

Lesson Guide: Rabbit

Vocabulary:

- Cottontail
- Rabbit
- Burrow
- Council
- Sun
- Adaptation
- Oral Tradition

See the attached vocabulary sheet in Educators Guide.

Engage:

- Allow students time to read the story attached to the Educator's Guide entitled: *'How Cottontail Got His White Markings: A Shoshone Legend.'*
- Explain that this is a sacred story from the Shoshone people, passed down for generations through oral traditional storytelling. It serves multiple purposes: explaining natural phenomena, teaching values, and preserving cultural knowledge.
- **Before reading**, ask students:
 - "What do you already know about how oral traditions work? How are they different from written stories?"
 - "Why might a community create stories to explain animal features?"
- After reading, facilitate a class discussion:
 - What makes Cottontail a hero in this story?
 - How does this story connect to the environment where the Shoshone people lived?
 - What values or lessons does this story teach?

Explore and Explain:

- **Activity 1: Story Analysis - Oral Tradition vs. Written Stories**
 - Students complete a Venn diagram comparing oral traditions (like the Cottontail story) with modern written stories. They should consider how stories are passed down, what purposes they serve, how they change over time, and what gets emphasized.
- **Activity 2: Story Elements and Cultural Purposes**
 - Students analyze the narrative structure of the Cottontail story by identifying traditional story elements (setting, characters, conflict, rising action, climax, resolution, theme), then examine how specific story events convey cultural values such as community problem-solving, courage despite size or status, perseverance, relationships and honoring sacrifice. This dual analysis helps students understand how Indigenous stories simultaneously explain natural phenomena, teach important life lessons, and preserve cultural knowledge across generations.

Elaborate:

- **Activity 3: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Modern Conservation-Then and Now**
 - Through completion of the Activity 3 worksheet, students will identify how Native Americans use each part of the rabbit (meat, fur, bones, sinew) and explain why complete utilization demonstrates respect and conservation.
 - Students compare traditional sustainable hunting practices with modern conservation efforts by creating connections between past and present approaches to ecological balance.
 - Students analyze how the Cottontail story's theme of balance reflects Indigenous values of maintaining harmony in ecosystems.
- **Activity 4: Rabbit Nutrition-Traditional Food Science**
 - Students analyze a nutritional comparison chart to understand why rabbit was and still is an important food source for Indigenous communities. They calculate differences in protein, fat, and vitamins between rabbit and other meats, then connect traditional observations about rabbit's health benefits to modern nutritional science.

Evaluate:

- **Activity 5: Create a “Rabbit Knowledge Poster”**
 - Assign small groups of students to work together, creating a visual poster (or PPT slide) that brings together everything they learned in the lesson.
The poster should include visual elements, a title, and the following:
 - Story Summary: One or two sentences about How Cottontail Got His White Markings and its main lesson.
 - Cultural Values: List 2–3 values taught by the story (e.g., courage, balance, respect for nature).
 - Ecological Knowledge: One fact about how Indigenous people used rabbits sustainably.
 - Nutrition Insight: One fact about why rabbit meat was important and healthy.
 - Vocabulary Connection: Use at least 3 vocabulary words in context.

Suggested Lesson Activities:

- Indigenous Vocabulary
- Story Analysis - Oral Tradition vs. Written Stories
- Story Elements and Cultural Purposes
- Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Modern Conservation-Then and Now
- Rabbit Nutrition-Traditional Food Science
- Rabbit Knowledge Poster

Additional Educator Resources:

- [Rabbit Teacher Resources](#)
- [Rabbits and Hares Indigenous Food Source](#)
- [Rabbit Tales of the Cherokee](#)
- [Eastern Cottontail Rabbit](#)
- [More on Eastern Cottontail Rabbit](#)

How Cottontail Got His White Markings: A Shoshone Legend

Complete Story for 6-8 Readers

Part I: The Council of Animals

Long ago, when the world was still young and animals could speak, the sun burned far hotter than it does today.

Its heat scorched the desert day after day. The ground split open like broken clay. Water holes dried into shallow pits of dust. Plants that once filled the land with green wilted and turned brown. Even the tough sagebrush drooped under the endless blaze.

Animals hid wherever they could find shade. Birds stayed silent in their nests. Rabbits retreated deep into their burrows. Lizards pressed themselves beneath stones, no longer enjoying the warmth they once loved.

One morning, as the heat grew unbearable, Eagle cried out from a high cliff, his voice carrying across the land.

“Enough. We must gather. All animals—come to the shaded canyon by the spring.”

Eagle was respected by all. He flew higher than any other and saw the land as a whole. When he called a council, no one ignored him.

The animals gathered in a narrow canyon where a small spring still flowed between the rocks. It was one of the last places with water, and its cool shade felt like a gift.

Eagle landed first, folding his wide wings. Bear arrived soon after, panting heavily beneath his thick fur. Coyote trotted in, alert and watchful. Deer stepped carefully into the shade, weak from hunger and thirst. Snake slid quietly to a cool stone, even he was unable to endure the heat. Mountain Lion came. Hawk. Badger. Prairie Dog. Animals from the desert and the mountains filled the canyon.

At the edge of the gathering stood Cottontail Rabbit. He was small and dusty, his ears drooping from the heat. Many of the larger animals barely noticed him.

When all had arrived, Eagle spoke.

“The sun burns too fiercely. The land cannot survive this way.”

Bear growled in agreement. “My cubs suffer. Even I cannot travel during the day.”

“The air itself burns,” Eagle said. “Even the sky offers no relief.”

“There is no food,” Coyote added. “The plants are dying. The land is failing us.”

Snake lifted his head. “If this continues, none of us will live.”

A heavy silence followed.

At last, Bear spoke again. “The sun must be stopped. Someone must shoot it with an arrow.”

The canyon filled with gasps.

“But who?” Deer asked. “The sun is far beyond our reach.”

One by one, the animals explained why they could not do it. Bear was too clumsy. Eagle could not carry a bow. Coyote lacked the strength. Others had never used weapons at all.

Hope faded from the canyon.

Then a small voice spoke.

“I will do it.”

The animals turned. Cottontail stood upright, his ears lifted high.

Laughter rippled through the crowd. “You?” Coyote said. “You are no bigger than my paw.”

Cottontail's ears flattened, but only for a moment.

"I am small," he said calmly. "But I am fast. I am determined. And I am willing."

He looked around the circle. "You are strong, but none of you will try. Is it not better for someone to try, even if they are small?"

The canyon fell silent.

Eagle studied the rabbit carefully. Then he nodded.

"Courage does not depend on size," he said. "It depends on heart."

One by one, the animals offered their support.

Eagle gave a feather.

Bear gave strength.

Deer gave endurance.

Even Coyote bowed his head in respect.

Cottontail lifted his chin. "I will travel east, to where the sun rises. I will wait for it there."

Part II: The Long Journey

Before dawn, Cottontail prepared.

He shaped a bow from juniper wood and crafted arrows tipped with sharp stone. Eagle's feather guided his finest arrow. He gathered seeds and roots and filled a gourd with water.

At sunrise, he set off.

Day after day, he traveled east. The land was harsh. The heat was relentless. His food ran low.

His body grew tired and thin. Still, he continued.

"I must keep going," he told himself each morning.

At last, after many days, the air changed. It smelled wet and alive. A deep, rolling sound filled the distance.

Cottontail climbed one final hill and froze.

Before him stretched the great water—the ocean—endless and shining.

Near the shore stood a tall tree. Cottontail climbed it and settled on a high branch. That night, he waited.

As dawn approached, the sky shifted from dark to gold.

The sun rose.

Cottontail drew his bow, steady and focused.

"For the land," he whispered.

He released the arrow.

Part III: The Falling Sun

The arrow struck the sun.

The sky shook.

The sun fell.

Fire swept across the land, racing faster than any animal could run. Cottontail fled, searching desperately for shelter.

At the last moment, he found a burrow.

He dug wildly, twisting the tunnels and blocking them with packed earth. Heat followed him underground, burning his neck, wrists, ankles, and tail.

At last, the fire passed.
When Cottontail emerged, the land was changed—but the sun no longer burned as fiercely.
And on Cottontail’s body, the places touched by fire had turned white.
That is why Cottontail Rabbit still carries white markings today—a reminder of courage,
sacrifice, and balance.

Rabbits: Wildlife, Food, and Respect

Rabbits are common in many parts of the world and have played an important role in human diets for thousands of years. People have hunted rabbits as a wild food source because they are widespread, reproduce quickly, and provide lean, nutritious meat. Today, rabbits are still eaten both in the wild and on farms in many regions, including Europe, Asia, and North America. Wild rabbits can be hunted, or they can be raised for meat in agricultural settings.

Historically, rabbits have been a sustainable source of protein. In some areas, raising rabbits was and still is a practical way to feed families, because they are easier to care for and reproduce faster than larger livestock.

For many Indigenous peoples of North America, wild game like rabbits was an important part of the diet. Hunting was not just about food it was also tied to cultural traditions, respect for animals, and sustainability. Rabbits, like other animals, were treated with gratitude and care. Indigenous practices often included using all parts of the animal and offering thanks, showing the deep relationship between people and the land.

Even today, rabbits continue to appear in traditional hunting cultures and in some modern culinary practices. Learning about rabbits as both wildlife and food helps us understand how humans can live in balance with nature taking only what is needed and showing respect for the animals that sustain us.

Rabbits are considered a seasonal food in many Indigenous diets. They are most abundant in spring and early summer when their populations grow the fastest. Hunting rabbits during these seasons allowed communities to take only what was needed, ensuring that populations remained healthy for future use. Seasonal foods also encouraged connection to the land. Observing the cycles of animals and plants taught respect for nature and ensured that communities lived in balance with their environment.

Eating foods seasonally was not just about availability, it also shaped healthier diets. Indigenous peoples relied on a variety of plants and animals throughout the year:

- Spring/Summer: rabbits, fish, berries, greens, and nuts
- Fall: deer, squash, root vegetables, and harvested grains
- Winter: preserved meats, dried fish, stored roots, and nuts

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Indigenous Languages Vocabulary Sheet (6-8)

Directions:

In Column 1, rewrite the word in English. In Column 2, write the definition of the word in your own words, then in Column 3 rewrite in Native language (if available). If it's not available, you may use the Native language of a neighbor, friend, or community member.

Vocabulary Word	English Rewrite	Definition	Shoshone
			Language Rewrite
Cottontail			Tapo'
Rabbit			Kamme
Burrow			Tsa'hote (hole dug by an animal)
Council			Taikwa wapeneen (Speakers/leaders)
Sun			Tapai (sun or day)
Adaptation			Antapsenaha
Oral Traditional Story (noun)			Natekwihappeh
Story Telling (verb)			Natekwiha

STUDENT WORKSHEET

Name: _____

Date: _____

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Burrow			
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Sun			
Adaptation			
Oral Traditional Story (noun)			
Story Telling (verb)			

Name: _____

Date: _____

Oral Tradition vs. Written Stories

Use the Venn diagram to compare oral traditions (like the Cottontail story) with modern written stories. In the left circle, write things that are only true about oral traditions—stories told out loud and passed down by speaking. In the right circle, write things that are only true about modern written stories—stories written down in books or online. In the middle where the circles overlap, write things that are true about both types of stories.

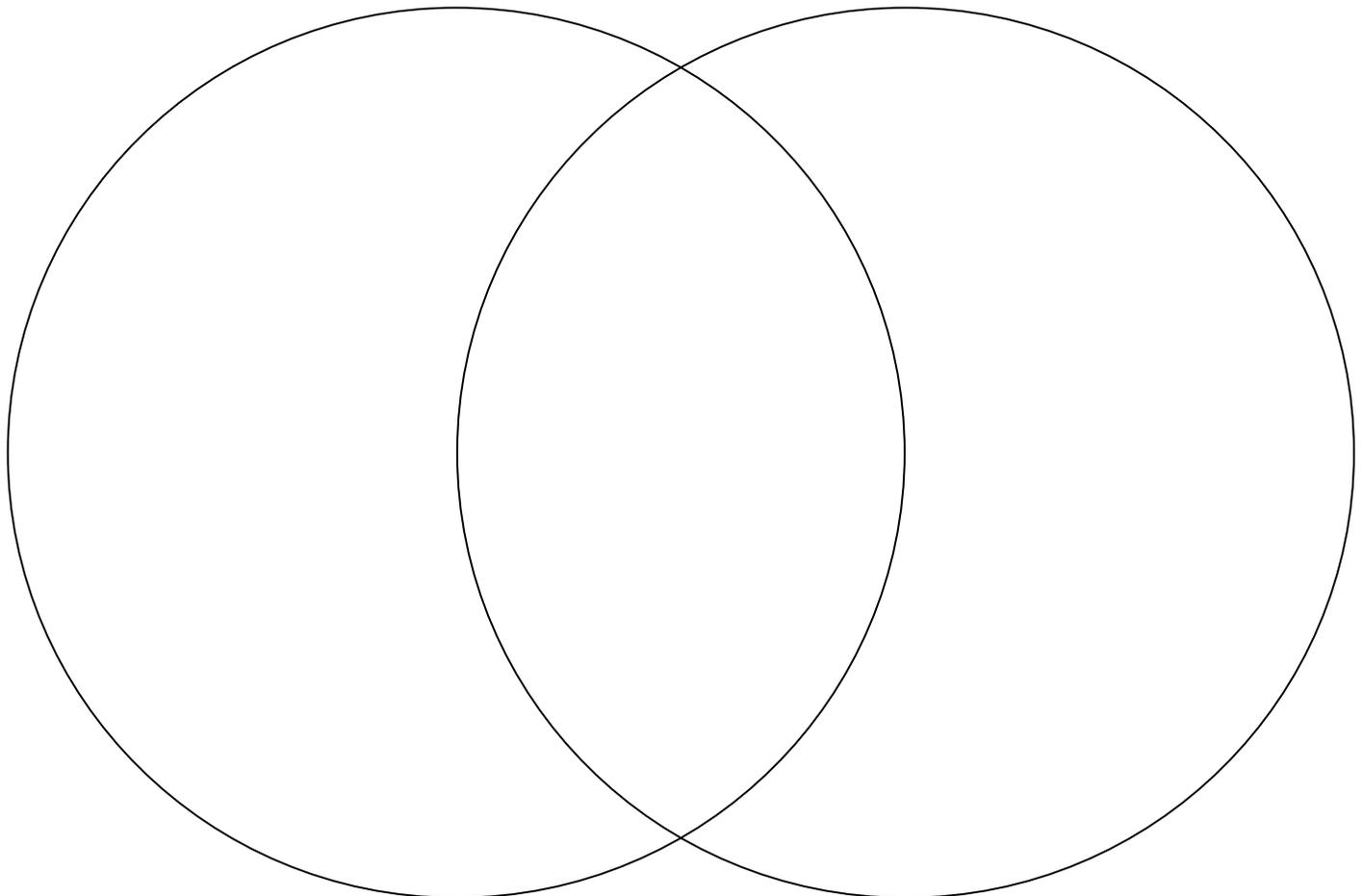
Think about: How do people share these stories? Why do people tell them? Do the stories change over time? What parts of the stories are most important?



Oral Traditional Stories



Written Stories



Story Elements and Cultural Purposes

Name: _____ Date: _____

Story Structure Analysis

Complete the organizer below to analyze the structure of the Cottontail story:

Story Element	Description from Cottontail Story
Setting (Where and when does the story take place?)	
Characters (Who are the main characters?)	
Conflict/Problem (What is the main problem?)	
Rising Action (What events lead up to the climax?)	
Climax (What is the turning point or most exciting moment?)	
Resolution (How is the problem solved?)	
Theme (What is the main message or lesson?)	

Cultural Purposes Analysis

For each story element or event below, identify what cultural knowledge, value, or lesson it teaches:

Story Element or Event	What It Teaches
The animals hold a council to solve a shared problem	
Other animals initially laugh at Cottontail because he is small	
Cottontail volunteers even though the task seems impossible	
Cottontail's journey to the ocean is long and difficult	
Cottontail digs a twisting burrow to escape the fire	
Cottontail's white markings remain as a reminder of his sacrifice	

Reflection Question: How does this story serve multiple purposes at once (explaining nature, teaching values, preserving culture)? Give specific examples.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Modern Conservation - Then and Now

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Native American people developed sustainable hunting practices over thousands of years. These practices demonstrated respect for animals and maintained balance in ecosystems.

Traditional Practices Included:

- Giving thanks to the rabbit's spirit before and after the hunt
- Using every part of the animal (meat, fur, bones, sinew) - zero waste
- Taking only what was needed to avoid depleting populations
- Hunting during specific seasons to protect breeding cycles
- Teaching younger generations to honor all living things
- Understanding rabbits' role in the food web and ecosystem

Answer these questions:

1. Rabbit meat was used for:

Why was this important for survival?

2. Rabbit fur was used for:

How does this show resourcefulness?

3. Rabbit bones were used for:

4. Rabbit sinew (connective tissue) was used for:

5. How did using every part of the rabbit show both respect for the animal and understanding of resource conservation?

Indigenous peoples understood that taking too many rabbits would:

- Disrupt the food chain (predators like coyotes, hawks, and eagles would suffer)
- Reduce rabbit populations below sustainable levels
- Harm plant communities (rabbits help spread seeds and control vegetation)
- Create imbalance in the ecosystem

6. In the story, Cottontail helped restore balance by making the sun "just right." How does this story reflect the value of maintaining balance in nature?

Today, we can show respect for cottontail rabbits and maintain ecological balance through the conservation efforts, like the following:

- Protecting habitat from development, monitoring populations, studying behavior, creating wildlife corridors, and controlling invasive species.
- Observing wildlife respectfully from a distance without touching or feeding them.
- Reducing pesticide use and keeping cats indoors to prevent harm.
- Supporting conservation organizations and participating in citizen science projects.
- Advocating for green spaces in urban planning and educating others about native wildlife.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Rabbit Nutrition - Traditional Food Science

For thousands of years, Native American people across North America relied on cottontail rabbits as an important protein source. Indigenous nations had sophisticated knowledge about the nutritional value of rabbit meat long before modern science could measure vitamins and minerals. It was observed that rabbit meat kept people strong, helped children grow, and sustained hunters for long journeys. Today, nutritional science confirms what Indigenous peoples knew, that rabbit meat is one of the healthiest proteins available.

Nutritional Comparison Chart

(per 100g/3.5 oz serving, cooked)

Nutrient	Rabbit	Chicken	Beef (lean)	Pork
Calories	173	165	250	242
Protein	33g	31g	26g	27g
Fat	3.5g	3.6g	15g	14g
Saturated Fat	1g	1g	6g	5g
Iron	4.8mg	0.9mg	2.6mg	0.9mg
Vitamin B12	7.2mcg	0.3mcg	2.6mcg	0.7mcg
Niacin (B3)	7.2mg	13.7mg	5.8mg	6.3mg
Selenium	38mcg	27mcg	28mcg	42mcg
Phosphorus	263mg	228mg	213mg	246mg

Questions:

1. Compare the protein content. How much more protein does rabbit have compared to beef, per serving?

_____ grams

2. How much more protein does rabbit have, compared to beef (percent wise)?

Calculation: (Protein in Rabbit – Protein in Beef) ÷ Protein in Beef × 100 =%

_____ %

3. Why would high protein content be especially important for:

Hunters traveling long distances?

Growing children?

4. Compare the iron content. Rabbit has 4.8mg of iron per serving. How does this compare to chicken?

5. What does iron help our bodies do?

6. Rabbit meat is very lean (low in fat).

How many grams less fat does rabbit have compared to beef, per serving? _____ grams

How many grams less fat does rabbit have compared to pork, per serving? _____ grams

7. Saturated fat is considered less healthy than other types of fat. Compare the saturated fat in rabbit to beef and pork. What do you notice?

8. Look at all four meats in the chart.

Which meat has the LOWEST number of calories per serving? _____

Which meat has the HIGHEST number of calories per serving? _____

9. Vitamin B12 is essential for making red blood cells, brain function, and energy production. Vitamin B12 is only found naturally in animal products.

How much Vitamin B12 does rabbit meat provide compared to chicken? Compared to beef?

Rabbit has _____ times more Vitamin B12 than chicken.

Rabbit has _____ times more Vitamin B12 than beef.

10. Which meat provides the most, nutritionally? _____