“HOW THE WORLD WAS MADE”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ BUILDING BACKGROUND
“How the World was Made” is a creation myth of the Cherokee Indians that explains how the world began. Like many of the tribe’s myths, we are able to read them today thanks to James Mooney, a Smithsonian Institution anthropologist who lived with the tribe between 1887 and 1890. After gaining their trust, he collected tribe members’ firsthand accounts of their rituals and stories.

LITERARY ELEMENTS
- Oral Literature
- Creation Myth
- Archetype

READ & RESPOND TO THE TEXT

Big Idea (p. 24) What does Water-beetle’s role in the story reveal about the Cherokees’ relationship with animals?

*Water-beetle plays a crucial role in the creation of Earth, which reveals the importance of animals in the Cherokee culture. According to the myth, without animals, the world in which the Cherokee live would not exist.*

Archetype (p.24) What traits does the Great Buzzard share with characters you know from other stories?

*The Great Buzzard, whose flapping wings create mountains and valleys, has great strength. That he is called back implies he doesn’t know his own strength. (Characters from other stories will vary.)*

Drawing Conclusions (p. 25) What do you conclude is the reason that the Cherokee don’t eat crawfish?

*Since the shell of the Red Crawfish is a bright red, the Cherokee believe that the sun scorched it, therefore spoiling its meat.*

Drawing Conclusions (p. 25) According to the Cherokee, why are animals such as owls and panthers nocturnal?

*These and other animals are nocturnal because they were able to remain awake and keep watch for seven nights; the other animals couldn’t remain awake for the entire duration.*
What do the Cherokee believe is the reason many trees lose their leaves in winter?

Except for the cedar, pine, spruce, holly and laurel, most trees could not remain awake for seven straight nights.

**READ & RESPOND TO THE TEXT**

- What is the little Water-beetle’s role in the creation of Earth? What does this tell you about Cherokee reverence for all creatures?

  *The little Water-beetle brings up soft mud that grows into Earth. This tells us that the Cherokee respect all creatures.*

- What do the “conjurers” do? Who do you think the conjurers are? Explain.

  *The conjurers move the sun up. They seem to be magicians who control nature.*

- We see that the animals and plants that were able to keep awake for seven nights were rewarded with special characteristics. What moral lesson might the Cherokee have been trying to teach through these animals and plants?

  *The moral they may have been trying to teach is that vigilance and perseverance are rewarded.*

**ANALYZE & EVALUATE**

- What does the narrator say when Cherokee tradition has no answer or explanation for an occurrence?

  *When there is no answer or explanation for an occurrence, the Cherokee say that “no one remembers” or “we do not know.”*

- For the Cherokee, are humans more important than plants or animals or equal to them? Support your answer with examples from the myth.

  *Humans are equal to plants and animals. The Cherokee believe that animals had a major role in creating Earth.*

- Another archetype found in many myths and folktales is a daunting challenge or test that only heroic characters can overcome. How does this archetype appear in this myth?

  *This archetype appears in the seven-night vigil that is overcome by certain animals and trees.*

**CONNECT TO THE BIG IDEA**

- Why do you think the Cherokee people explain natural phenomena in story form?

  *They explain everything in story form because narratives (stories) are memorable.*

- What do their explanations suggest about their relationship with nature?

  *Their explanations show that they feel close to nature.*
“THE SKY TREE”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ BUILDING BACKGROUND
“The Sky Tree” is a creation myth of the Huron tribe who lived northeast of the Great Lakes. This myth is an example of an earth-diver myth because it involves a living being diving down into the water to retrieve mud that will be spread onto the back of the Great Turtle. This mud will eventually grow around the back to form Earth.

LITERARY ELEMENTS
- Oral Tradition
- Myth

READ & RESPOND TO THE TEXT

Questioning (p. 35)  Why is the old chief’s dream important to the story?

The old chief’s dream inspires the actions that led to Earth’s creation. If the old chief hadn’t told his dream, his wife may have never cut down the Sky Tree.

Big Idea (p. 35)  How is the Native American attitude toward the natural world reflected through the action of the water animals who dive down and bring up soil to place on Turtle’s back?

The Native Americans’ attitude toward the natural world is reflected when animals are given the responsibility for creating the world, thus becoming worthy of respect.

Drawing Conclusions (p. 35)  Based on the actions of the wife and the fact that she has been given a vital role in the myth, what do you conclude about the Huron’s beliefs about the role of husbands and wives?

Based on the wife’s actions in the story and the fact that she plays an important role, it is evident that the Huron respect and therefore pay tribute to a devoted wife.

READ & RESPOND TO THE TEXT

- What is the Sky Tree, and why is it important to the people in Sky Land?

The Sky Tree is a great tree in the middle of Sky Land that serves as the source for food.

- Why does Aataentsic cut down the tree, and what does that action reveal about her relationship with her husband?

She cuts the tree down in an attempt to save her husband’s life, thus showing that she would do anything to save his life, even destroy the source of all food.
• Which animal observes Aataentsic’s fall? What role does this animal assume?

_The Turtle observes her fall; he assumes the role of leader of the animals._

**ANALYZE & EVALUATE**

• What is the function of the old chief’s dream in this myth?

_His dream serves as the prompt for Aataentsic to cut down the Sky Tree._

• What does this myth suggest about the importance that Native Americans attribute to knowledge gained from dreams?

_Since Aataentsic acts on her husband’s dream, it is obvious that Native Americans value knowledge from dreams._

• What motivates Aataentsic to follow the Sky Tree into the hole? How do you view her actions?

_She follows the Sky Tree into the hole because she is trying to protect life. This shows her heroism because she risks harm to protect all of life._

• Why do you think the Huron preserved and perpetuated this piece of **oral literature**?

_The Huron may have wanted to preserve their religious beliefs, celebrate their ancestor Aataentsic, or offer an example of unselfish devotion and courage._

• How might this **myth** have been used by the Huron to teach a moral lesson?

_The Huron might have used this myth to teach the danger of hasty actions, to teach the value of sacrifice, or to teach the importance of working together for a common goal._

**CONNECT TO THE BIG IDEA**

• What does the role of water animals in the creation of Earth suggest about Native American attitudes toward other living creatures?

_The fact that water animals took part in creating Earth suggests that Native Americans attach great importance to other living creatures._