

The Ojibwa Corn Hero

When the youth Wunzh reached the proper age, his father built him a lodge in a remote place where he could fast undisturbed and find his guardian in life. It was spring of the year and, in the first days of his fast, Wunzh walked the woods each morning, musing on the first shoots of plants and flowers, coming alive in the warming earth.

2 He hoped this would store his mind with pleasant thoughts for his dreams each night. Often, on these strolls, he found himself wondering how these plants grew, some of them sweet like berries, others poisonous, yet others full of medicine. Perhaps, if he knew more about such things, he could help his people. Perhaps they might not have to rely on the luck of the hunt or the occasional fish caught from opaque waters.

As the days went by, Wunzh grew too weak for such wanderings and instead lay in his lodge, praying that he would dream of something that would help his people. In his increasing dizziness, he permitted himself the thought that while the Great Spirit had made all things, including the people, he could have made things a bit easier for them.

On the third day of his fast, as he lay in his lodge, he saw a figure descend from the sky—a figure richly dressed in yellow and green garments of many shades, with a great plume of golden feathers waving on its head. With dreamlike grace, it arrived in Wunzh's lodge.

“The Great Spirit sent me to you, my friend,” said the figure. “He takes note that your prayers are unusual. You don't seem to want the glory of the warrior, but instead merely something for the good of your people.” The visitor went on to explain that this was possible. The condition was that Wunzh wrestle with his visitor.

At first, Wunzh's heart sank. He was already weak from fasting. What hope did he have . . . ? But gathering his courage, he engaged the figure, and they wrestled until Wunzh felt utterly exhausted. Abruptly, the figure stopped, smiled, and said, “That's enough for now. You did well, I will come again to try you.” He disappeared, ascending into the light of the sun.

The following day he came again, and once again challenged Wunzh who by now was even weaker. But it seemed that the weaker his body was, the greater his courage and determination. Again they wrestled, long and hard, and again the visitor broke it off, promising

to come again for the final trial. Wunzh collapsed in an exhaustion near death.

The next day, after the third and final trial had begun, the heavenly visitor stopped and declared himself beaten. He sat down next to the youth and told him the Great Spirit was pleased with his courage. Now he would receive the instructions he had prayed for.

“Tomorrow,” the visitor said, “is your seventh day of fasting. Your father will come with some food for strength and I will come again and you will win. Afterward, you must strip my clothes from me, put me on the ground, and take away all the weeds. Then you must bury me there. Do not let weeds grow there, but come from time to time and see if I have returned. And then you will have your wish and be able to teach your people what you want them to know.”

In the morning, Wunzh's father came with food, and the youth said he would wait until sundown to eat it. And when the visitor came again, Wunzh seized him with strength that amazed the youth, threw him down on the ground and stripped away his rich yellow and green clothes. Seeing that the figure was dead, he buried him as he had been told to, and returned to his father's lodge to eat.

In the days that followed, Wunzh would go off unannounced to the spot where he had buried his friend and kept the weeds away. Toward the end of summer, he came to the spot and found that his old lodge had disappeared. In its stead was a tall, graceful plant, with clusters of yellow on its side, long green leaves, and a graceful plume of gold nodding from the top.

“It is my friend,” Wunzh said to himself, and suddenly knew his friend's name: Mondawmin. He ran to fetch his father and told him that this was what he had dreamed for in his fast. If the people cared for his friend the way Wunzh had been instructed, they would no longer have to rely only on the hunt or the waters. With that, he showed his father how to tear off the yellow clusters, as he had torn off the garments before, and he showed how to hold the ears to the fire to turn them brown. The whole family then gathered for a feast upon this newly grown presence in their lives, and expressed their lasting thanks to the spirit, the beautiful visitor, who had given it to them.

And so corn came into this world.

29. Explain two things this myth reveals about the Ojibwa way of life. Include specific information from the myth to support your answer.

THE OJIBWA CORN HERO
CONSTRUCTED-RESPONSE SCORING GUIDE

Score	Description
4	Response correctly identifies and fully explains two things about the Ojibwa way of life that are revealed in this myth (see below). The explanation includes specific supporting information from the myth for each thing.
3	Response correctly identifies and explains two things about the Ojibwa way of life that are revealed in this myth. The explanation includes supportive information from the myth that lacks specificity or development.
2	Response provides a partial answer: correctly identifies and explains one thing about the Ojibwa way of life, or identifies and explains two things with limited, incomplete, or partially correct information from the myth.
1	Response provides a minimal or vague statement about what the myth reveals about the Ojibwa way of life.
0	Response is totally incorrect or irrelevant.
Blank	No response.

Training Notes for Constructed-Response Item 29

What is revealed about the Ojibwa way of life:

- At first the Ojibwa depended solely on hunting and fishing for food, but learned how to take care of plants the correct way. Support: paragraph 2 tells that they relied on the hunt and an occasional fish; next to last paragraph describes how Wunzh taught them the correct way to care for the corn plant.
- Fasting, meditation, and isolation were used to promote reflection and a search for maturity or adulthood. Details from the first paragraph are relevant, as are any details that mention how Wunzh changed, or how he matured.
- The Ojibwa believed in the Great Spirit—Wunzh was willing to follow his instructions even though he was tired and weak from fasting.

29. This myth reveals to the reader two things about the Ojibwa way of life. One is that they are a tribe that hunts fish and game for their meals. Proof of this is in paragraph two, when Wunzh is dreaming of other ways to feed his people in ways other than "the luck of the hunt or the occasional fish caught from the opaque waters." 4

Secondly we learn that the Ojibwa people also believe in a Great Spirit. Throughout the passage we read about the Great Spirit and can only assume that all Ojibwa people believe in it since the Sen does a visitor (paragraph four.) But it is in the last paragraph where we learn that the tribe believes in the spirit because they give thanks to it (as well as the visitor) while they are eating their corn.

29. This myth reveals two things about the Ojibwa way of life: their heavy reliance on corn and their highly religious society. 4

Before the Ojibwa had corn, they could never be sure where the next meal would come from. Its arrival meant more stability for their diet and a decreased dependency on the luck of the hunt in order to obtain food. It is a small wonder that the Ojibwa chose to deify corn in this myth.

This selection also reveals the Ojibwa to be very much a religion-oriented society. The myth introduces Wunzh's week-long fast as something that would automatically have to take place since he had reached "the proper age." This was indeed the case for an Ojibwa, for in their society religion was as important (as or even the same thing as) sustenance.

29. Two things that reveal the Ojibwa way of life are:

3

When a young man is growing up his father takes him to a remote lodge to find his guardian in life. He would stay there for seven days without food from his father. After the seven days were up, the boy's father would come and get him and bring him home to eat.

Another thing is that the Ojibwa people had strong beliefs in spirits and stuff like that. They would rely on the spirits to help find food or at least tell them where to find food. The spirits were a big part of the Ojibwa's life.

29. The myth tells that at a certain age boys are sent away to a certain remote area to discover their "guardians" in life. In the first paragraph it says, "when the youth Wunzh reached the proper age, his father built him a lodge in a remote place where he could fast undisturbed and find his guardian in life." It also tells that the Ojibwa believe in a great spirit or a god like force. In paragraph five it says "The Great Spirit sent me to you, my friend." Some kind of figure was sent to the boy to help him do whatever he was at the lodge to do.

3

29. The Ojibwa believe in guardian spirits that everyone has and must locate through a vision.

2

The Ojibwa are very religious and serious about their beliefs, and show this through prayer to the Great Spirit.

29. They fasted and meditated, they knew how to fish and hunt but had little or no knowledge of plants and crops, since fishing and hunting is a gamble and might not come back with any food, growing crops is a more guaranteed way of getting food if the necessary precautions are taken.

2

29. The myth reveals that the Ojibwa are strong believers in the Great Spirit. The myth also reveals that the Ojibwa believe in mind over power.

1

29. They have major beliefs of fasting and meditating to communicate with spirits.

1