



Center for Indian Community Development

Memorandum

DATE: April 17, 1996
TO: Laura Lee George, Coordinator
FROM: Ruth Bennett, Ethnographic Researcher
RE: Ch'ahl Xontehl-taw Hil

He-yung!

I have added an Introduction entitled "A Guide to Reading Ch'ahl, Xonteltaw Hil."

Also, as agreed in our meeting of March 18 between you and I and Jim Six, I am following the format of highlighting the Hupa language text that is linked to the cultural commentary and attaching the cultural commentary immediately behind the Hupa language text page it refers to. I also repeated the Hupa language text link and page number at the top of each cultural commentary page so that the cultural commentary will be accessible from the Hupa language text.

Enclosed also find a diskette that contains the cultural commentary formatted as text on Microsoft Word 6.0 for IBM (i.e., on the computer I work on.) Barred l can be accomplished, if someone will do a Find and Replace with L and barred l.

I will appreciate your comments. Please write and let me know what you think.

k'iye niwxsiste

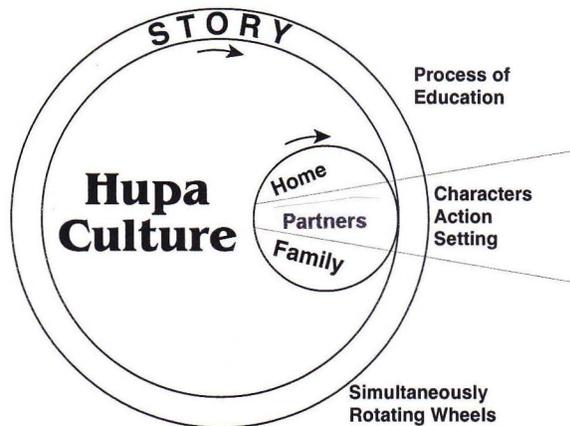
cc: Lois Risling

A Guide to Reading
Ch'ahL XonteLtaW HiL
A Hupa Story by Ray Baldy

Hupa storytelling involves a storyteller, a story, and an audience

- ◆ *Storyteller* — narrators who express intentions
- ◆ *Story* — what is told or written down
- ◆ *Audience* — listeners or readers who interpret intentions

Hupa stories were and are an important part of the education of Hupa people into Hupa culture. To understand what a story means is to participate in the process of education. The following chart depicts this process and the relationship between Hupa stories and Hupa culture.

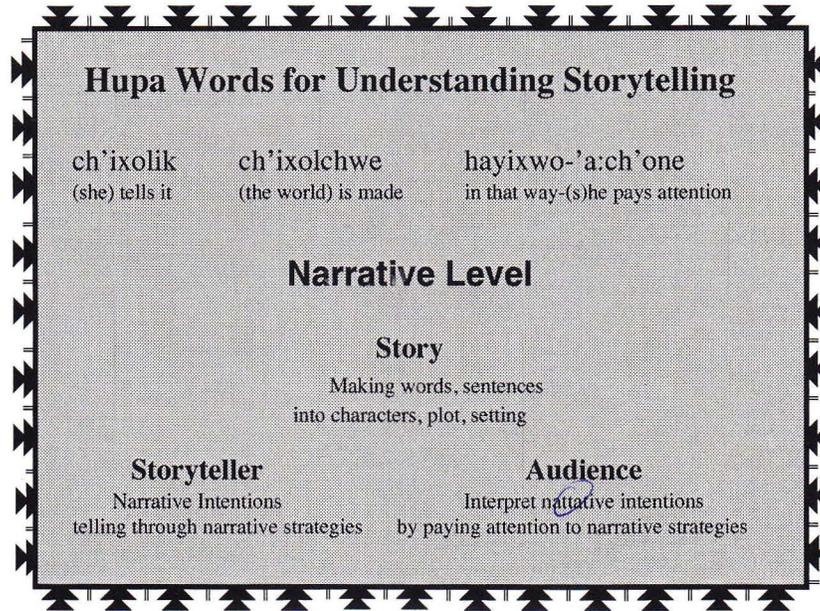


Hupa stories contain characters, plot, and setting.

- ◆ *Characters*—the people and other living beings in the stories
- ◆ *Plot*— what happens
- ◆ *The Setting* — the earth known by the Hupa in ancient times.

Narrative Level

The following chart uses Hupa words to explain the dynamics of storytelling.



The story is made, or created, through words. Words are combined into sentences and longer units. The words put into sentences in stories contain narration. Narration is what happens in a story, and is expressed through characters, plots, and settings. Storytellers have intentions relating to what they want to say about human experience through their characters and their actions. Storytellers have narrative strategies for realizing their intentions.

Narrative strategies are ways of arranging words to create sentences that combine to become stories. The audience listens to the story and pays attention to the characters, their actions, and the setting. In assimilating the specific words, or the arrangement of words, or the way that things happen, the audience is taking into account the narrative strategies of the storyteller. The knowledgeable audience can identify these narrative strategies, making connections between the level of words and the level of character, plot and setting. In this way, the audience comes upon the narrative attentions of the storyteller and a story acquires social meaning.

Understanding social meaning in Native American stories is a way of understanding Hupa culture. For Hupa people as well as for people outside the culture, understanding the culture means understanding a way of life that

has had a major influence on the history of Northern California. Social meaning that is shared between a particular Hupa storyteller and a particular audience, has reference to how Hupa people lived in ch'ixolchweding, the mythic times recorded in the stories. These ideas governed a way of life that existed for thousands of years prior to contact with Euro-Americans. It is an exciting prospect that a Hupa story provides a window into that life, and this chapter provides a guided reading experience so that an audience can proceed step-by-step in understanding what the story means.

Discovering the narrative intentions of a storyteller can be overwhelming because the list of possible narrative strategies is as long as any imagination can make it, and because narrative strategies exist on a variety of levels, including the following:

- the relationship of words and expressions to other words and expressions
- the relationship of words to characters, actions, and setting
- the relationship of characters, actions, and settings, to other characters, actions, and settings
- the relationship between the storyteller's experience within Hupa culture and the words, as well as the characters, actions, and settings of the story
- the relationship between audience experience and the words, as well as the characters, actions, and settings of the story

A NARRATIVE STRATEGY: METAPHOR

Whatever level of the story we are concerned with, a narrative strategy will appear in the form of a relationship between things. The value of identifying narrative strategies is to find narrative intentions, or social meaning made by the storyteller. As audience, we draw on our own experiences to understand what is told to us. Whether or not our experiences are similar, they are a basis for comparison.

And comparison is the key to understanding metaphor, one of the most prominent of narrative strategies. Metaphor is our key to understanding some important things about Hupa values, Hupa people, and Hupa culture. So, our first task, is to be aware that metaphor is happening.

When we notice in a story something that strikes us as highly unusual, such as the love song sung by Frog's mother, and its consequences, we can be on the lookout for the presence of metaphor.

Why the storyteller is telling us/me this?

We look for a comparison that explains beyond the literal meaning of the words, to a metaphorical meaning. The love song sung by Frog's mother is an example of the storyteller's use of metaphor. This example of metaphor exists on the level of characters and actions, where something that a character does, results in consequences beyond a literal connection. If we, as audience have never experienced the consequences of having a medicine song sung for us, we may be puzzled at first as to its meaning for us.

Interpreting the presence of metaphor, however, is a process of comparison that goes beyond a comparison of the young woman's experience with our own experience, but includes that comparison. The presence of metaphor depends upon a meaning beyond the literal experiences of the audience. In the case of a song being a metaphor, the song is

medicine, the song is power. Besides the words surrounding the song, such as "xwanchwing," her mother; "de:q'inikiwinga:w", she sang; and k'imau, medicine; the actions of the story document the process of metaphor at work. The words that the storyteller chooses to make a metaphorical comparison connect that experience with all of human nature.

There are connotations to be gathered in a metaphorical interpretation that can be understood by asking why the prospective mother-in-law makes medicine with a song. ~~The double bulb can be interpreted as a reference to human sexuality, and the newborn who tumbles around can be interpreted as being a primal life force.~~ Understanding these meanings gets us to social meaning, because this understanding is a way to understand the intentions of a Hupa storyteller in describing how Hupa people view marriage and domestic partners.

3.
connotations

Even though the concept conveyed in a metaphor may be new to us, the notion of comparison and contrasting experiences is probably something we have done before. We compare and contrast our own experiences in identifying a metaphor. Then we go beyond this and identify what the literal words are being compared with in identifying the metaphor. The metaphor of the "love medicine song," that is so powerful that it brings coyote to frog unites character and plot because it changes frog's life.

SOCIO-CULTURAL LEVEL

This discussion of the narrative strategy of metaphor provides an example of how stories are a way for Native Americans to pass on culture. What do we mean by culture? Whatever is passed on by individuals within a group that relates to the identity of the group can be called "culture." Generally an individual participates in various groups at the same time, such as family, community, and tribe, and these relations define the culture that individuals participate in as members of any of these groups.

For Hupa people in ancient times, family life was the most important, as illustrated by the Ch'ahl, Xonteltaw HiL story, where the prospective husband gains acceptance into frog's home, and then repays her with violence, only to get his just reward from her family. In addition to "home," socio-cultural meaning revolves around "partner" and "family." Respect for other family members, especially for domestic partners, is one of the most important themes in the story.

Our interpretation of the story will depend upon experiences we have had, for example, if we are already familiar with a story, we may interpret it differently, or, if we have recently had an experience that strikes us as similar to something that happened in the story, we may bring a new interpretation to bear on our reading. Above all, as audience, we understand that what a story means is communicated through connections we make with the text, with the storyteller and with ourselves.

repeats &

There is one other point to mention, and that is that although narrative strategies focus on shared social meaning, what we interpret from a story may be unique. Proof of this is one individual's interpretation may differ from one reading to the next. This is because interpretation of a story ultimately depends upon experiences, and no one's experiences are ever exactly the same.

Our interpretation of a story will depend upon experiences we have had.

Even one individual's experiences may differ from one day to the next, and may influence how that individual interprets a story. Her interpretation will differ as her experiences change. For example, if we are already familiar with a story, we may interpret it differently. Or, if we have recently had an experience that strikes us as similar to something that happened in the story, we may bring a new interpretation and interpret it in a different way than before. Above all, what we as audience ~~understanding~~ about a story is communicated through a fluid relationship that we make with the text, with the storyteller and with ourselves.

and connections, and connotations

KEY CONCEPTS

As you read through the story, keep the concepts of "family," "partner," and "home" in mind, as these concepts are revealed through narrative strategies. To arrive at an understanding of the story, is to gain an education and an understanding of Hupa culture.

Now, go ahead and read Ch'ahL, XonteLlaw HiL, Frog, Coyote, Living Together and try your hand at interpreting what the story means. There are more hints to guide you. You can find these by clicking on the highlighted Hupa language text.

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