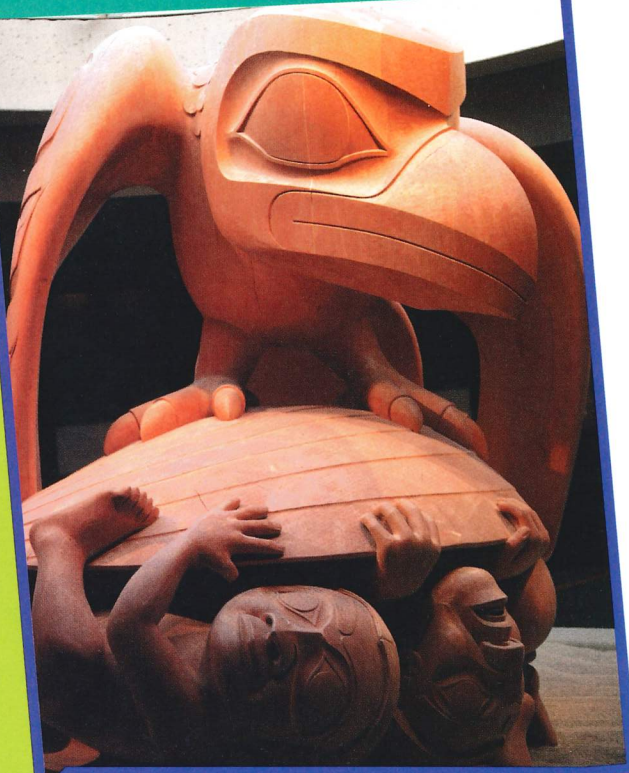


# HOW CAN ORAL STORIES BE



In 1978, Haida artist Bill Reid started carving this sculpture called *Raven and the First Men*. First Peoples across Canada share a tradition of telling stories about animal spirits. Raven is an important character who appears in hundreds of stories told by the Haida, Tlingit, Kwakwaka'wakw, and other First Nations of British Columbia. Raven is often portrayed as both a creator and a trickster, a greedy troublemaker.

This photo of a **potlatch** was taken in 1914 in Fort Rupert. At a potlatch, Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest Coast pass on important traditions and beliefs through storytelling, singing, and dancing. **Q:** What evidence of oral traditions can you find in this photo?

People have always used **oral traditions** to pass on knowledge and ideas from one generation to the next. Oral traditions take various forms, such as stories, poems, dances, and music.

Indigenous societies use oral traditions to pass on their history, culture, customs, and important skills and knowledge. Some oral traditions tell about everyday events, some communicate an understanding of the environment, and some pass along spiritual messages or sacred teachings.

In North America, Indigenous societies have preserved their culture and identity through their oral traditions. For scientists, historians, and Indigenous people today, oral histories provide present-day evidence of traditions that may date back thousands and even tens of thousands of years.



# E USED AS EVIDENCE?



Medicine man Roy Nooski of the Nadleh Whut'en First Nation speaks to students on Aboriginal Culture Day.

**Q:** Although stories can now be published in print and shared online, Indigenous peoples continue to tell their stories in person. Why do you think they do this?

Indigenous peoples believe that it is very important to be accurate when passing on stories and traditions. Designated people, such as Elders, are often recognized as holding valuable knowledge. They are responsible for passing on their knowledge to preserve the historical record.

Though accuracy is very important, oral stories are not always told the same way. They are sometimes changed so that the storyteller can, for example, teach a lesson in a different way. Oral stories may also challenge scientific theories about early humans.

Indigenous peoples often take a collective approach to making sure that their stories remain accurate. When narrators tell a story, they often explain who told them the story. This might be an Elder or a great-grandparent. The accuracy of a story is often confirmed by a group—although individuals can also challenge the details.

**Q:** How might this collective approach maintain the accuracy of stories passed on by word of mouth? What might be some limitations of this approach?

Oral histories and stories may be told

- in family settings, to pass on local or family knowledge
- during formal occasions or ceremonies, such as potlatches
- during certain seasons, at a particular time of day, or in specific places