

Where
the past
is present

DETROIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

TEACHER RESOURCE LESSON PLAN

ANISHINABEG ORAL TRADITIONS



INTRODUCTION

This lesson helps third grade students understand the life and culture of the Native Americans that lived in Michigan before the arrival of European settlers in the late 17th century. It includes a comprehensive background essay on the Anishinabeg. The lesson plan includes a list of additional resources and copies of worksheets and primary sources needed for the lessons.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

What was life like for the Native Americans who lived in Michigan before the arrival of Europeans?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Explore how the Anishinabeg learn about the past and the world around them.
- Compare and contrast a modern student's way of learning to that of an Anishinabe child.
- Apply the oral tradition to the student's own family life.

MI GLCES – GRADE THREE SOCIAL STUDIES

H3 – History of Michigan Through Statehood

- 3-H3.0.1 - Identify questions historians ask in examining Michigan.
- 3-H3.0.4 - Draw upon traditional stories of American Indians who lived in Michigan in order to make generalizations about their beliefs.
- 3-H3.0.5 - Use informational text and visual data to compare how American Indians and settlers in the early history of Michigan adapted to, used, and modified their environment.

COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS - ELA

Reading

- 1 - Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it.
- 2 - Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development, summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

Writing

- 3 - Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Speaking and Listening

- 2 - Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

LESSON PLAN: ANISHINABEG ORAL TRADITIONS

BACKGROUND ESSAY

The banks of the Detroit River have been a natural gathering place for over six thousand years. People began visiting the Detroit area thousands of years ago, but not much is known about them because they left no written evidence of their lives.

Several Native American groups lived in Michigan over three hundred years ago when the first Europeans arrived in Detroit. At that time, Detroit was an open land of rich soil, forests and grasses. Large fruit trees like crabapple and black cherry grew wild. Animals such as squirrels, muskrats, beavers, deer and bear roamed free and fed on grass, while swans, turkeys, quail, geese, doves and other birds travelled in flocks. The Detroit River was a clear flowing waterway, and schools of fish jumped in and out of the water.

Michigan's rich land, beautiful water and bountiful wildlife created the perfect land for the Anishinabeg – the people who were living here in the 1600s. The Anishinabeg were also called the People of the Three Fires because they included three different groups, the Ojibwa (Chippewa), the Ottawa, and the Potawatomi. The groups spoke the same language and shared a similar heritage. The Anishinabeg people were devoted to passing on the belief system, legends and culture of their ancestors. They also moved in groups with their families from place to place. They lived in different places for each season, depending on what natural resources were available, to hunt, plant, gather and fish.

It is not known how the People of the Three Fires came to live in Michigan. They may be the descendants of pre-historic peoples who lived here thousands of years ago, or they may have traveled from another place. Native American oral histories

say that the groups came from the northeast coast of North America, from present day Canada and New England.

When Europeans arrived in the 1600s, they found that Michigan's Anishinabeg were split into three groups. The Ojibwa first settled on the eastern shore of Lake Superior. They were good hunters, fishers, and gatherers of maple syrup and wild rice. The Ottawa lived on the eastern shore of Lake Huron, and they were primarily trading people. They sometimes travelled hundreds of miles to exchange goods

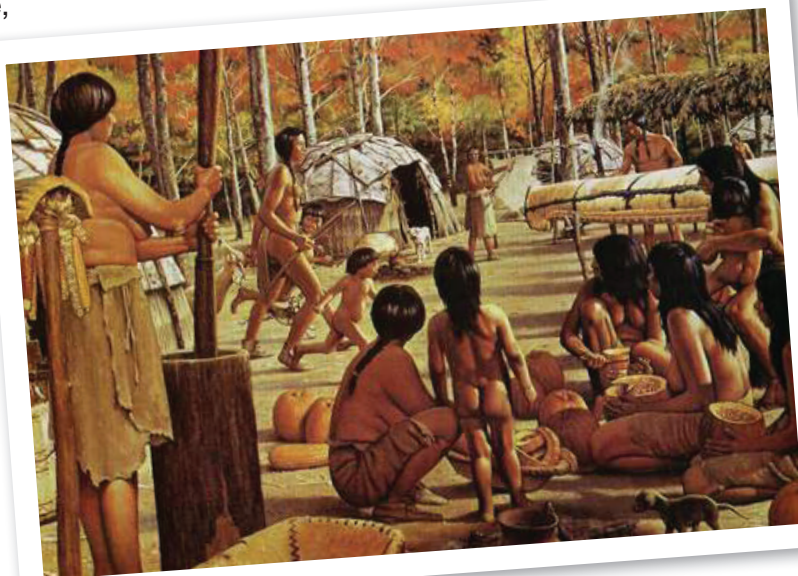
with other tribes. The Potawatomi lived in southwestern Michigan. They were known for their hospitality and good relations with other Native American groups.

All of the Anishinabeg groups were fishers and hunters and gatherers. They hunted for animals such as deer and beaver. They gathered fruits, nuts, wild rice and roots. Sometimes they grew corn, gourds, squash, beans and

rice. They had great respect for animals and plants and learned all they could about them. The Anishinabeg believed that they should only use from nature what they needed to live.

Since they had such great respect for nature, the Anishinabeg never let any part of an animal go to waste. They used animal bones to make needles, weapons and beads. Skins were used for clothing, moccasins, shelter coverings, sacks, box hinges and rope. Tendons of the animals, called sinew, made very durable thread.

The Anishinabeg also used plants in many different ways. Cornhusks made good bedding, while cobs made pegs and pipes. Birch tree bark was used to make canoes or to cover their homes, which were called wigwams. Wigwams were built by placing birch bark over a rectangular dome-



LESSON PLAN: ANISHINABEG ORAL TRADITIONS

shaped structure. They also used birch bark to make containers by sewing together pieces that then could hold water, food or supplies. Branches of trees made frames for canoes, wigwams and snowshoes, as well as bows and arrows. Sweet grass was woven into baskets and sometimes used as a thread. The earth was also used. Rocks were made into arrowheads, farming tools and mallets. The clay earth made pots.

Anishinabeg children did not receive formal schooling. Instead, they learned by watching and listening to adults and elders. Children joined their families to help make or repair tools for hunting and gathering food or to prepare it for storing and eating. They participated in daily living activities depending on their age and gender. It was very important for children to pay attention to what they could learn from adults. They learned to have respect for, and knowledge of, the world around them. They admired adults, elders, storytellers and others with special talents and skills.

Children also listened to stories and legends that the elders told. Elders could be anyone in the group or band recognized as being important, respected or skilled. These stories sometimes took the form of myths. They were a very important part of the ethic system of the group, and described how they understood the world. Today, we may call an ethic system “religion,” but the Anishinabeg and other Native American groups did not have the same vocabulary and way of looking at their world.

Instead of looking through picture albums or reading history books, the children learned about the past through the elders’ stories. These stories taught lessons and helped children develop life skills. The children loved to hear the stories over and over. Soon they knew the stories from memory

and told them to others who were younger. This way of learning about the past is called an oral history tradition. Oral history is important for passing down information from one generation to another. Oral history was crucial to learn life lessons and to develop the skills needed to survive. Oral history is still practiced by many cultures today.

Native American children also learned through trial and error. If something worked, they did it again. If it didn’t work, they might have tried again or done something different. Anishinabeg children and young adults also learned through intense training. Many activities in the groups called on special

skills and required years of training. These included making tools, decorations, and learning how to administer herbs and other natural resources for healing.

The Detroit area was very important to the Anishinabeg and other Native American groups (including the Wyandot, Iroquois, Fox, Miami, and Sauk) because it was a natural gathering place that was easy to reach. Tribes could reach Detroit

from Lake Huron in the north, Lake Erie from the south, and from several other rivers and streams that emptied into or near the river. For thousands of years before the Europeans arrived, many Native American groups came to the river to gather, hunt and fish and to trade with each other. They also gathered to discuss important matters or share news.

The Anishinabeg called the area that is now Detroit the “Bending River.” In the 1600s, there weren’t Native American settlements along the river. Instead, it was a meeting and hunting ground.



LESSON PLAN: ANISHINABEG ORAL TRADITIONS

MATERIALS USED

Data Elements:

- *Map: Michigan in 1760*
- *Story: The Origin of the Robin*
- *Story: The Three Cranberries*
- *Story: Allegory of the Seasons*
- *Story: Disappearance of the Rose*
- *Story: Ojibwa Creation Story*
- *Story: The Tree of Life*
- *Map: The Migration of the Anishinabe*

Paper and pencils

Document camera or overhead projector (optional)

LESSON PREPARATION

- If using an overhead projector, make transparencies of the Data Elements.

LESSON SEQUENCE

1. Explain to the students that they will study how the Anishinabeg taught and learned about the past. Ask them how they learn about the past today – in a textbook, in school, on television? Ask them how they think the Anishinabe learned about their past. If needed, remind them that they did not have books, photographs, or television. Explain that Anishinabeg children learned from elders within their tribe. Elders were respected people because they lived through many events and have heard stories from many people.
2. Show the students *Map: The Migration of the Anishinabe*. Explain that their legends said that their ancestors originally came from the East Coast. They called themselves the Anishinabe. Over many years, they divided into three different groups: the Ottawa, Potawatomi and the Ojibwa (Chippewa). Because they had similar ancestry, they spoke the same language and formed a loose group. They called themselves the People of the Three Fires. If desired, show the students *Map: Michigan 1760* and where each group lived.
3. Explain that the elders told stories about the

world around them, nature, and other lessons they had learned about life. Show them what you mean by telling one of the stories from the Data Elements. To be most effective, familiarize yourself with the story ahead of time so that you can truly tell the story instead of simply reading it.

4. Using a document camera or an overhead projector, show the students the written version of the story you told. As a class or in small groups, discuss the following questions:
 - Did your teacher leave any parts out or change anything in the story from the way it is written?
 - What things happened in the story that could be true?
 - Is there anything in the story that you don't think could have happened?
 - What did you learn about nature?
 - What lessons did you learn?
5. Discuss the responses as a group. Be certain to emphasize the following points: When someone tells a story from memory, sometimes it can be told in different ways, and things can be added and left out. Stories and legends (based on things that really happened) are passed on from generation to generation verbally, in the Native American tradition. This is an example of an oral history tradition.
6. Ask the students to talk to their parents, guardians and/or grandparents, about past events or about family stories and traditions. They could be about a war or something significant in history, or just an interesting story about their family. In the next few days, ask the students to share their stories out loud for the class. This could also be a written assignment, but the oral tradition of Native Americans is best understood through storytelling.

LESSON PLAN: ANISHINABEG ORAL TRADITIONS

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Books:

- Arbic, Bernard. *Sugar Island Sampler*. Allegan Forest, Michigan: The Priscilla Press, 1992.
- Bourgeois, Arthur P., editor. *Ojibwa Narratives of Charles and Charlotte Kawbawgam and Jacques LePique, 1893-1895*. Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1994.
- Burgess, Marilyn and Gail Guthrie Valaskakis. *Indian Princesses and Cowgirls, Stereotypes from the Frontier*. Montreal, Canada: Litho Acme, 1992.
- Cleland, Charles E. *Rites of Conquest*. Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1992.
- Eastman, Seth. *A Portfolio of North American Indians*. Afton, Minnesota: Afton Historical Society Press, 1995.
- Hele, Karl S. *Lines Drawn Upon the Water: First Nations and the Great Lakes Borders and Borderlands*. Waterloo, Ont: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008.
- Hickerson, Harold. *The Chippewa and Their Neighbors*. Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc., 1988.
- Kohl, Johann Georg. *Kitchi-Gami: Life Among the Lake Superior Ojibway*. Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1985.
- McCarthy, Cathy. *Indian Nations, The Ojibwa*. Austin, New York: Raintree Steck-Vaughn Publishers, 2001.
- Morriseau, Norval. *Legends of My People, The Great Ojibway*. Toronto, Canada: The Ryerson Press, 1965.
- Nies, Judith. *Native American History*. Random House, Inc., 1996.
- People of the Lakes*. TimeLife Books, The Indians Series, 1994.
- Peyton, John L. *The Stone Canoe and Other Stories*. Blacksburg, Virginia: The McDonald and Woodward Publishing Company, 1989.
- Vizenor, Gerald. *The Everlasting Sky: Voices of the Anishinabe People*. St. Paul, Minnesota: Minnesota Historical Society Press. 2001.

Wyman, Walker D. *The Chippewa, A History of the Great Lakes Woodland Tribe Over Three Centuries*. River Falls, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin-River Falls Press, 1993.

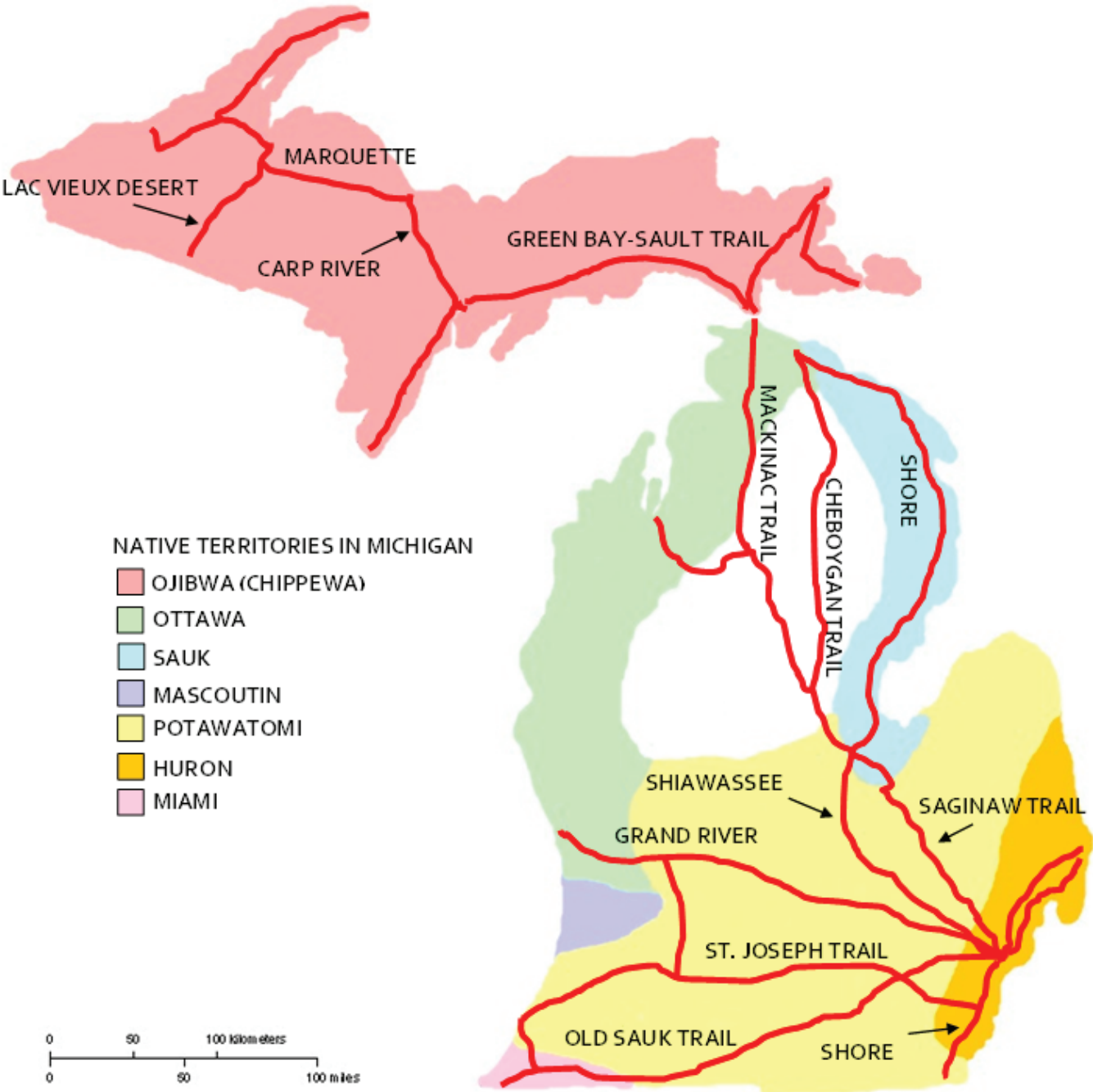


Links:

- Ojibwe Waasa-Inaabidaa: www.ojibwe.org
- News From Indian Country: www.indiancountrynews.com
- National Museum of the American Indian: www.nmai.si.edu
- Great Lakes Intertribal Council: www.glitc.org
- National Congress of American Indians: www.ncai.org
- Ojibwe Language Society: www.ojibwemowin.com

For more information about the
Detroit Historical Society,
or to schedule a field trip to the
Detroit Historical Museum or
Dossin Great Lakes Museum,
visit detroithistorical.org

MAP: MICHIGAN IN 1760



STORY: THE ORIGIN OF THE ROBIN

Spiritual gifts are sought by the Chippewas through fasting. An old man had an only son, a fine promising lad, who had come to that age which is thought by the Chippewas to be the most proper to make the long and final fast, that is to secure through life a guardian spirit, on whom future prosperity or adversity is to depend, and who forms and establishes the character of the faster to great or ignoble deeds.

This old man was ambitious that his son should surpass all others in whatever was deemed most wise and great amongst his tribe. And to fulfill his wishes, he thought it necessary that his son must fast a much longer time than any of those persons known for their great power or wisdom, whose fame he envied.

He therefore directed his son to prepare with great ceremony, for the important event. After he had been in the sweating lodge and bath several times, he ordered him to lie down upon a clean mat, in a little lodge expressly prepared for him, telling him at the same time to bear himself like a man, and that at the expiration of twelve days, he should receive food, and the blessing of his father.

The lad carefully observed this injunction, laying with his face covered with perfect composure, awaiting those happy visitations which were to seal his good or ill fortune. His father visited him every morning regularly to encourage him to perseverance, expatiating at full length on the renown and honor that attend him through life, if he accomplished the full term proscribed. To these admonitions the boy never answered, but lay without the least sign of unwillingness till the ninth day, when he addresses his father – “My father, my dreams are ominous of evil! May I break my fast now, and at a more propitious time, make a new fast?” The father answered – “My son, you know not what you ask! If you get up now, all your glory will depart. Wait patiently a little longer. You have but three days yet to accomplish what I desire. You know, it is for your own good.”

The son assented, and covering himself closer, he lay until the eleventh day, when he repeated his request to his father. The same answer was given him, by the old man, adding, that the next day he would himself prepare his first meal, and bring it to him. The boy remained silent, but lay like a skeleton. No one would have known he was living but by the gentle heaving of his breast.

The next morning the father, elated at having gained his end, prepared a repast for his son, and hastened to set it before him. On coming to the door, he was surprised to hear his son talking to himself. He stopped to listen, and looking through a small aperture, was more astonished when he beheld his

son painted with vermillion on his breast, and in the act of finishing his work by laying on the paint as far as his hand could reach on his shoulders, saying at the same time: – “My father has ruined me, as a man; he would not listen to my request; he will now be the loser. I shall be forever happy in my new state, for I have been obedient to my parent; he alone will be the sufferer; for the Spirit

is a just one, though not propitious to me. He has shown me pity, and now I must go.”

At that moment the old man broke in, exclaiming, “My son! My son! Do not leave me!” But his son with the quickness of a bird had flown up to the top of the lodge, and perched on the highest pole, a beautiful robin red-breast. He looked down on his father with pity beaming in his eyes, and told him, that he should always be seen happy and contented by the constant cheerfulness and pleasure he would display, that he would still cheer his father by his songs, which would be some consolation for the loss of the glory he had expected; and that, although no longer a man, he should ever be the harbinger of peace and joy to the human race.

From Schoolcraft's Ojibwa Lodge Stories, edited by Philip P. Mason.



STORY: THE THREE CRANBERRIES

Three Cranberries were living in a lodge together. One was green, one white, and one red. They were sisters. There was snow on the ground; and as the men were absent, they felt afraid, and began to say to each other, "What shall we do if the wolf comes?"

"I," said the green one, "will climb up a shingoub tree."

"I," said the white one, "will hide myself in the kettle of boiled hominy."

"And I," said the red one, "will conceal myself under the snow."

Presently, the wolves came, and each one did as she had said. But only one of the three had judged wisely. The wolves immediately ran to the kettle and ate up the corn, and with it, the white cranberry. The red one was tramped to pieces by their feet, and her blood spotted the snow. But she who had climbed the thick spruce tree escaped unnoticed, and was saved.



From Schoolcraft's Ojibwa Lodge Stories, edited by Philip P. Mason.

DE 1.10 - STORY: ALLEGORY OF THE SEASONS

An old man was sitting alone in his lodge, by the side of a frozen stream. It was the close of winter, and his fire was almost out. He appeared very old and very desolate. His locks were white with age, and he trembled in every joint. Day after day passed in solitude, and he heard nothing but the sounds of the tempest, sweeping before it the new-fallen snow.

One day, as his fire was just dying, a handsome young man approached and entered his dwelling. "You shall do the same, and we will amuse ourselves."

He then drew from his sack a curiously-wrought antique pipe, and having filled it with tobacco, rendered mild by an admixture of certain leaves, handed it to his guest. When this ceremony was concluded they began to speak.



"I blow my breath," said the old man, "and the streams stand still. The water becomes stiff and hard as clear stone."

"I breathe," said the young man, "and flowers spring up all over the plains."

"I shake my locks," retorted the old man, "and snow covers the land. The leaves fall from the trees at my command, and my breath blows them away. The birds get up from the water, and fly to a distant land. The animals hide themselves from my breath, and the very ground becomes as hard as flint."

"I shake my ringlets," rejoined the young man, "and warm showers of soft rain fall upon the earth. The plants lift up their heads out of the earth, like the eyes of children glistening with delight. My voice recalls the birds. The warmth of my breath unlocks the streams. Music fills the groves wherever I walk, and all nature rejoices."

At length the sun began to rise. A gentle warmth came over the place. The tongue of the old man became silent. The robin and bluebird began to sing on the top of the lodge. The stream began to murmur by the door, and the fragrance of growing herbs and flowers came softly on the vernal breeze.

From Schoolcraft's Ojibwa Lodge Stories, edited by Philip P. Mason.

STORY: DISAPPEARANCE OF THE ROSE

Roses were once the most numerous and brilliantly colored of all the flowers. Such were their number and such were the variety and richness of their shades that they were common. No one paid much attention to them; their beauty went unnoticed, their glory unsung.

Even when their numbers declined and their colors faded, no one appeared to care. Cycles of scarcity and plenty has occurred. There was no cause for alarm. There is degeneration and regeneration. Plenty always follows scarcity.

But year after year, roses became fewer in number. As the numbers and richness of the flowers diminished, the fatness of the rabbits increased. Only the bear, and the bee, and the humming-bird were aware that something was wrong.

The Anishinabeg felt that something was not quite right but they couldn't explain it. They only know that the bear was thinner and that the bear's flesh was less sweet than formerly. The bears found smaller quantities of honey and what they found was less delectable. The bees and humming-birds found fewer roses. The Anishinabeg were bewildered; the bears blamed the bees; the bees were alarmed. But no one could do anything.

Eventually, one summer there were no roses. Bees hungered; humming-birds grew thin; the bears raged. In later years, that summer was known as the Summer of the Disappearance of the Rose. At last, everyone was alarmed. In desperation, a great meeting was called. Everyone was invited.

There were many days of discussion before the meeting decided to dispatch all the swift to

search the world for a single rose; and, if they found one, to bring it back. Months went by before a humming-bird chanced to discover a solitary rose growing and clinging to a mountainside in a far off land.

The humming-bird lifted the faint and pallid rose from its bed and brought it back. On arrival, medicine men and women immediately tended the rose and in a few days restored the rose to life. When he was well enough the rose was able to give an account of the destruction of the roses.

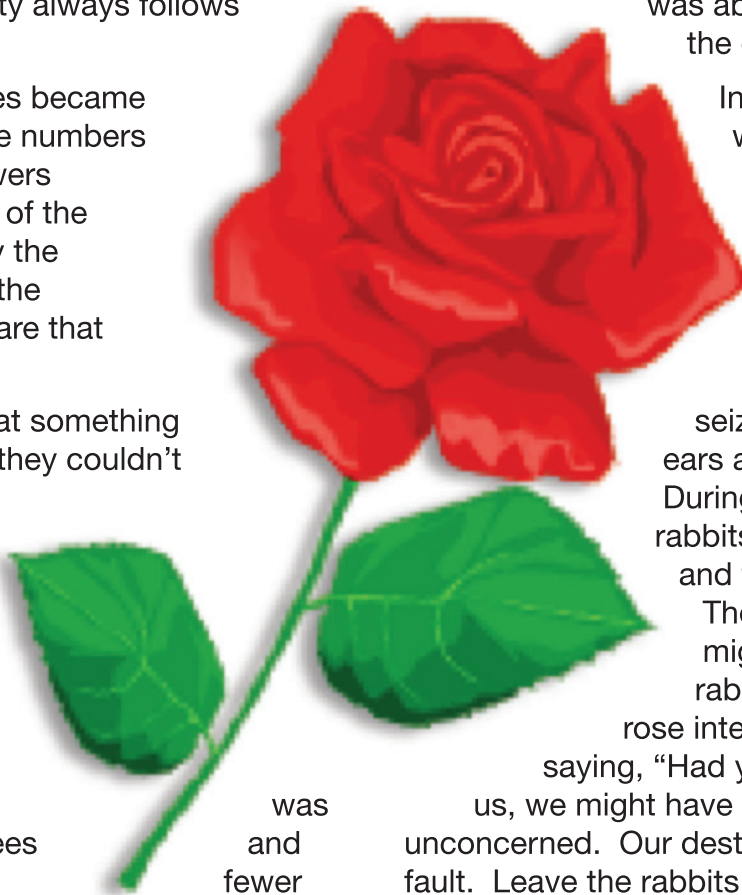
In a voice quivering with weakness, the rose said, "The rabbits ate all the roses."

The assembly raised an angry uproar. At the word, the bears and wolves and lynxes seized the rabbits by the ears and cuffed them around. During the assault the rabbits' ears were stretched and their mouths split open.

The outraged animals might have killed all the rabbits that day had the rose interceded on their behalf saying, "Had you cared and watched us, we might have survived. But you were unconcerned. Our destruction was partly your fault. Leave the rabbits be."

Reluctantly the angry animals released the rabbits. While the rabbits wounds eventually healed, they did not lose their scars which remained as marks of their intemperance. Nor did the roses ever attain their former brilliance or abundance. Instead the rose received thorns to protect them from the avarice of the hungry and the intemperate.

Courtesy of Basil Johnson – Ojibwa Heritage



STORY: OJIBWA CREATION STORY

I would like to tell you a story about how man was created on this earth. This story was handed down to me by my Grandfathers. They recorded their stories on rows of wee-gwas (birch bark). This way our sacred teachings will never be lost.

When Aki (the earth) was young, it was said that the earth had a family. Neebegeesis [Nokomis] (the moon) is called grandmother.

The earth is said to be a woman. She is called Mother Earth because from her come all living things. Water is her lifeblood. On her surface everything is given four sacred directions – north, south, east, and west. When she was young, this earth was filled with beauty.

The creator, Gitchie Monito, took four parts of Mother Earth and blew into them using this mégis or sacred shell. From this man was created. To this day the mégis or cowrie shell is worn by Indians to symbolize and remember this event.

From this original man came Anishinabe. In Ojibway language, if you break down the word, this is what it means: Ani (from whence), Nishina (lowered) Abe (the male of the species).

It is said that the Great Spirit lowered man to the earth.

This man was created in the image of Gitchie Monito. He is natural man. He is part of Mother Earth. He lives in brotherhood with all that is around him.

All tribes come from this original man.

We believe that we are Nee-kon-nis (brothers) with all tribes. We are separated only by our tongue or language.

The Ojibway are a tribe because of the way they speak.

So it is in this way that the Ojibway teachings tell us how life developed for the Anishinabe.

Way back when just Indians lived in this country a religious prophet told us of a people who would come and try to destroy our sacred teachings. To keep this from happening, the Ojibways took a log from the manone (ironwood tree). They hollowed it out and put inside all the birch bark scrolls on which the teachings and ceremonies were recorded. Men were lowered over a cliff by long ropes. They dug a hole in the cliff and buried the log where no one could find it.

It is said that the time will come again when Indian people can practice their religion without fearing any man.

When this time comes, the prophets say that a little boy will dream where the ironwood log full of the sacred scrolls is buried. He will lead his people to the place. From that time on, all of us will be able to live in religious freedom again. That time is not yet come today. Maybe, those of you who hear this story will see all these things come about.

From *Mishomis: The Voice of the Ojibway* by Edward Benton Benai, Indian Country Communications, Inc.



STORY: THE TREE OF LIFE

A tree images life
It grow
Unwell, it heals itself
Spent, it dies.

A tree reflects being
It changes
Altered, it restores itself
Ever to remain the same.

A tree gives life
It abides
It lends existence yet
Endures undiminished

Trees give me everything
Serve all my needs
To the tree I can give
nothing
Except my song of praise.
When I look upon a tree
I remember that
The apple tree can
Allay my hunger
The maple can
Slake my thirst
The pine can
Heal my wounds and cuts
The bark of birch can
Form my home, can
Mould my canoe and
vessels

The tissue of birch can
Keep the images that I
draw
The balsam groves can
Shield me from the winds
Fruit of the grape vine can
Bend as my bow, while
The cherrywood provides
An arrow shaft.
The cedar ferns can
Cushion my body in sleep
The basswood can
Become my daughter's
doll
The ash, as snowshoe,
can
Carry me across the
snows
The tobacco can
Transport my prayers to
God
The sweetgrass can
Aromate my lodge
The roots of evergreen
can
Bind my sleigh and craft
The stump and twig can
Move the soul of woman
The leaves wind-blown
can
Open my spirit.

MAP: THE MIGRATION OF THE ANISHINABE

