The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush

Long ago, a little boy named Gopher lived on the Great Plains. Although he always tried to keep up with the other boys in the tribe, he just couldn't.

Since he was not destined to be a warrior, Gopher had to find his own special place among his people. His talents as an artist enabled him to appreciate available resources and to see the beauty of colors... sunsets... and his environment.

Behind The Scenes

Tomie dePaola has been always been interested in folktales. No matter what their ethnic origin, he believes that folktales teach us about life... and people. The “Author's Note” at the end of this story explains how he got the idea for the Indian Paintbrush story. It also mentions The Legend of the Blue Bonnet, his tale about the state flower of Texas.

Since the Indian Paintbrush is the state flower of Wyoming, and the author dedicates this book to his friends who shared their part of Wyoming with him, this selection is in the Rocky Mountain section.

However, spectacular fields of Indian Paintbrush do bloom in Texas, too. Why not use this story, along with The Legend of the Blue Bonnet, to learn more about Texas and the southwest.

Many Different Directions

- **Locate Wyoming on a map.** Point out the Great Plains— that narrow strip located along the eastern border of the state. Explain that this is part of a huge plain area that extends from Canada to Mexico. With the group, gather books and information about the Great Plains. See what you can learn.

- **Experiment with paint... and paintbrush.** Provide paper, watercolors, and easel paintbrushes (large, fat brushes). Tell children to dip the large brush into the paint, and dab it on paper. (The brush would be used like a sponge in sponge painting.) Using this technique, youngsters can create their own pictures of the Indian Paintbrush flowers.

- **Point out the close relationship between Native Americans and nature.** Recall story details that show how Little Gopher appreciates and respects the land, the natural resources, and the sunsets. Determine why it's important for everyone to care for the environment. List things that your students and their families do to show their concern.

- **Try rock painting.** Mention that Little Gopher liked to decorate smooth stones with berry juice. Plan a similar project. First, go on a rock hunt. Ask each child to find a rock/shape that they like. Rinse the rocks with water. Dry them thoroughly with paper towels. Then, display magic markers in a variety of colors. Suggest that youngsters use their imaginations... and decorate the rocks. Put together your own rock collection.

- **Make up some new color words.** Ask children to think of original names for colors they'd like to use. Suggest “sky blue,” "red rose," "grass green," and other colors from nature. On a bulletin board, set up a colorful paintbrush display. Post the names on these paper paintbrushes.

- **Read aloud The Legend of the Blue Bonnet,** Tomie dePaola's book about the state flower of Texas. Use this story as a springboard for learning more about this state, its major cities, and
places of interest.

- Part of Collection:
  
  **Folktales and Folklore, Native American Heritage**

- Subjects:
  
  Arts and Crafts, Outdoor Activities and Recreation, Colors, Cities and States, Early Science, Native American, Maps and Globes

- Skills:
  
  Development of Reading Comprehension, Maps, Listening Comprehension