

How Hummingbird Got Fire

Guide for Parents and Teachers
Presented by Golden Gate Audubon Society



Objective:

Students will read and answers questions about a local native Ohlone folktale.

State Standards – English Language Arts, Reading, 3rd grade:

1. Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.
2. Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.

Background:

The Ohlone are Native people from the Central California Coast, from the San Francisco Bay through Monterey and down to the Salinas Valley. Before the arrival of the Spanish in the 18th century, the Ohlone did not see themselves as one group and spoke eight different languages. The Rumsien (or Rumsen) is the language group from the Monterey area. The author of the book this story is from, Linda Yamane, translated and reconstructed this story from the stories of her ancestors.

This story should be considered a folktale, in that it is a story that originated among a group of people, and has been passed down through generations as part of an oral tradition.

Directions:

1. Before reading, introduce the concept of folktales and who the Ohlone people are.
2. Have the students read the story, “How Hummingbird Got Fire.”
3. Have the students answer the comprehension question in complete sentences.
4. Bonus activity: Have students draw a picture of Hummingbird getting fire.
5. Bonus activity: Explain the concept of myths—stories that attempt to explain aspects of the natural world. Ask them what they think this story was trying to explain. (Why hummingbirds have red throats and how fire came to exist in the world.) Ask if they know any other stories that try explain aspects of the world. Then have students create their own myths. Tell them to think about one aspect of the natural world—the Bay Area fog, trees losing their leaves in winter, dogs with really loud barks, etc.—and make up a fun story explaining how that came to exist.

Hummingbird Story Answer Key:

Who were the main characters in the story?

Eagle, Hummingbird, and the Badger People. Also Crow, Raven, and Hawk.

Who dried up all the waters? How?

Eagle used her magic and help from Hawk to dry up the waters.

Why did the five friends want to use fire?

They were hungry and needed a fire to cook the food they found.

Who was Eagle's nephew? Why did she send him to the Badger people?

Eagle's nephew was Hummingbird. She sent him to get fire.

How did the Badger People try to hide the fire from Hummingbird?

They hid the fire by covering it over with deer skin.

How did Hummingbird succeed at getting an ember from the fire?

Hummingbird reached into a hole in the deer skin with his long, narrow beak.

How did Hummingbird's throat turn red?

The ember from the fire flamed and turned his throat bright-red.

Do you think this story is real or make-believe? Why?

Opinion answer – should have a supporting argument.

*Learn more about hummingbirds at allaboutbirds.org/guide/Annas_Hummingbird.
Or visit goldengateaudubon.org.*

“How Hummingbird Got Fire”

A Rumsien Ohlone Story

As told by Linda Yamane

Presented by Golden Gate Audubon Society



Once, a very long time ago, something happened to the world. The ocean rose up higher and higher, covering the land little by little until nearly everything was covered over with water. Eagle, Hummingbird, Crow, Raven, and Hawk were together on a mountain top, looking out at the world and seeing how it had been destroyed. After many days, Eagle had an idea and used her magic, and help from Hawk, to dry up the waters.



By this time, the five friends were hungry. There was food to be found, but they needed fire to cook with. Eagle knew the one place where fire could be found, and sent her little nephew Hummingbird to get fire from the Badger People underground. But the Badger People refused to share their fire and sent Hummingbird away.

When Hummingbird returned, Eagle was very angry and sent him back. This time, the Badger People saw Hummingbird coming and said, “Cover the fire! Cover the fire!” They hid their fire by covering it over with deer skin.

But the deer skin had a hole in it, where an arrow had gone through, and Hummingbird reached in with his long, narrow beak. He took out a hot ember and carried it away. But before he could put it safely under his wing, it flamed, turning his throat brilliant red.

That’s why Hummingbird has a red throat, and that’s how there came to be fire in the world again.



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Reading Comprehension Questions



1. Who were the main characters in the story?

2. Who dried up the waters? How?

3. Why did the five friends want to use fire?

4. Who was Eagle's nephew? Why did she send him to the Badger People?

5. How did the Badger People try to hide the fire from Hummingbird?

6. How did Hummingbird succeed at getting an ember from the fire?

7. How did Hummingbird's throat turn red?

8. Do you think this story is real or make-believe? Why?
