No something in our hearts believes that there are other things.” “Yes, go on and tell me what your hearts do believe,” said First Maker.

“Well, we believe that maybe there is something way down in the water.”

“Yes, that is what I want to hear;” said First Maker. “You can dive. Why don’t you dive down and see what you can find,” He said.

So the first duck dived down and down. He was gone a long, long time.

“I am afraid that my brother has drowned,” said one of the ducks.

“No, do not be afraid of that,” said another duck,

“No, do not worry about that,” said the other duck. “He has not been gone long enough to have reached the point of being tired.”

So the ducks and First Maker sat and waited.

After a time the first duck came to the surface. He was panting so hard for air they had to wait some more until he caught his breath.

“Well younger brother did you get anything?” asked First Maker.

The first duck said, “No, I went down and I went down, but I did not find anything.”

The second duck said, “I’ll go down and see what I can find.”

The second duck dived down deeply into the water and again they waited and waited and waited.

“I guess that my brother has died,” said one of the ducks. “He has been gone so long,” “No, our brother has not died,” said another duck. “He has not been gone long enough to reach the bottom.”

They waited and waited and at long last the second duck appeared on the surface.

“Did you find anything?” asked First Maker.
“No,” replied the second duck. “I went down and down and down, but I got nothing. I did see something down there, but I could not reach it. I was too tired.”

“These big ducks cannot go down far enough to find the bottom. Let me go down,” pleaded the third duck.

First Maker thought for awhile. He looked at the third duck and thought some more. At last he agreed, but he cautioned, “You are quite small, so be careful you do not exceed your limit. I don’t want any of you to die.”

The duck agreed. He dived down and down and down. He too was gone a long while and the others waited and waited. At last the third duck broke the water upwards and came to the surface.

“Did you get anything?” First Maker yelled.

“Yes,” gasped the little duck. “I went down and down and down and something struck me. I looked where I felt it hit me and I took this.”

He handed First Maker a piece of plant. He looked at it carefully. He turned it this way and that and you could see his face wrinkle with thought. At last he spoke, “Where this came from there must be earth. There is no doubt, my younger brothers, that what you felt in your hearts is true. There is something way down in the water.”

First Maker turned to the fourth and last duck. He said, “You go down this time. The other ducks are all too tired. If you feel something hard don’t touch it. Keep going until you find something soft. Don’t look at it, but put some of it in your bill and bring it to me.”

“I’ll go right now,” the fourth duck answered excitedly. He went down and down and down and down and down. He dove until he felt something hard with his feet. Then on and on and on he went until he felt something soft. He shut his eyes tightly and filled the hollow of his bill with it. It was sticky and he had a hard time pulling his feet loose. He swam upward as fast as he could with the soft stuff sticking to his feet. Upward and upward he went until he came out of the water.

“Did you get something?” First Maker demanded. The little duck was so tired that all he could do was swim to First Maker and empty his bill into his hands and wipe his feet on his arms. First Maker looked at the brown stuff in his hands and smiled, “It is mud!” he exclaimed. “It is wet earth with which we can make our world. Are you ready?” he asked the ducks, and they all yelled together, “We are ready!”

First Maker and the ducks made the world. Then they divided the world into sections by placing water here and there. They made the sky, the plants, the trees and the animals. They made the stars, the sun and the moon.

After a long while First Maker decided that was not enough, so he made the people. He made the people out of clay as he had made everything else. He made four groups of men and women. He set them on the ground in front of him while he made some clay arrows. He put the arrows in a row on the ground a long, long way away from him. Then First Maker said to the clay people, “I do not know which group of you is the bravest. I want to know brave people. I will test you to find out. Run through the arrows and the one that goes through them will be my people. They will be brave and wise.”

The first group ran, but when they came to the row of arrows they were frightened and stopped in their tracks. They could not go on and they fell to the ground. “Get up!” ordered First Maker. “Go away, you cannot be my people.” Then he told the second group to run though the arrows, but they were frightened too and turned back. “Go like the others!” First Maker said to them. Then the third group ran, but fell back. “You too are worthless. Go with the others!” First Maker commanded. No one knows who these groups of people were or if they are still around today.
Then First Maker told the fourth group to run through the arrows and they did. If they were frightened they did not show it. "You are very brave people!" exclaimed First Maker, "You will be my people and I will give you helpers to teach you. Where you live shall be the center of the world and you will be surrounded by enemies to keep you brave." That is why the Apsáalooke live in Montana and Wyoming, between the mountains and the plains, beside the Yellowstone River. It is also why all of the other tribes respected and feared them.

**Migration Narrative: Version I**

The migration story of the Crow Indians, or Apsáalooke, is certainly interesting, intriguing, and often frustrating to the researcher. This extensive and dramatic migration story has been repeated by a succession of at least sixteen generations of Crow historians, keepers of the tribal annals, and history. It is said that in the long, long-ago times, the ancestral tribe of the Hidatsa and Crows once lived toward the east in the "tree country," now believed to be the western end of the Great Lakes, south of Lake Superior and west of Lake Michigan. Here the tribe followed the lifeways of woodland Indians.

One spring, as the grass was turning green and the deer and buffalo were grazing with relish in the parklands, the rains stopped. Hot winds began blowing continuously, and soon the green earth was parched to brown. The buffalo disappeared. The chiefs held council, and an earnest search for the vanished herds was organized. Teams of fourteen men were sent out in all directions. The parties eventually returned without success, all but the team going west.

It was a long time later that this last group returned. When they did, each man was laden with huge packs of jerked buffalo meat. Everyone in the tribe had a little meat to eat. The searchers then reported that their travels had led them far to the west where trees began to thin out and there were open areas of grassland. There the hills were rolling, broken by bluffs covered with pines. The men killed some buffalo and returned. This place is now believed to be in the area of central Minnesota.

Soon after, the entire tribe packed up and headed west. As the story goes, they caught up with the buffalo herds and resumed a more leisurely way of life, maybe even settling down as part-time farmers and hunters in what is now perhaps northern Minnesota and southern Manitoba. Contemporary Apsáalooke people have traveled to this area and seen the caved-in sites of the earthen lodges and other structures of a village and tipi rings on nearby bench lands. These Apsáalooke have been told by Native peoples who presently live there that according to their historians, the forefathers of the Apsáalooke once lived here. The tipi rings were used by a part of the tribe who preferred to live in tipis during the summer and hunt the buffalo, while the others lived in the village along the river and did some farming. Then, one day the two groups got together and moved away. They headed southwestward and never returned.

This ancestral tribe deliberately moved away, probably for better hunting and farming grounds. On the way, these migrants stopped for some time at Sacred Waters (Devils Lake in northeastern North Dakota). Here, two chiefs, No Intestines and Red Scout, fasted and sought the First Maker's guidance on their perilous journey. Red Scout received an ear of corn and was told to settle down and plant the seeds for his sustenance. No Intestines received a pod of seeds and was told to go west to the high mountains and plant the seeds there. These seeds were sacred, and the proper way to use them would be revealed. First Maker promised No Intestines that his people would someday increase in numbers, become powerful and rich, and own a large, good, and beautiful land.

The journey was resumed, and when the band reached the Missouri River they moved in with the Mandans, whose village was located on the west side near the junction of the Heart River with the Missouri. Later, the newcomers moved farther upstream and built their own village of earthen lodges in the vicinity of the
Days of the Blackfeet:
A Historical Overview of the Blackfeet Tribe for K-12 Teachers in the State of Montana.

Part One: Creation to 1799

The creation of the Blackfeet people and their universal existence with the Above World, Earth World, Water World, Origination Stories, Territorial Use and the arrival of the Rifle, Horse, Small Pox and Trade Items.

Blackfoot and the Universal Interaction

The Above World

Our origination stories begin with the formation of the earth world (North American continent) and continue on through the present 21st Century. In 1949, Yellow Kidney, along with Little Plume, in an interview with Claude Schaeffer about Origination stated: "The supernatural was an old man. Not a white man but he had gray hair and a beard. He is the person who created the human beings and helped them. His name is White Beard." (Murray) White Beard is a different person from Napi and lives up in the sky. There are three or four of these persons of which White Beard is the leader.

Charlie Reavis, a respected spokesperson for our people, in 1951 shared the following origin history. "The distinguishing “Above Medicine Persons” are the Sun, who had a wife the Moon, and their only surviving child, a son called Morning Star.” (Murray) The Sun and Napi are both creators, although have a difference in function. Sun created the people and the animals, while Napi created the culture of the people. In addition, there are other persons who were created that have attributes of animals, animate objects, and natural phenomena such as rocks and stars. Some of the people are: Thunder, Wind Maker, Underwater Person, Maker of Cold Weather, Blood Clot, Seven Persons and virtually all animals with no exception through evolution.

The North Star reminds the Blackfeet of the story of Feather Woman. She was wishing to marry a star and the Star Being came to her and took her to the above world. She resided there with Morning Star, her mate, for a long time. Morning Star told Feather Woman not to dig up the Big Turnip, she digs the turnip and sees her family on earth and gets lonesome and returns to earth. Hence, we now have the North Star.
The Wolf Trail or Milky Way tells of the wolf animals and the Blackfoot person relationships and teachings. It is from these stories we learn the importance of learning through observation and the special relationship that Blackfoot people have with the animal beings.

The Seven Boys or Big Dipper constellation tells of the seven brothers who left earth to live in the sky. It is through stories like this that we recognize the reality of living as a different physical person. These boys and their sister were human beings like us and yet we look at them as star beings. They are very important to the Blackfeet and are called The Seven in the Blackfeet language.

The Bunched Stars or Pleiades constellation tell of the six boys who did not get white buffalo calf hides for robes so they went to live in the above world. They cannot be seen during the buffalo calving season but appear in the sky at the time of their departure from earth.

The visual star observations reflect a very old time when the entire universe was formed and was utilized to teach and remember lessons to live by for the earth world.

The Earth World

The above person made the earth and people to live on it. This is how the Saukomitapiks (earth beings) came to be. It is here that the story of the Blackfeet people will begin on earth.

The distinct stories which were shared in life about the origination of Blackfeet people are directly related to the character of Napi. Napi was placed with our people to teach lessons of natural survival on the earth place where we reside. It is from Napi Stories that we know the trees, plants, animals, water, geology and geography of our existence.

The use of birch by the Blackfeet for their tipi stakes is described in the following story. The Blackfoot explained these markings as follows: 'Old Man was blown by a great wind, which tumbled him head over heels, up and down the hills, and over the mountains. As he tumbled along, he caught hold of trees and bushes but all broke off in his hands. Finally he caught hold of a birch tree. It was tough and, although the wind tossed Old Man up and down, the tree held. When the great wind stopped, Old Man go down from the birch tree and became very angry. He said, 'You spoiled all my fun. I was running over the hills and mountains and through the woods until you caught hold of me. Now I am going to punish you.' So Old Man took out his knife and gashed savagely at the tree. And the marks seen on birch trees are the scars made by Old Man's knife.'
This example of a Napi story shows the style which Blackfeet will tell you about the making of mountains, why the mountains are north/south versus east/west, why the animals are shaped and look as they do. It is not only the visual features that are explained through story but such abstractions such as wind, hail, snow, rain, thunder, lightning, rivers flowing east and west, wildlife habitat, etc.

The Blackfeet people have a relationship with the above world through character stories such as Feather Woman and Scarface. It is through these important relationships that individual mountains along the Rocky Mountain Range bear the names of these people. Feather Woman is an earth being who wished to marry a star and was granted this wish and became the wife of Morning Star. She was taken to the Above world where Feather Woman Mountain lived until the time she came back to earth to teach the earth beings lessons of life. She brought with her the child conceived of her and Morning Star. Today, near Heart Butte on the Rocky Mountain range you will see a mountain named Feather Woman Mountain.

Scarface, another very important character in the teachings for Blackfeet people, went to see the Sun and brought back the life renewal ceremonies to the earth people. These earth-above being relationships continue as the Blackfoot world is created.

The painted tipis of the Blackfoot people reflect relationships such as the Snow Tipi, Thunder Tipi, Elk Tipi, Buffalo Hoof Tipi, Rock and the list goes a long way. In these painted lodges you will see the stars, rainbow, rolling hills, mountains, fallen stars, night sky, and day sky paintings, which are symbols documenting the creation of the home on which they are painted.