**Sunrise...Sunset – Sun Myths from Two Cultures**

**Background:**   
  
Myth #1 - The Sun Dancer: This myth comes from the Maya of Guatemala. It explains the story of a man who discovers a trunk of magnificent clothing of glorious colors. As he decides to try them all on, he becomes trapped in a mysterious trance and begins to dance wildly. The man cannot stop the dance and is guided fantastically all around the forest. As he comes to the edge of a cliff, he slips off but then unbelievably flows higher and higher up towards the sky like a huge red ball. The dancing man with the wildly colorful clothes has now become the sun.

Myth #2 - How Grandmother Spider Stole the Sun: This myth comes from the Muskogee (Creek) Native Americans of Oklahoma. It tells how the animals lived on the earth without light. Fox and Possum try but fail to bring the sun to the dark side of the earth. Grandmother Spider weaves a web to capture the sun. Buzzard has the feathers of his head burnt off as he places the sun on his head and carries it to the sky. According to this legend, this is why, to this day, buzzards are bald and still fly high in the sky circling the sun. Also, the sun makes rays across the sky that are shaped like the rays in Grandmother Spider's web.

**Purpose:**  
To explore two different cultures' myths of the creation of the sun, and how the sun is a valued part of our environment and survival.

**Objectives:**  
Students will create a myth (pictorial, oral, or written) about the sun's origin.   Students will design a Sun Mask and perform a Sun Dance wearing their mask for a Sun Celebration in honor of the sun.

**Materials:**  
Glue, Scissors, Bag of natural items from outside environment (leaf, feather, acorn, bark, nut, flower petal, etc.)   
Bright colored construction paper for paper mask, Native American Rhythms (music),

**Directed Lessons:**  
**Discussion:**  
(Set the scene - use creative dramatics, act out) When you woke up this morning, you wiped your eyes, stretched, and yawned. You jumped out of bed and looked out the window and saw the sun shining. How do your eyes feel as you notice the sun? (The sun is very bright.) How does the sun feel on your hands? (It is hot.) Where do you think the sun came from? (Allow time for all the students to use their imagination and come up with an idea about the sun's origin.)Tell the class you want to share a "special" story with them. Tell them that a special make-believe story or myth, is a story that has been told over time and has become very important to that group's culture or family. They should listen very carefully to see what the story might be able to tell us about the people or culture that it represents. Act out and use creative dramatics while reading and retelling the myths, "The Sun Dancer" and "How Grandmother Spider Stole the Sun." Use illustrations and visual aids if necessary. Ask for reactions.

**Questions:**  
Why do you think the man was dancing? Do you think he was happy or sad? What can you tell about the people who made this special story (myth)? How would you dance if you were a sun dancer? Allow for acting out. Why is the sun important for us? Why do we need the sun?      
Explain to the class that they are going to have a SUN celebration in honor of the sun. First they will go on a SUN search to collect natural items (around the campus/environment) that have had some effect from the sun (leaf, flower, faded piece of bark, etc.) Use the construction paper and cut out an oval shaped mask. Paste the items they have collected on the mask to make a design or facial parts. Tell the students that they will wear their mask later on as they perform a short Sun Dance (steps can be as simple as the Hokey Pokey, or you may wish to use original Native American Indian dance steps.) You may want to spread this lesson out over a few days so that the masks can dry thoroughly.

**Group Lesson:**  
Divide the class in groups of 4-5. Each group creates an original short story (myth) that explains where the sun came from. This can be done pictorially through mural drawings or a written story with illustrations, depending on the level of your students. Afterwards, each group can present or act out their myth (have Native American music playing in the background.)

**Evaluation:**  
Have the students ask their family members and extended family members about their family "special" stories or myths. Have the students create a Family Myth Shield and display them in the school library. Have students draw pictures of the myths read in class.

**Resources:**  
Bruchac, Joseph. "How Grandmother Spider Stole the Sun," Keepers of the Earth, Native American Stories. Fulcrum, Inc., Colorado. 1989. Collection of myths, stories, science lessons. Excellent for all grades. de Paola, Tomie. "The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush." G.P. Putman's Sons, New York, 1987. K - 3. Plains Indian story of how the colors of the sunset came to be. Mayo, Gretchen Woo. "Star Tales: North American Indian Stories." K-5. Excellent illustrated stories about the moon, stars, and sky.    McDermott, Gerald. "Arrow to the Sun." The Viking Press, Inc., New York, 1974. K-3. A Pueblo Indian Myth that tells how the spirit of the Sun came to Earth through the help of a boy who is transformed and filled with the power of the sun.   "The Sun Dancer." World Myths and Legends II - Central America. Simon and Schuster, Inc.   
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