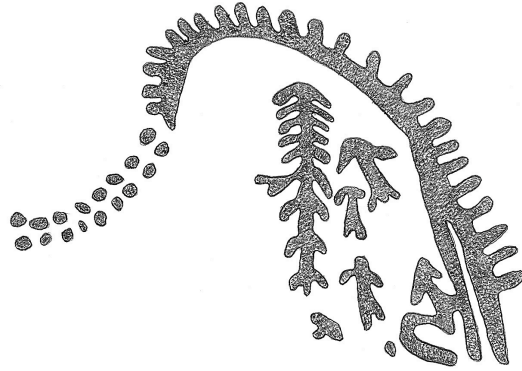


## Educational Tools for Teachers & Parents



### **The Truths of Trees • A Story by Thomas Doty**

#### **Key Cultural Concepts**

*The Truths of Trees* is set in Doty’s mountain home in southern Oregon and in the redwood groves of the northern California coast. While the story draws most of its cultural ideas from Tolowa, Tututni and Chilula traditions, many of these concepts are universal among all native people of the region.

**An Ancient Race of One-Leggeds** — “The Tree People are our relations,” says the storyteller. They are often called by their nickname, The One-Leggeds. Trees provide food and medicine, shelter and warmth. In *The Truths of Trees*, Tommy and Tippy take refuge in a giant redwood where they discover a medicine that cures the world’s sickness. To native people, ancient groves of Tree People are filled with mystery and holiness. They inspired the Old Ones to create the first myths from a time when Tree People and Human People were growing up together. These stories dramatized cultural truths, and still do. “In Old English the word for tree and truth is the same word: treow. We desire our truths to be steadfast and deeply rooted, and outlast centuries.” (Page 3).

**Monsters in the Depths** — Native stories are filled with monsters. In *The Truths of Trees*, Coyote tells Doty about “giant serpents who nap in the lakes and use submerged redwoods for pillows, and monsters and dark ghosts who give you humans the willies...” (Page 10). Coyote tells the story of a how four brothers fought the two-headed monster that tore up the woods. In native cultures, monsters in the stories are often symbols for the monsters Human People face within themselves. Coyote taunts Doty to face his fear by visiting the battlefield and confronting the monster ... the clearcut. He points out, “Monsters are never far away.” (Page 8).

**Within the Forest** — The redwoods are a misty world of distinct weather patterns and plant life, of rich qualities of filtered light, subtle seasons and deep silence. The native people view each grove as a village filled with their Tree People relatives. Together they evolved into complex cultures. Stories were everywhere ... in the language of the forest landscape and told in the winter lodges. This changed with the arrival of Europeans. The traditional lifeways of the redwoods and the native people are continually threatened. Yet the knowledge contained in millennia of stories gives hope to both cultures. “Though the stories are fractured, there are whispers of monologues that rise out of stumps and dialogues that speak through heaps of broken branches.” (Page 10).

**Wake Up!** — In native cultures, most prophecies are not predictions. They are warnings. When the world gets out of balance, stories are created that say, “Wake up! The world isn’t right! And you can do something about it.” In *The Truths of Trees*, Coyote’s urging that Doty confront the clearcut is a kind of subtle prophecy, a little wake-up warning. But Minnie Reeves, a 102 year old Chilula elder, tells us emphatically what can happen if we don’t take care of the trees. “The redwood trees have a lot of power: they are the tallest, live the longest, and are the most beautiful trees in the world. Destroy these trees and you destroy the Creator’s love. And if you destroy that which the Creator loves so much, you will eventually destroy mankind.” (Page 10).

## Writing Prompts & Discussion Questions

These prompts and questions address important ideas in *The Truths of Trees*.

1. What truths do the Tree People reveal? To Doty? To you?
2. Describe the relationship between native people and the redwoods.
3. Who are Tommy and Tippy? What do they contribute to the story?
4. In the story, Doty contemplates, “Which are older? The trees or the stories?” What do you think?
5. At the end of the story, Doty says he will return to the clearcut. Would you return? Why or why not?