

Prereading: U.S.A. Culture

Native Americans, sometimes referred to as Indians, live throughout the country, and although divided into numerous tribes, share cultures based on strong traditions and respect for the land. One important ceremony through which tradition is maintained from generation to generation is the **Naming Ceremony**, which, in this instance, is where the author receives his Oneida name. Because of a series of delays in organizing the ceremony, he is now at an age where he can fully appreciate its importance and has a voice in choosing that name. He chooses his grandfather's name, *Kwakkoli*, as a means of honoring a connection with the past and the present, and of completing the life cycle of generations.

Prior to reading the story, it will be helpful to work with students, perhaps as part of a larger unit of study or within a mini-lesson, to discuss important information about Native Americans, in general, and about the Oneida tribe in particular. Students could be assigned research tasks prior to the lesson and/or, as resources permit, the teacher can prepare key information to share with students before they read "I Am Kwakkoli."

Vocabulary: Words to Watch

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Oneida

a North American Indian tribe. The name by which the tribe is known is derived from a native word meaning "standing rock," referring to a boulder sacred to the tribe situated near the site of their ancient village on Lake Oneida, New York. The Oneida number about 3500 at present.

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solstice

a time when the sun is at its greatest declination. North of the equator, this occurs on June 22.

Anglo

a reference to Americans and American culture

whippoorwill

a nocturnal American wild bird named for its distinctive call, which sounds like the bird is calling its own name (*whip-poor-will*)

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butterflies

nervousness

flying

in formation

when planes or birds flying in a set pattern and order, such as a >

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clans

small groups, often connected through kinship

Reading

Ask students to read "I Am Kwakkoli" aloud, taking turns, perhaps by each reading one paragraph. If students are particularly interested in or confused by details during this first reading, stop to discuss and explain these things as they arise so that students have a **clear sense of events and details depicted** in the story. After this first (possibly interrupted) reading, ask students to reread the story silently and then have it read aloud one last time.

After the story has been read, ask for students' general reactions and responses. Do they notice any similarities to traditions or ceremonies in which they have participated? How are the events in the story similar to those students may have experienced? How do they differ? Ask students to note the many details which had to be arranged in order for the Naming Ceremony to occur, and to discuss the importance of these details.

Rites of passage are celebrated by many people around the world; have any of your students participated in such a tradition? Ask students to discuss their own experiences, those of friends or acquaintances, and/or those with which they might be familiar through reading, film, or general knowledge.

Writing



Events in “I Am Kwakkoli” unfold in a **sequential** manner. The author sets out what is about to occur in the first paragraph and then moves forward in time to delineate the events associated with his Naming Ceremony. He also provides background information when it is necessary to help the reader understand why certain choices are made in order for the ceremony to proceed properly.

Ask students to think of an important event in their own lives. It is not necessary for the event they choose to have strictly religious or traditional overtones, but the personal significance of the event should be made clear in the writing. In addition to asking students to reflect upon and write about why the event is important, remind them to include both background and chronological information so that the reader will have a clear and complete understanding of the event. A review of the following might be useful, but students should be discouraged from merely completing information relevant to the items below. Their aim is to **write a descriptive piece about an important event** in their lives; they are not trying to produce a list of answers to the questions below.

Using the text of “I Am Kwakkoli” as a model, review these key elements of reporting with students:

Who was present; who participated in planning the event; who helped; who was absent?

What is the event they are describing?

Where did the event take place?

When did the event occur?

Why was the event held; why did something occur; why was it significant?

How did the event unfold; how did the writer feel about this event upon its completion?

Ask the class as a whole to respond to these questions as they pertain to the story, reminding them that the author has not merely constructed a chronological listing of events, nor has he strictly followed the sequence of these questions. He has included important information while also **infusing the writing with his own sense of excitement about and appreciation for the significance** of the Naming Ceremony for himself and his family.

Ask students to work in pairs, to first discuss the events they will describe in writing. Encourage them to ask one another as many questions as necessary so that the final writing will be clear as well as interesting. When the writings have been completed, invite students to share them with the entire class.

Name _____ Date _____

Vocabulary in Context

Directions: Based on the way the **words in bold** are used in the story, **write** what you think each word means in the sentences below. After you've written your definitions, **look up** each word in your dictionary and copy the definition that most closely matches the way the word is used in the story. Finally, **write your own original sentence** using that word. Make sure the sentence shows what the word means. Use a separate sheet of paper for this activity.

Note: Some phrases and idioms might not appear in your dictionary, and some words may have more than one meaning. You may need to ask another student or your teacher for help.

Example: I was told the medicine man **meditated** for three days before the name came to him. (page 108)

Definition based on context: *contemplated deeply*

Dictionary definition: *devout contemplation or spiritual introspection*

Original sentence: *The Buddhist monk meditated daily as part of his spiritual life.*

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1. My grandfather was alive then, and he asked a medicine man friend of his to name her and **made the arrangements**.
2. My dad talked about naming me for several years, but it was hard to **pull it together** long distance.

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3. My stomach hurt as if I had the flu, but I think it was just **butterflies**.

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4. The ceremony finally began. The Faithkeeper called up the three **clans** of the Oneida Tribe: the Bear, the Turtle and the Wolf.

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- 5., 6., 7. My name also reminds me of the many **traditions** and **beliefs** that are part of my **heritage** and about which I have a lot to learn and understand.

Name _____ Date _____

Comprehension Check for "I Am Kwakkoli"

Circle the letters of all the correct answers. Some questions have more than one correct answer.

- Kwakkoli is an Oneida word for
 - bear
 - turtle
 - coyote
 - whippoorwill
- The two events that delay Bisco's Naming Ceremony are:
 - his grandfather's death and a failure in school
 - his grandfather's death and a family move
 - the weather and a family move
 - his grandfather's death and a cousin's death
- The Naming Ceremony takes place in:
 - December
 - March
 - June
 - September
- The Oneida Reservation is located in:
 - California
 - New York
 - Florida
 - Wisconsin
- The special clothing for the Naming Ceremony is
 - a shirt
 - shoes
 - jewelry
 - a hat
- Bisco belongs to the _____ Clan of the Oneida tribe.
 - Whippoorwill
 - Turtle
 - Bear
 - Wolf
- The fruit that is sacred to the Oneida is the
 - apple
 - banana
 - orange
 - strawberry
- The Naming Ceremony is usually held when an Oneida child is about
 - five
 - three
 - eight
 - ten
- Bisco's mother cannot attend the ceremony because
 - she is a woman
 - she is too old
 - she is dead
 - she is not a tribal member