

Plan for Tlingit Oratory Curriculum

Ishmael Hope

This is a four-week curriculum for introducing grades 7-12 to the art of Tlingit oratory. The curriculum may be lengthened and modified by teachers depending on the cultural resources available, such as a Tlingit Elder-in-residence. In fact, it will be considered essential to have a consistent cultural specialist involved in the planning and implementation of this curriculum. This course could be used by any teacher for any classroom. Ideally, the course will be integrated with the Tlingit language, though it could be done entirely with the English as well. Students should be encouraged to learn at least a few Tlingit phrases to incorporate into their speeches.

The outcome of the Tlingit oratory workshop will be students familiar with the model for Tlingit oratory, as conducted at the Koo.éex', the Memorial Feast and other Tlingit ceremonial gatherings. Students will end the course by conducting a Koo.éex' themselves, modified slightly from the Memorial Feast toward a feast of appreciation and joy. Students will learn the art of metaphor for language arts proficiency. They will study personal, local and in some cases, world history.

Day 1

Who Am I?

Students will be introduced to the concept of Tlingit culture and the clan system. The students, if Tlingit, will be questioned what clan they are. If they don't know, their assignment will be to find out. If the students are non-Tlingit, what is their cultural background? Are there family crests in their background? What countries are their ancestors from? Who are the major historical figures in their lineage? Students will write two paragraphs on their cultural history.

Resources:

Tlingit Country Map by Andrew Hope III

<http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/ANCR/Southeast/TlingitMap/>

Tlingit Elders Traditional Education Checklist

<http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/curriculum/Tlingit/Salmon/checklist.html>

Day 2

Assign students to come in with two paragraph assignment on their cultural background. If they haven't fully completed the assignment, give students class time to work on it. Spend time calling up parents/grandparents in class, if possible and appropriate. End class with a few students sharing their research.

Day 3

Students are assigned to investigate one important aspect of their history. What is one of their famous ancestors? Students may choose an important person in their genealogy, local community, a historical person from the United States or their ancestral countries. What was an important moment in their lives? What was the most joyous experience in their lives? What were their major accomplishments? If they are Tlingit, what is the story behind one major crest of their clan? What is a story of a major person in their clan history? If they are on the Raven side, they may be interested in finding a story from the Raven Cycle.

The teacher and Elder consultant will need to be familiar with or familiarize themselves with Tlingit oral literature and be aware of the cultural protocols in the local community and with the larger Tlingit community. Ideally, it is most important to learn a story firsthand from a Tlingit Elder. Secondly, it is highly important to find oral literature that is well-edited, transcribed in the original Tlingit language, well-translated and endorsed by the Tlingit community. If such material is unavailable, there will need to be some sophistication in accessing and utilizing the appropriate clan history and this is why an Elder consultant is very important for working through these sometimes-sensitive materials.

Students are assigned a two-paragraph summary of an important person or episode in their history, and also assigned to find and share direct sources of the stories – due on Day 5.

Resources:

Haa Shuká: Tlingit Oral Narratives by Richard and Nora Dauenhauer
Gáigiwdul.àt: Brought Forth to Reclaim the Legacy of a Taku River Tlingit Clan by Elizabeth Nyman and Jeff Leer
Tlingit Myths and Texts by John Swanton

Day 4:

Students continue investigating their history. Have the Elder consultant or invite a guest Tlingit culture bearer to share their cultural history.

Day 5:

Students continue investigating their history.

Day 6:

Students share their history with the rest of the class.

Day 7:

Students are introduced to the art of Tlingit oratory with an emphasis on connecting with their personal history. They will be asked to think about the stories they have just learned in their history, and to connect it with a Tlingit Elder might do with their oratory.

Class reading: The speech by Willie Marks – Keet Yáanayi in Haa Tuwunáagu Yís. The speech is chosen because it fits the model of oratory that will be applied for this class: a speech firmly within the Tlingit tradition that incorporates an aspect of the orator's clan history to illustrate the orator's feelings of joy and healing in response to the kindness and support of his "opposites." Ideally, it would be important to read the Tlingit in the Tlingit language and in English. Because of the unfamiliarity of the text, the teacher or the Elder should read the text.

Class discussion: What is a metaphor? When was a time that you felt sad and something made you feel better? What did it feel like? Encourage students to think of a simple metaphor for this like 'being picked up', like 'my heart warmed', like 'a weight was being lifted from my shoulders'. Have each student consider a metaphor for how it felt when they were sad, angry, happy and other emotions. Spend five minutes writing it down. Have a few students read their metaphors to the class. Now go back to Willie Marks' speech. Have one or two students read it aloud now. Ask them to find the metaphor and discuss it with the class.

Resources:

Haa Tuwunáagu Yís by Richard and Nora Dauenhauer

Day 8:

Introduce students to the structure of Tlingit oratory. Emphasize these points:

1) Begin with the "genealogical catalogue" as Richard and Nora Dauenhauer call it. These would include:

A_x sáni hás – My paternal uncles

A_x éesh hás – My father's people

A_x eat hás – My paternal aunts

A_x daakanóox'u – My outer shell, my paternal great-grandparents

A_x káani yen – My in-laws

2) Share some appreciation for the opposites. This might include:

Gunalchéesh haat yi.aadí

Thank you for coming here.

Gunalchéesh yáade xat yeey.éex'i.

Thank you for inviting me here.

A_x tuwáa sigóo x'axwdataaní.

I would like to speak.

Xát tsú ax tuwáa sigóo x'axwdataaní.

At this moment I (also) would like to speak.

Yáa yeedát ax tuwáa sigóo (xát tsú) x'axwdataaní

I will speak to you.

Sh tógáa xat ditee.

I am grateful.

Ax toowú yak'éi yá yixsateení.

I feel good seeing you.

3) Reference a story and close it with a metaphor. Refer back to the Willie Marks speech. Allow students to explore their ideas on the metaphor. Give them some time to think about it and work on it.

4) After the metaphor is introduced, they might say this:

Yéi áyá ax toowú yéi yatee yáa yagiye

yee yát axwalgeení.

That is how I feel today

seeing your faces.

Yéi áyá ax toowú xwlayáakw

yá yee yadook axwalgeení.

That is how I explain my feelings

looking among your faces.

Yéi áyá yatee ax een

yee tuwáatx.

That is how it is with me

because of you.

5) End with gratitude, such as *gunalchéesh*, *sh tógáa xat ditee*, and *ax toowú yak'ei*.

Assignment:

Have the students write a paragraph of the story and the metaphor. They will share it and work on it in the next few classes.

Resources:

Haa Tuwunáagu Yís

Lingít X'éináx Sá: Say it in Tlingit! A Tlingit Phrasebook by Richard and Nora Dauenhauer

Day 9:

Have students continue working on their speeches. Focus today on Tlingit phrases, from the genealogical catalogue and expressions of thanks and gratitude. Ask the Elder to help develop some phrases that a student may prefer. Have the Elder spend the last 20 minutes of class discussing Tlingit oratory.

Day 10:

Now focus on the metaphor. It is ideal to have the whole speech told in Tlingit, but in this case, it may be acceptable to tell the metaphor part in English. Work with each student on an aspect of their history that relates to the joyful experience they are having in the company of their opposites. It is appropriate that at first they write out their speech, but rehearse being able to eventually share the speech without notes.

Non-Native students may work aspects of their history into this Tlingit format. They may say, for instance, "My grandfather told me a story about a time when he almost lost his life when he was confronted by a bear, but his friend saved him. While he was out hunting for deer, a bear came right up to him. His friend ran over to him. He shot at the bear, momentarily stunning the bear, and they were both able to run away. That is how it feels seeing you today. It is like we were lost without you, but seeing your faces, seeing how strong our community is, we have saved ourselves."

Or they might say something like, "Our American Founding Fathers fought against an oppressive British government. I am thinking about them while I am among you today. They wrote a Constitution and a Declaration of Independence guaranteeing every citizen certain inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That is how I feel seeing your faces today. We are living our lives freely, as citizens, pursuing our happiness."

Day 11:

Rehearsal for student speeches.

Day 12:

Introduction to the format of a *Koo.éex'*. Hand out Lily White's "*Koo.eex'*: Tlingit Memorial

Party." Located at:

http://www.sealaskaheritage.org/programs/Koo.eex_Memorial_party.pdf

Have students read it aloud to each other. Have the Elder explain ideas about the Koo.éex'. The suggested format for this Koo.éex' would be:

- ❖ The main feature that distinguishes this gathering from a Memorial Koo.éex' is that the focus is on feelings of joy, rather than speeches for The Removal of Grief that we see in the Memorial Koo.éex'. The format is very similar, however.
- ❖ Who is the host? Who is the guest? Choose. Ask the Elder who might be the hosts and who might be the guests. The host speaks first and serves.
- ❖ Significantly simplifying the Koo.éex' structure, but staying true to many of the elements of a Koo.éex', it is suggested that the host stands up and begins the series of speeches. Each student will have an opportunity. Then the next side does the same thing. There may be different approaches to how a host and how a guest may speak, and many traditional Tlingit songs that may have been sung, but a simplified--and still culturally respectful-- version of the Koo.éex' may help students begin to learn the structure of a Koo.éex' and put themselves in a position to have a successful experience.
- ❖ Students will be coached on responses from the opposites as a speech is being given. This should happen as much as possible, especially, loudly and proudly, "Gunalchéesh." Thank you. Other responses may include:

Gunalchéesh.á!

Thank you very much!

Hó hó.

Ha wáa sá.

How that is.

I x'éit wutuwa.áx.

We hear you.

Yéi.á!

Yéi yatee.

That's how it is.

Gunalchéesh aadéi yoo x'eeyatángi yé.

Thank you for how you are speaking.

- ❖ After the students are finished with the speeches, the hosts serve them food. Have their parents help them bring a dish. The guests may also contribute food, if the Elder advises, but the hosts hand the food to the guests.
- ❖ If there are gifts, have the students hand out gifts to the guests.
- ❖ Everyone eats and has a good time!

Day 13

Rehearsal for the Koo.éex': students must continue working on their speeches and rehearsing in small groups and as a larger group. Students who finish, or who may need a break and have a hard time focusing, will be assigned to making gifts, such as sewing buttons onto scarves or koogéinaa, sashes.

Day 14

Continue rehearsals: ask the Elder to speak for 20 minutes, telling stories, speaking about oratory, providing more detail, knowledge and advice about the Koo.éex'. Begin special invitations to Elders, cultural leaders, and Clan Leaders of the community.

Day 15

Continue rehearsal.

Day 16

Continue rehearsal. Mix it up by showing a video of Tlingit storytelling, such as Gary Waid's *Kéet Shagóon*.

Day 17

Dress rehearsal: make sure that food is being prepared, all the gifts are being gathered, and that everyone thoroughly understands the format. Consult with special guests about the format to ensure that they understand that they have an opportunity to speak at the appropriate moment.

Day 18

Final dress rehearsal and preparations: during the lunch hour or evening, let the Koo.éex' begin! Yee gu.aa yáx̄ x'wán!