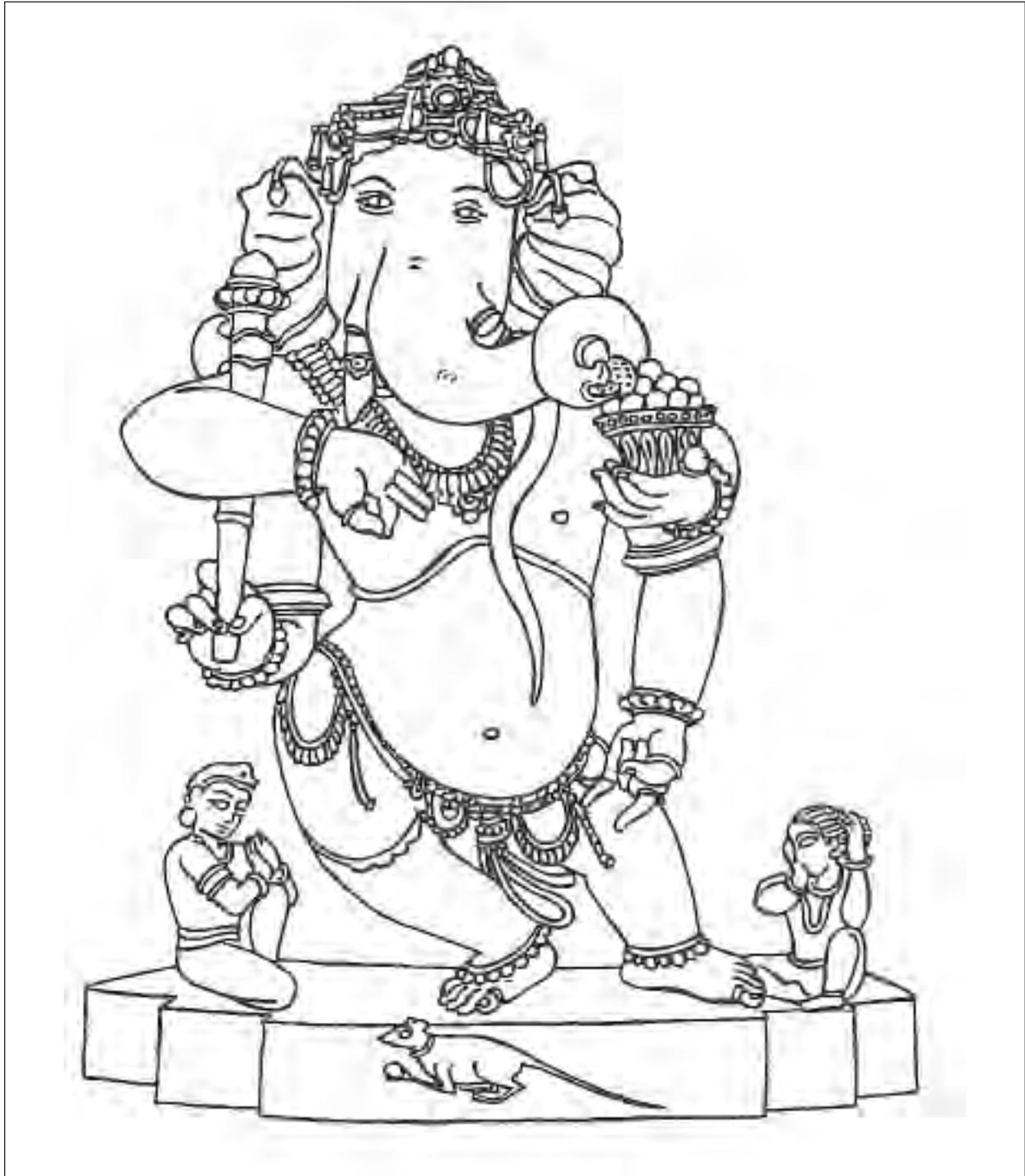


Hindu Myths and Stories



ASIAN ART MUSEUM
CHONG-MOON LEE CENTER
FOR ASIAN ART AND CULTURE

Asian Art Museum of San Francisco Passport to Asia Storytelling Program

Dear Instructor,

Welcome to the Asian Art Museum's "Passport to Asia" Storytelling Program. We look forward to coming to your classroom and presenting to you and your students art distinctive to the culture and traditions of India. Stories will be told to help bridge the world that the students know with the world they are entering and to enhance the students' imagination so that they can better connect with what they see.

To ensure that your students gain the maximum advantage of participating in the storytelling program, the enclosed activities are suggested for before and after our visit. The storyteller's presentation will be narrower in concept; however, the information, stories and activities we have prepared will be helpful for developing context relative to our visit. In addition to these suggested activities, we have also included a list of resources for your classroom use.

Thank you for participating in our Passport to Asia Program.

Asian Art Museum Storytelling Corps



Suggested Pre-visit Activities

1. Where is India?

Show the students where India is on a globe, world map or atlas. Compare its size with that of the United States. Measure the distance in miles from San Francisco to New Delhi, the capital of India, or calculate the hours it would take to get there by airplane. A map of India is included in this packet.

2. How do you say hello in India?

Namaste (nah mahs day) is used for both hello and goodbye and means, “the god in me greets the god in you.”

3. What are myths?

Myths are stories from long ago that are sacred to the people who told them.

4. What are Hindu myths?

The Hindu religion is based on the belief in one absolute, timeless unending source of all creation. However this one source is worshipped in the form of many gods, of which the three central ones are Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the preserver) and Shiva (the destroyer). There are also demons or anti-gods, who have great power and constantly fight with the gods. The demons are sometimes temporarily victorious, but when the gods combine their forces, they always overcome.

5. Who are some of the gods and goddesses?

Vishnu: The preserver of life. To save earth, he incarnated himself many times, as a fish, a tortoise, a boar, Rama, Krishna, and in some beliefs, Buddha.

Lakshmi: The wife of Vishnu, a loving form of the divine mother goddess and the goddess of love, beauty, and wealth.

Rama: A great hero who fought the demon Ravana, who had kidnapped Rama’s beloved wife Sita.

Krishna: He was a flute-playing cowherd as a youth, delighting in childish pranks.

Shiva: He is the god that destroys life and then recreates it.

Parvati: The wife of Shiva, and another loving form of the divine mother goddess. She is also the mother of Ganesha and Kartikeya.

Durga: A very powerful and fierce form the divine mother goddess. She defeated the buffalo demon that threatened the world.

Ganesha: Known as the god of wisdom and the remover of all obstacles. He has the head of an elephant.

Kartikeya: He is also known as Skanda, the god of war.

Brahma: The god of creation.

5. How do the gods and goddesses get around?

The gods and goddesses use vehicles that include:

Garuda: An animal with the head of a vulture and the body of a man, Garuda is the king of the birds and the vehicle of Vishnu.

Nandi: A bull, the vehicle of Shiva, he sits at the door of many temples pointing towards the image of Shiva inside.

Rat: The vehicle of Ganesha, the elephant-headed god.

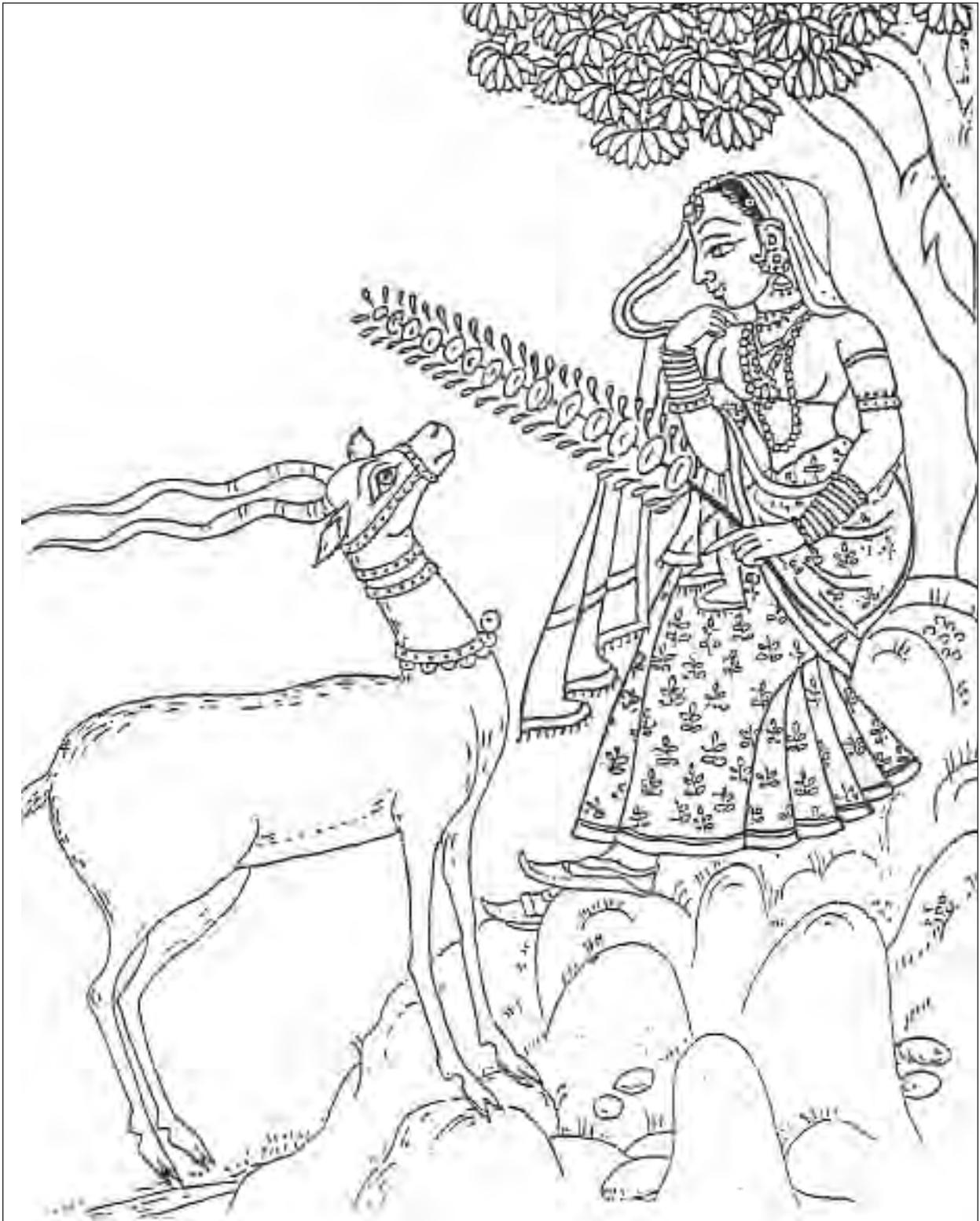
Peacock: The vehicle of Kartikeya. It is also the national bird of India

Lion: the vehicle of Durga who is the fierce form of the mother goddess, Parvati.

6. Tell the story, *The Girl in the Forest*.

What story does it remind you of that we tell in this country?

The Girl in the Forest



The Girl in the Forest

From *Seasons of Splendor* by Madhur Jaffrey

Once upon a time, there was a girl who lived alone in a forest. She did not know her parents for they had died when she was little. There was not much to eat in the forest except roots and leaves, so the girl depended upon the charity of passing strangers who often gave her roasted grains of millet and barley from their knapsacks.

It just so happened that although the girl was poor, she had been graced with the most exquisite face and body.

One misty dawn, it chanced that a rich, handsome King came riding through this forest. As his horse was racing towards the red morning sun, the King saw a brilliant glimmer moving behind the leaves. He eased his horse cautiously towards it.

If the horse moved a step, so did the glimmer. If the horse stopped, so did the glimmer.

The King was very puzzled. He got off his horse and called, "Who is it?"

There was no answer. The King wondered if he was being deceived by a sunbeam.

As he moved closer to the glimmer, it streaked through several bushes and moved away. The King ran after it.

When he stopped again, so did the glimmer, but this time, the King could hear quick, shallow breathing.

"Come out of there, I order you to come out of there," the King called.

Again, the glimmer began moving with great speed. The King chased it and when he was close enough to hear the same shallow breathing, he jumped upon it.

To his great surprise, the King found himself holding a young, beautiful maiden in his arms.

Her long hair fell behind her like a sheet of silk, her eyes, large and soft, were gazing at him like a frightened deer.

"Do not be frightened, beautiful princess," the King said in soothing tones. "All I want to do," went on the King, quite overcome by her beauty and proud bearing, "is to ask you to marry me. Will you please marry me?"

"Oh, yes," she answered, "yes, yes."

The King lifted her up on to his horse and then jumped up behind her. Together they rode towards his palace where a solemn marriage ceremony was performed.

A year passed. One day, the Queen called her handmaidens and said, "For breakfast today, I would like some grains of roasted millet and barley."

The handmaidens were astonished. Only poor peasants ate roasted grains of millet and barley, but they thought royalty had strange ways and off they went to the market to buy the required grains.

As the Queen was sitting nibbling at her breakfast, the King chanced to come to the door.

“Whatever are you eating?” he asked.

The Queen put her plate behind her, shielding it from the King’s eyes, and answered, “Pearls....just pearls.”

The King was silent for a moment. “Where did you get such a large collection of pearls?”

“Oh,” she answered, trying to sound casual, “they were sent to me by my parents. This is what I was used to eating for breakfast at home.”

The King said, “In our home, my dearest Queen, we might serve saffron rice cooked with raisins or roasted deer or dates stuffed with walnuts, but never pearls. Your father’s home must be so much grander than ours. I am sure you must miss it. I would very much like to take you back to visit your parents. We can leave tomorrow.”

Terror struck at the heart of the Queen. She ran to goddess Parvati’s temple and fell at her feet. “Oh Parvati,” she prayed, “Save me! Save me! I do love my husband so very much. I never told him I was a princess. He just assumed I was. I was far too afraid to correct him lest he leave me. And when he came in and saw me eating roast grains of barley and millet, I was at my wit’s end. I lied out of panic. Please, please, help me.”

Parvati felt sorry for this good, kind Queen and said, “For three hours I will give you just the kind of home that your husband expects to see. I will give you a father and a mother and all necessary relatives and servants. For three hours only.”

The Queen thanked Parvati and rushed back to the palace where arrangements were already being made for a visit to the Queen’s ancestral home.

The next day the royal party—with horses, palanquins and servants—set out at dawn. The Queen guided them through the forest until they reached a clearing. “There,” she said, pointing to a distant castle, ‘there is my father’s palace.’”

The palace exceeded all the King’s expectations for it was made entirely of gold. The doors and windows were made from gleaming rock crystal edged with emeralds. There was a large bathing pool outside, which was studded with sapphires right down to its coolest bottom. In the garden there were arbors where juicy grapes hung in luscious bunches and mango trees laden with their sweet fruit. Musicians strolled about playing lutes, horns, conch shells and two-sided drums.

A sumptuous feast had been laid out like a picnic on the grass. Standing around it were liveried servants, shooing away flies with peacock feathers and yak-tail fans.

“Welcome to our home,” said the Queen’s gracious parents. “Would you like to bathe in our pool before we settle down to eat?” they asked the King.

Now the King was enchanted by the blue waters of this unusual pool. He thanked his hosts and changed into his bathing loincloth.

“This has been the most refreshing experience of my life,” he said as he came out dripping with water. Attendants helped him dress and hung up his wet loincloth to dry on a bush.

The next hour was spent in eating roasted quail from golden plates and drinking orange blossom wine from hollowed-out rubies.

Dusk fell. The Queen began to urge the King to return home.

“Why so early, my Queen?” the King said, “I’m really enjoying myself. Your parents have been so kind and hospitable. I would like to get to know them better.”

“Perhaps some other time,” the Queen said, “I do feel we have stayed long enough.”

“Couldn’t we just spend a week here? Don’t you enjoy being home?” the King asked.

“Oh, yes I do,” answered the Queen, now near tears, “but...I feel...we shouldn’t...be a burden to my old parents.”

“All right, my sweet,” said the King, “if you insist on returning then we will but we should visit your parents again. This place is a true paradise.”

And so the King’s party returned home.

The following day, the King realized that he had left his wet loincloth drying on a bush. He called one of his courtiers and asked him to send a couple of horsemen with gifts for the Queen’s parents and with instructions to collect the loincloth.

The horsemen headed towards the Queen’s father’s palace. But when they neared the clearing from which they had spotted the palace, they saw nothing.

“The day is a bit hazy,” one horseman said, “perhaps it is a bit further ahead.” On and on they went without any sign of the palace.

“This seems to be just about where the palace should be,” said the second horseman.

Just then on a very familiar bush, beside a simple pond, they saw the King’s loincloth. It was dry now and fluttering gently in the breeze.

The horsemen folded it neatly and returned to their King. There they told their story adding, “Your majesty, it is exceedingly strange. We saw a pond and a bush, but no jeweled palace, no garden, no musicians and no liveried servants.”

The King went to his Queen and said, “I cannot understand this. My horsemen have just returned with the loincloth I left drying in your father’s garden.”

The Queen let out a gasp.

“But,” went on the King, “they saw no golden palace, no sapphire-lined pool, no musicians, no...”

“Please don’t go on,” said the Queen, falling down in a heap. “Oh, forgive me. I have no father or mother. I lived all alone in the forest when you met me. What you saw me eating was not pearls but roasted grains of barley and millet. I did not mean to deceive you. I was so afraid of losing you that what I blurted out ...was a lie. And then, when you wanted to visit my family, I appealed to Goddess Parvati for help. The golden palace, the sapphire-lined pool. All these beautiful things were the goddess’s doing. She helped me out. Please, find it in your heart to forgive me.”

The King embraced his wife and said, “There is nothing to forgive. You did what you did out of love. If goddess Parvati understood your predicament who am I to complain? Perhaps we should go to Parvati’s temple together and offer her our thanks.”

Suggested Post Visit Activities

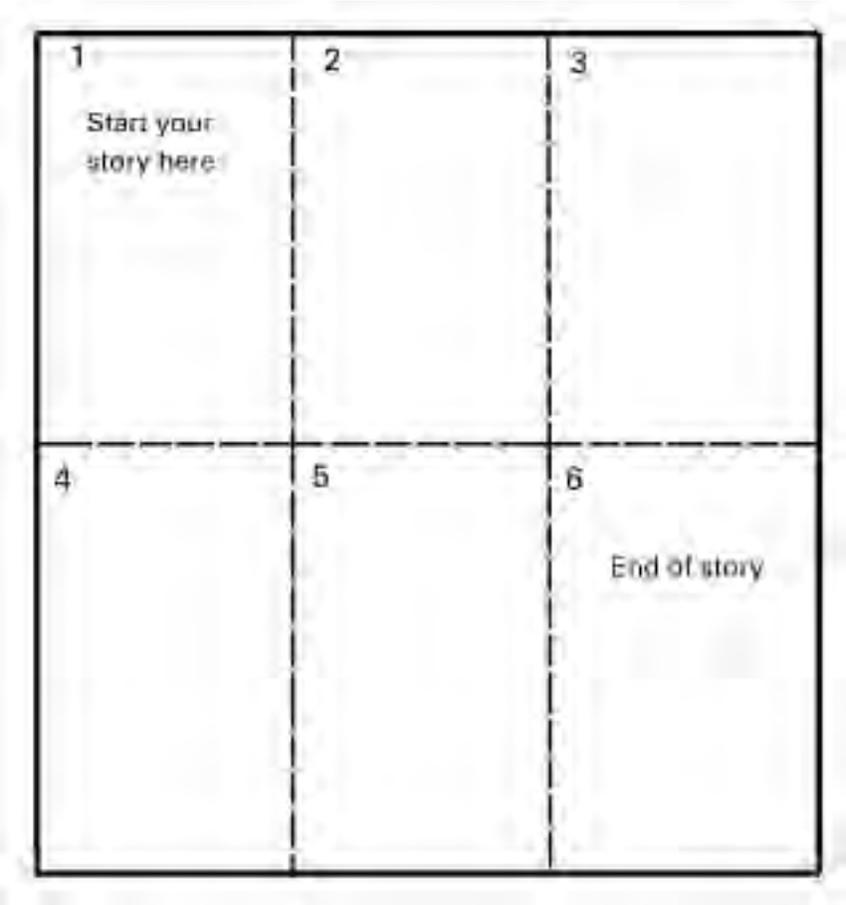
1. Color the picture of Ganesha and Nandi. (Enclosed)
2. Write your own story about one of the gods or goddesses you met in the stories that were told to you. Draw a picture of a god or goddess in your story.
3. Draw a picture pocket story. (Pattern enclosed)
4. Play a game of charades acting out your favorite gods, goddesses and their vehicles.
5. Select and read to the class stories from the book list.

Nandi



Pocket Picture Story

- 1. Fold paper in half and then in thirds to fit in your pocket.
- 2. Make a pocket picture story from one of the stories you heard at the museum.
- 3. Remember to start your first square with the beginning of the story; the last square is the end of the story.
- 4. Take your pocket picture story home and tell the story to your parents.



A Book List of Sources for Indian Storytelling

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