

The Story Circles for Children

Teacher Instructions:

Begin at the circle closest to the interpretive center and the stone monument. Hand out one laminated scavenger hunt card and wet-erase marker per team/pair.

Remind students that what they are about to see is a work of art, created by Maya Lin (an architect/artist most famous for her Vietnam Veterans war Memorial in Washington D.C) and just as they would not step on a painting, they are going to respect the Story Circles as they explore the pictures and words on the stone to find the scavenger hunt clues. **An asterisk denotes a scavenger hunt answer.** You can adapt this to the amount of time you have and the age of your students as appropriate.

Story Circle 1 - Introduction:

The place where you are standing has been a meeting place for people for thousands of years. The Confluence Story Circles are one of a series of outdoor artworks done by the celebrated environmental artist, Maya Lin to commemorate the 200-year anniversary of when Lewis & Clark came west to find the Columbia River and its passage to the Pacific Ocean. The story circles celebrate the rich cultural and natural heritage of the Columbia Plateau People who have called the confluence of the Snake and Columbia Rivers home for thousands of years. ***A Confluence is a meeting or gathering at one point. Here we mean two great rivers coming together.*** Who can name the rivers? Which is which?

This place was where local tribes met regularly to trade, tell stories, and visit with relatives and friends long before there was a state park. As we explore the other circles you will learn about the connections between the people, the land, and the rivers.

Move to the largest circle nearby

Story Circle 2 – Seasonal Rounds

This is called the Seasons Circle. The circle is separated into four seasons. The name of each season is written in ***Sahaptin, the common language of the Columbia Plateau Tribes***, and in English. What plants and animals do you see under each season? ***Can anyone find the Wild Onion? What season does it grow in?***

Remember that there were no grocery stores 200 years ago when Lewis and Clark arrived in this place. The People of the Columbia Plateau used the land and the river as their supermarket, hunting, gathering, and harvesting the abundant gifts that nature provides. They moved with the seasons, taking advantage of what nature provided throughout the year in different places. Today the traditions of the seasonal round continues, with knowledge of the plants and animals, how to find them, and when to harvest and hunt being taught by tribal elders for the next generation to carry on. What plants and animals do you see represented on the stones?

Move to the raised circle nearest the canoe and the swimming beach

Story Circle 3 – Trading Circle

This is called the trading circle, and it shows you many of the items people traded. Many of these items cannot be found in this part of the Columbia Plateau. As we still do today, people used the rivers as trading highways, bringing goods from far away to trade for things they might not have where they lived. ***Find something you would like to trade*** What do you think you could trade for a Buffalo Robe brought from across the Rocky Mountains down the Snake River? What might you be willing to trade for a piece of onyx or obsidian that you could use to make a sharp knife or spear-point? ***The Tribes of the Columbia Plateau have been trading here for over 10,000 years.*** Today many Native Americans still meet to camp and fish along the river, carrying on important traditions.

Move to the smaller in-ground circle

Story Circle 4 – Coyote Circle

This is the Coyote Circle that celebrates the story of ***Coyote’s gift of Salmon to the people.*** (Have a student step in to the circle and read the text from the story). What gifts do animals provide to people other than food? (Birds sing beautiful music, some animals provide fur and hides for clothing and shelter, dogs and cats provide companionship, horses provide transportation, etc.)

Move to the raised circle nearest the oval

Story Circle 5

As you approach this circle, remember that many wild creatures live here and we must be respectful of them. You can often see frogs and little toads, field mice and voles, small garter snakes, and snails, especially at this circle. Here the artist provokes us to think about the way humans have changed these rivers in recent times. ***McNary Dam is downstream, and it has caused the river in this area to rise creating a reservoir.*** Salmon who have reached this spot on the river have had to travel through four dams to get here, and they will pass through many more in both the Columbia and the Snake on their journey upriver to spawn.

Move to the in-ground oval

Story “Circle” 6 – Lodge Oval

What shape this is part of the artwork? Maya Lin wanted it to be shaped like the traditional long houses of the Columbia Plateau Tribes (which you can see in in the interpretive center). The oval celebrates the tribes who have called this place home for thousands of years. ***The names of the Tribes are carved into the stone.*** Over 200 years ago, these are the people ***Lewis and Clark met during the three days they camped right on this spot in October of 1805.***

Move to the final raised circle nearest the stone monument

Circle 7 – Salmon Circle

Salmon are an important part of life on the Columbia Plateau. They provide nourishment for people and animals that eat them. After spawning in the rivers and streams, the bodies of the adults break down and provide nutrients to enrich the soil and feed insects that baby salmon need to survive. The names of the species of salmon that pass this point on the river are carved in the stone. ***How many species of salmon are depicted here?*** When Lewis and Clark were here, Salmon were plentiful and the rivers were filled with salmon during the seasonal runs. Today many are endangered, and we are working hard to protect and restore habitat for salmon throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Return to the first circle

The Story Circles celebrate the people who have called this place home for thousands of years, and the natural and cultural resources and traditions that sustain and enrich the life of this land and its people still today. What might artists in the future wish to record about us? What resources are important from your community or culture that your family passes down from generation to generation? As you leave today, think about what stories you might tell in your own community that generations to come should know about you. Thank you for exploring the Story Circles!