

American Literature: Native Americans and Puritans

Native American Literature

- Native American legends are oral traditions that often have moral lessons or some form of belief that is taught
- Humans and animals are seen as equals, and animals are given human characteristics
- There are many different kinds of legends:
 - Hero stories- about people who have been immortalized
 - Trickster stories- about different trickster figures of the tribes- coyote for the Navajo- who were both helpful and dangerous figures

The Puritans

- Puritan is a broad term, referring to a number of Protestant groups that sought to “purify” the Church of England
- They wished to return to the simpler forms of worship
- Many Puritans suffered persecution in England- some were put into jail and whipped, their noses slit and their ears lopped off
- Some fled to Holland while others fled to North America

Puritan Beliefs

- Puritans believed that Adam and Eve’s sin had damned most people for all eternity

- They also believed that Jesus Christ had been sent to earth to save particular people as the “elect”
- It was difficult to know for certain if one was saved or damned, so the puritans tried to behave in as exemplary a manner as possible
- Puritans valued plainness and feared the forests because that is where Satan resided
- The American character has been shaped by the moral, ethical, and religious convictions of the Puritans

Puritan Literature

- Puritan literature consists of sermons, diaries, and personal narratives that are told with a plain writing style
- These pieces were instructive and often reinforced the authority of the Bible and the church