

Teacher Discussion Questions

General Questions

Q: What might scientists hope to learn from these stories?

A: Native stories provide very general information about the occurrence of volcanic events and how the events affected local populations. In some cases, Native stories tell us about events that either left no geologic deposits or deposits that are hard to find.

The Lake on Mount Rainier

Q: Tacobed tells the grandfather that Tacobed's head will burst open. What is the fate of water within the lake at the mountain summit? What does this mean for the land below.

A: The lake on Tacobed will drain and pour down the flanks of the volcano, carrying away rock debris and vegetation that will bury the valley floor.

Q: Geologists know that a lahar (volcanic mudflow) gushed from Mount Rainier, poured over the land, and flooded the present site of Orting around 500 years ago. Does this story describe first-hand knowledge of the flood?

A: The story describes the mudflow that settled in the present site of Orting, but it is not first hand knowledge. Each generation of inhabitants delivered the story orally to the next, the story perhaps changing in detail.

The Mountains

Q: What characters are the mountains? What are their relationships?

A: White Mountain or Patu is Mount Adams. He is the Husband of two wives—Taqo'men (Mount Rainier) and Lawelatla (Mount St. Helens).

Q: What do you think the fighting between these characters describes?

A: The fighting describes two mountains (Mount Rainier and Mount St. Helens) erupting in the same general period of time.

Q: What happens to Taqo'men? What do you think that symbolizes?

A: Taqo'men is hit on the head and her head falls off. This could symbolize the change in shape of Mount Rainier's volcanic cone caused by a volcanic eruption or landslide.

The Husband and Wife Argument

Q: What is the rumbling heard by Xwa'ni? What is its source?

A: Xwa'ni heard rumbling from Lawelatla (Mount St. Helens) and Takhoma (Mount Rainier). The two volcanoes erupted (fought, as told in this story).



Fire, Flood and Fury continued...

Q: Lawelatla blows her top. What could this symbolize? Tahoma's head is knocked off. What does that communicate?

A: Lawelatla's blowing her top symbolizes Mount St. Helens erupting. Tahoma's head being knocked off describes how Mount Rainier's volcanic cone changed shape after the eruption. The description may indicate that part of the volcano was removed by eruption of rock fragments or by collapse in a landslide.

Q: This very old story describes simultaneous eruptions of Mount Rainier and Mount St. Helens. The story of eruptions at multiple volcanoes was told long before scientists discovered physical evidence of their occurrence. How might the reports of these simultaneous eruptions be of value to scientists and planners who wish to prepare for future events?

A: Scientific evidence enables scientists and planners to theorize that the eruptions were "simultaneous" within a human generation. These "simultaneous" eruptions of Mount St. Helens and Rainier could have occurred around 2,500 to 2,600 years ago, between 1480 and 1583, or between 1843 and 1850. Multiple volcanoes have erupted during the same general time period in the past; they could do so again.

Tacobed and Changer

Q: Native people respected and feared natural forces. Why do you think they created this story? How did this story help them understand nature?

A: All cultures seek explanations for the origin of features and events familiar to them. They created this story to comprehend the origin of the two mountain ranges (Cascades and Olympics) and to explain why Mount Rainier erupted in the past but not at the time when the story was told.

Q: Why is Tacobed getting bigger?

A: Tacobed is getting bigger because it is erupting and depositing volcanic materials on its flanks.

Q: What might have made native people change their opinion of Tacobed and see her as a monster?

A: An eruption that destroyed the land might have caused native people to change their opinion of Tacobed.

Q: Before Tacobed turned into a monster, she provided life-sustaining substances to the people. What did she give them?

A: She provided food (salmon) and water.



Fire, Flood and Fury continued...

Q: When Tacobed draws in a very deep breath, she bursts her blood vessels, and the blood gushes and pours down her sides. What does blood do for a body? Why does this native story see the gushing fluid as blood?

A: *Blood and hot lava can both be red. Blood gives the body life. The gushing fluid coming from Tacobed is described as blood because the life and activity of the mountain is taken away and the mountain becomes harmless.*

Q: The blood is changed into rivers of water. Why is water important? What promise does Changer make about the water?

A: *Water is necessary for humans. Changer promises that Tacobed will remain harmless; fish will return to the rivers. The story tells how a volcano, after an active period, regains its calm. Wildlife and plants will return to the volcano's slopes and provide sustenance.*

Q: Do you think Tacobed is dead or napping?

A: *Tacobed is napping.*

The Miser of Mount Rainier

Q: The old man takes all the hiaqua he can find. Why does this make Sahale angry? What is the punishment?

A: *This made Sahale angry because he did not leave any hiaqua as an offering to the tamanowas powers that helped him discover the treasure. Sahale punished the old man by causing a great storm, burying the man in snow, sending demons, erupting fire and ash, and causing water to pour down the slopes of the volcano from the lake at the summit of the volcano.*

Q: What evidence in the story tells us Mount Rainier is a volcano?

A: *Sahale erupted fire (perhaps lava and pyroclastic flows) and the air became thick and hot (ash). Water flowed from the summit, which may have been the summit lake draining or lahars (mud flows).*

Q: What changes does he see in the mountain?

A: *The mountain lost its top and generally changed shape.*

