

Ojibwe Creation Story

(As retold by Mishomis of Madeline Island)

Many years ago, my Ojibwe ancestors migrated to this area from their original homeland on the eastern shores of North America. Now the Ojibwe and their offshoots are spread from the Atlantic coast, all along the St. Lawrence River, and throughout the Great Lakes region of this country.

I would like to tell you an account of how man was created on this Earth. This teaching was handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation by my ancestors. Sometimes the details of teachings like this were recorded on scrolls made from *Wee'-gwas* (birchbark). I am fortunate to be the keeper of several of these scrolls. They will help me remember some of the details of what I give to you.

When *Ah-ki'* (the Earth) was young, it was said that the Earth had a family. *Nee-ba-gee'-sis* (the Moon) is called Grandmother, and *Gee'-sis* (the Sun) is called Grandfather. The Creator of this family is called *Gi'-tchie Man-i-to'* (Great Mystery or Creator).

The Earth is said to be a woman. In this way it is understood that woman preceded man on the Earth. She is called Mother Earth because from her come all living things. Water is her life blood. It flows through her, nourishes her, and purifies her.

On the surface of the Earth, all is given Four Sacred Directions--North, South, East, and West. Each of these directions contributes a vital part to the wholeness of the Earth. Each has physical powers as well as spiritual powers, as do all things.

When she was young, the Earth was filled with beauty.

The Creator sent his singers in the form of birds to the Earth to carry the seeds of life to all of the Four Directions. In this way life was spread across the Earth. On the Earth the Creator placed the swimming creatures of the water. He gave life to all the plant and insect world. He placed the crawling things and the four-leggeds on the land. All of these parts of life lived in harmony with each other.



Gitchie Manito then took four parts of Mother Earth and blew into them using a Sacred Shell. From the union of the Four Sacred Elements and his breath, man was created.

It is said the Gitchie Manito then lowered man to the Earth. Thus, man was the last form of life to be placed on Earth. From this Original Man came the *A-nish-i-na'-be* people. In the Ojibwe language if you break down the word Anishinabe, this is what it means: ANI (from whence) NISHINA (lowered) ABE (the male of the species).

This man was created in the image of Gitchie Manito. He was natural man. He was part of Mother Earth. He lived in brotherhood with all that was around him. All tribes came from this Original Man. The Ojibwe are a tribe because of the way they speak. We believe that we are *nee-kon'-nis-ug'* (brothers) with all tribes; we are separated only by our tongue or language.

Today, the Ojibwe cherish the Megis Shell as the Sacred Shell through which the Creator blew his breath.

A Lakota Creation Legend

There was another world before this one. But the people of that world did not behave themselves. Displeased, the Creating Power set out to make a new world. He sang several songs to bring rain, which poured stronger with each song.

As he sang the fourth song, the earth split apart and water gushed up through the many cracks, causing a flood. By the time the rain stopped, all of the people and nearly all of the animals had drowned. Only Kangi the crow survived.

Kangi pleaded with the Creating Power to make him a new place to rest. So the Creating Power decided the time had come to make his new world. From his huge pipe bag, which contained all types of animals and birds, the Creating Power selected four animals known for their ability to remain under water for a long time. He sent each in turn to retrieve a lump of mud from beneath the flood waters. First the loon dove deep into the dark waters, but it was unable to reach the bottom. The otter, even with its strong webbed feet, also failed. Next, the beaver used its large flat tail to propel itself deep under the water, but it too brought nothing back. Finally, the Creating Power took the turtle from his pipe bag and urged it to bring back some mud.



Turtle stayed under the water for so long that everyone was sure it had drowned. Then, with a splash, the turtle broke the water's surface! Mud filled its feet and claws and the cracks between its upper and lower shells. Singing, the Creating Power shaped the mud in his hands and spread it on the water, where it was just big enough for himself and the crow. He then shook two long eagle wing feathers over the mud until earth spread wide and varied, overcoming the waters. Feeling sadness for the dry land, the Creating Power cried tears that became oceans, streams, and lakes. He named the new land Turtle Continent in honor of the turtle who provided the mud from which it was formed.

The Creating Power then took many animals and birds from his great pipe bag and spread them across the earth. From red, white, black, and yellow earth, he made men and women. The Creating Power gave the people his sacred pipe and told them to live by it. He warned them about the fate of the people who came before them. He promised all would be well if all living things learned to live in harmony. But the world would be destroyed again if they made it bad and ugly.

Iroquois Creation Myth

(This version taken from the Iroquois Indian Museum)

Long before the world was created, there was an island floating in the sky upon which the SkyPeople lived. They lived quietly and happily; no one ever died or was born or experienced sadness. In the SkyWorld was the Celestial Tree from which all kinds of fruits and flowers grew. The wife of the Chief of the SkyWorld was called SkyWoman; and one night, SkyWoman, who was expecting a baby, had a dream in which the Celestial Tree was uprooted. When she told her husband the dream, he took it as a powerful message and that the people of SkyWorld would have to help the dream come true.

The young men of the SkyWorld tried with all their might to uproot the tree but failed. Finally the Chief of the SkyWorld wrapped his arms around the tree and with one great effort, uprooted it, leaving a great hole in the crust of the SkyWorld. SkyWoman leaned over to look into the hole, lost her balance, and fell through the hole. As she slipped she was able to grasp a handful of seeds from the branches of the Celestial Tree.



As SkyWoman fell, the birds and animals in the water below saw her and decided that she would need help. Geese flew up and caught her between their wings and began to lower her down toward the water. The animals saw that SkyWoman was not like them and would not survive in water. So each of the animals dove into the water trying to bring up earth from the bottom. Many animals tried and failed, but tiny muskrat vowed to bring up earth or die trying. She went down, deep, deep, until she was almost unconscious, but with one small paw grasped some earth before floating

back to the top. When muskrat appeared with the Earth, the Great Turtle said it could be placed on his back. When the tiny bit of earth was placed on Turtle's back, it began to grow larger and larger until it became the whole world.

The geese gently set SkyWoman on the earth and she opened her hands to let the seeds fall on the soil. From these seeds grew the trees and grass, and life on Earth had begun.

In time, SkyWoman gave birth to a daughter, Tekawerahkwa, who grew to be a lovely young woman. A powerful being called WestWind fell in love with Tekawerahkwa and took her as his bride. In time she became pregnant with twin sons. She named one Sapling, who grew to be kind and gentle. She named the other Flint, and his heart was as cold as his name. They grew and began filling the earth with their creations.

Sapling created what is good. He made animals that are useful to humans; rivers that went two ways; and into these he put fish without bones. He made plants that people could eat easily. If he was able to have his way, there would be no suffering. But Flint destroyed much of Sapling's work and created all that is bad. He made rivers to flow only in one direction and put bones in fish and thorns on berry bushes. He created winter (but Sapling gave it life so that it could move to give way to Spring). Flint created monsters which his brother drove beneath the Earth.

Eventually Sapling and Flint decided to fight until one conquered the other. Neither was able to win at first, but finally Flint was beaten. Because he was a god, Flint could not die; so he was forced to live on Big Turtle's back. Occasionally his anger is felt in the form of a volcano.

The Iroquois people hold a great respect for all animals. This is mirrored in their creation myth by the role the animals play. Without the animals' help, SkyWoman may have sunk to the bottom of the sea and earth may not have been created.