



WALKING WITH
MISKWAADESI



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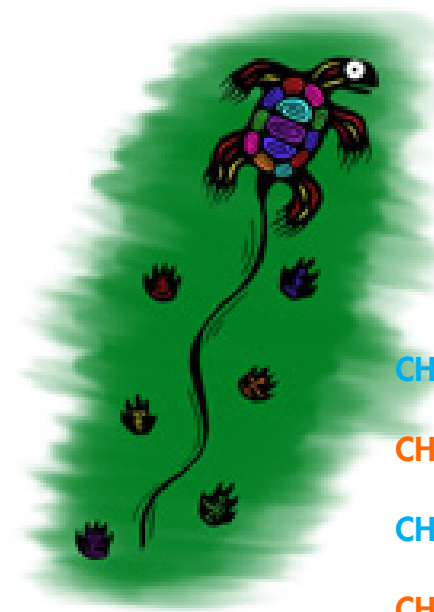
Additional companion publication resources include *Miskwaadesi & A'now:ara Curriculum-based Activities*, *The Ways of Knowing Guide Earth's Teachings*, and Species Identifier guides. These are available online at www.turtleislandconservation.ca or from Turtle Island Conservation at the Toronto Zoo.

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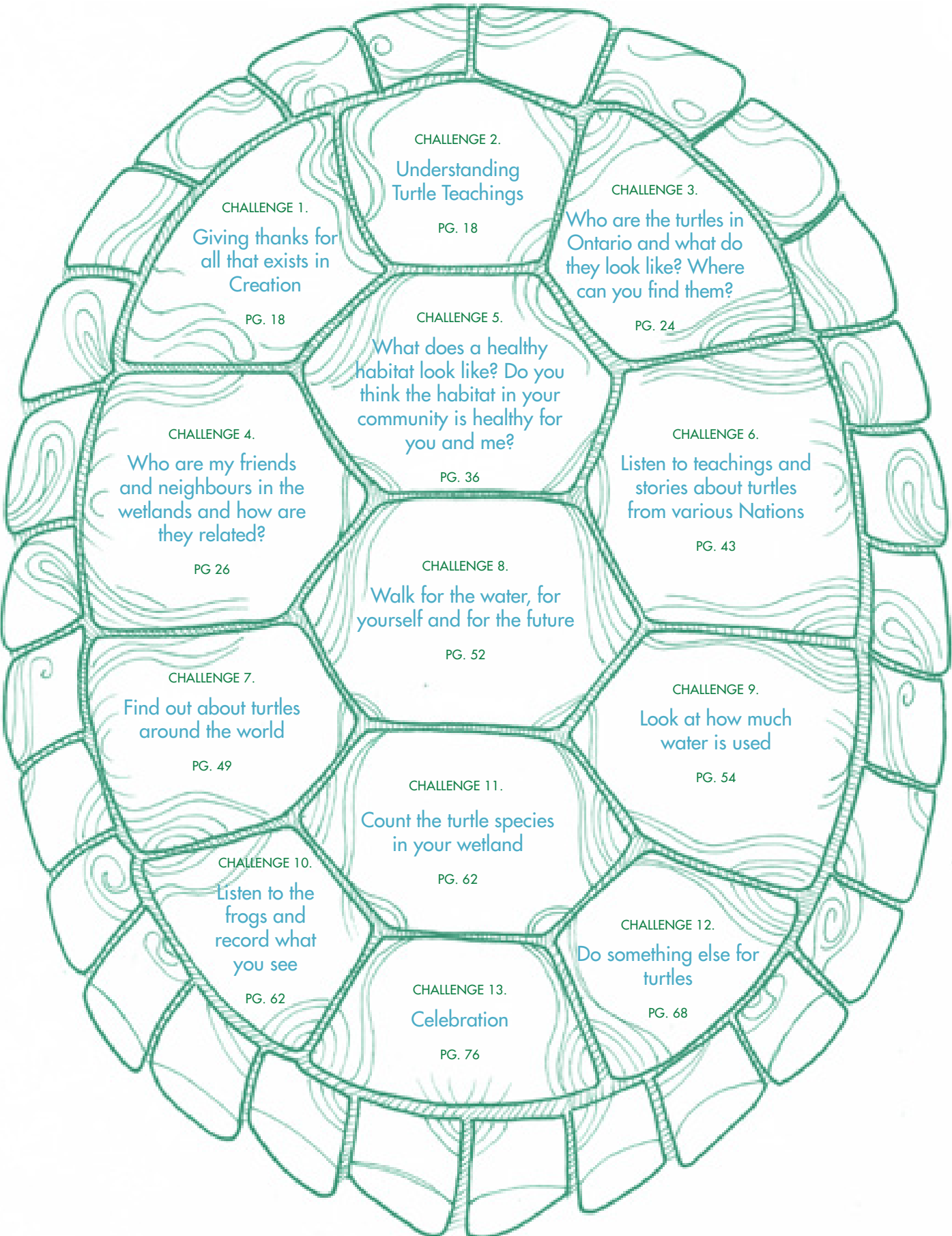
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MISKWAADESI'S THIRTEEN CHALLENGES



"Challenges are met with great honour especially when we know it is for a deep purpose – the betterment of all, especially our Mother Earth. We are guided by vision and dreams, but most of all we are guided by our Spirit and Spirit Helpers."

Josephine Mandamin's Journal – Mother Earth Water Walkers

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



ways of knowing partnership
TURTLE ISLAND
conservation

The sacred Turtle Teachings this project is based upon have existed since the beginning of time and are shared to foster and guide generations to come. It is with good hearts and minds we honour these original teachings, so that each one of us can walk the good red road our ancestors planned for us. The Toronto Zoo's Turtle Island Conservation (TIC) programme respectfully acknowledges with infinite gratitude those who have contributed including all First Nation Elders; First Nation community members; Traditional Knowledge Keepers; First Nation TIC Advisory Group members; funding partners; First Nation authors; former TIC programme coordinators Benny Michaud, Candace Maracle, and Barbara Filion; TIC assistants Marilyn Desani, Skye Vandenburg, Randy Pittawanakwat, and Jocelyn Pelltier; and the countless children and youth who continue to inspire us for generations to come.

Chi Miigwech, Wahgeh Giizhigo Migizi Kwe (Eileen "Sam" Conroy), for your tireless, passionate dedication and obvious great love for this project. We are honoured by all of your contributions. Your wealth of life experience, and commitment to those who have come before us has resulted in a wonderful garden of opportunity for those yet to come!



INTRODUCTION

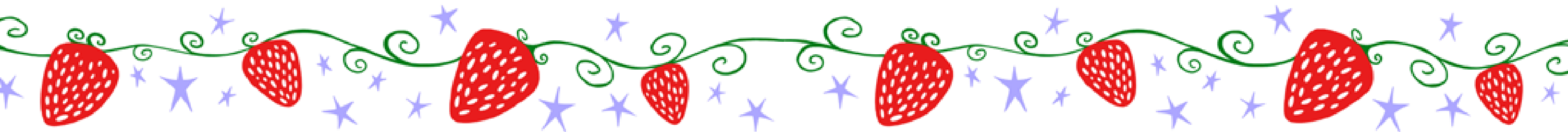
Boozhoo, Aanii, and Welcome to *Walking with Miskwaadesi*! This story is designed to invite readers into the world of Species at Risk, particularly turtles in Ontario, through the eyes of *Miskwaadesi*—a Painted turtle. This is a journey which enlists the Traditional Knowledge of the Anishinaabe People whose traditional lands surround the Great Lakes. The wisdom and knowledge contained in this book includes the authentic voices of recognized Traditional Knowledge Keepers located in the upper Great Lakes region of Ontario, Canada.

The Toronto Zoo's Turtle Island Conservation programme hopes that as you take this journey with *Miskwaadesi*, you will gain an insight into the distinct ways of knowing the *Anishinaabeg* and effectively contribute to the preservation of wetlands and the creatures that inhabit them for generations to come.

All my relations,
Misheeken n'dodem, Shkode Neegan Wawaskone,
Shawanaga n'doonji Anishinaabe Kwe n'dow.

Turtle Clan, Kim Wheatley, Head of the Fire Flower, Shawanaga First Nation, Anishinaabe Woman

Baamaampii Gwaabmiin!





MORNING PRAYERS

CHAPTER 1 - NTAM GINJIGAN

Nokomis Annie marvelled at the beauty of a new day. The early morning light was just beginning to fill the eastern sky. *Biidaaban* was calling the sun back for another day's journey. It was time to sound the *dewegan* and sing a morning song to greet all of Creation. As Nokomis Annie got ready, she thought about the importance of giving thanks to the Creator for all the gifts given to the *Anishinaabeg*. Although important, it was sometimes forgotten.

Nokomis Annie liked to use a morning prayer she learned from her friend Shirley, a fluent Anishinaabe language speaker. She stepped out into the warm, morning sunshine and placed an offering of *asemaa* under a beautiful *mitig*. She then began her prayer:

Gzhe Minidoo!

Miigwech noongwa wabdaamaa miinwaa ngoding giizhigak.

Miigwech kina gego gaa-miizhiyaang,

kina kiig gaa-tooyin aw sa Nishnaabe wii-miigkadaawsod.

Miigwech newiing nekyaa mebimiseg,

Miigwech, newiing nekyaa mebiniseg,

Miigwech wesiinyag gii-miizhiyang wii-wiisiniyang,

Miigwech bineshiinyag noodoonogwaa nagamwaad,

Miigwech nbi biinaagkozigoyang,

Miigwech gii-miizhiyang nokiiwin!

Miinshinaag mina-de'ewin, wii-mina nokiitaadiyang,

naadimooshinaag wii-ni-mosaadimaang.


Miigwech Gzhe Minidoo! Miigwech! Miigwech! Miigwech!



Nokomis Annie always felt good after saying this prayer. It reminded her of a visit she made to the Haudenosaunee community of Tyendinega the week before. When she arrived at the school, Nokomis Annie heard two students reciting the Thanksgiving Address during the morning announcements, a morning prayer of thanks. Their voices sounded so wonderful! She closed her eyes and thought about how it must have been in times long ago, when all Haudenosaunee people

greeted the morning with the “The Words That Come Before All Else,” also called the Thanksgiving Address. That morning the students gave Nokomis Annie a copy of their prayer. On her way home that day, she thought about the similarities between the Anishinaabe Morning Prayer and the Thanksgiving Address.

As a little girl, Nokomis Annie was taught by her grandparents the importance of being grateful



and thankful for the many gifts which have been given by the Creator. She was told that, as the youngest members of Creation, humans depend upon everything else for daily life. This included a teaching from her *Okomisan* about the importance of *mitigook*. Her *Okomisan* said that with every breath taken in comes oxygen that the *mitig* gives as a gift. With every breath out, carbon dioxide returns to the *mitig* and becomes part of it. One of the responsibilities of *mitig* is to take up carbon and store it in its trunk so the air is clean and healthy. Her *Okomisan* said that people use carbon from the *mitig* to make fire. She also shared other responsibilities of *mitigook* which include making oxygen for the air and making shade for the earth so it will not get too hot. *Mitigook* provide food for bugs that munch on leaves and their branches become a home for birds. Nokomis Annie was taught that bark from *mitigook* can make good baskets, containers, homes, wigwams, and sweatlodges. In traditional times, Elders were wrapped in *wiigwaas* when they passed over into the Spirit world. She was also told about the medicines which come from *mitigook*.

Tea from the buds and the bark, as well as syrup and sap, all help people to stay healthy.

Nokomis Annie could remember hugging *mitigook* as a child and it always felt like the *mitigook* were hugging back. She would also place an offering of *asemaa* at the bottom of a *mitig* and say *miigwech*. It reminded her of how connected humankind is to everything else in Creation.

Now a grandmother, Nokomis Annie must think about the ways she can explain to her grandchildren the importance of First Nations Traditional Knowledge, respect, and gratitude for the gifts of Creation.



TURTLE TEACHINGS

CHAPTER 2 - EKO-NIIZHING GINJIGAN

Ziigwan read the note over one last time as the bus turned off the highway and pulled into the stop in Parry Sound. With a smile, she put the piece of paper into her backpack, nudged her brother Noodin awake, and collected her belongings. Their adventure was about to begin!

Nokomis was waiting at the bus stop and gathered the children in her arms with a big welcome hug as soon as they got off.

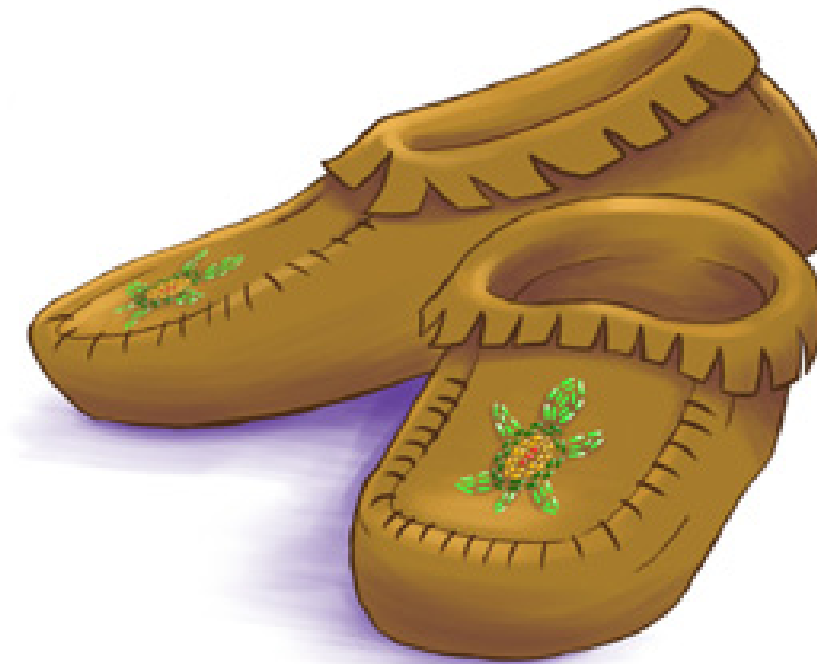
“*Aaniin! Aaniin!* My beautiful grandchildren, I am so glad that you have come. We will have a wonderful summer together!” she exclaimed.

When Nokomis Annie and her grandchildren arrived at her house, there was a fresh pan of baked *bannock*, fish, and *odeminan* waiting for them. These were some of their favourite foods and the children could already tell it was going to be a great visit!

After supper, everyone enjoyed watching the colourful sunset over the western edge of the *nibi*. The children played the listening game and they tried to count the many different sounds they could hear as the birds and other members of Creation sang a goodnight song to the sun. Ziigwan and Noodin noticed that there were more sounds at Nokomis Annie’s house than there were in the city. Just as the mosquitoes started to buzz, cousin Waaban rode up on his bike.

Aaniin, my grandchildren!
Are you coming to spend
the summer with me and
your cousins here at
Wasauksing?
I need your help with a
special project. Everything
is ready for you. I will
meet you at the bus stop.

Love, Nokomis Annie



"Aaniin Nokomis, are my cousins here yet? Oh great! Hey there, Noodin. I am so excited that you are here! Ziigwan, how are you? Did your Nokomis tell you about the work she is doing this summer down at the marsh? You should see her up to her ankles in mud! Nokomis, tell us about your dream again!" Waaban urged. The other children were excited to hear a story from their *Nokomis*.

As the sky began to darken and evening arrived, Nokomis Annie pulled her shawl up over her shoulders and settled into her favourite chair. Noodin and Ziigwan curled up at her feet while getting comfortable on colourful cushions.

Ziigwan noticed that Nokomis was wearing a nice pair of moccasins with turtles beaded on each one. She hoped to have a pair like that some day.

Waaban leaned on the railing, impatiently waiting for Nokomis Annie to share her dream.

"You know my children," Nokomis Annie began, "when I was young, my grandparents told me that dreams are very important. They hold special significance and we should listen to them carefully. I would like to share a dream with you that I had about Turtle Teachings. Do you remember the Creation Story I shared with you last summer?" asked Nokomis Annie.

"Yes!" exclaimed Waaban. "That was my favourite story. It is about Turtle Island, right? Can you share it again?" he asked.

"Of course, my grandson! It is one of my favourites as well. I would love to tell you the story shared with me by my grandparents."

High in the heavens there lived alone a woman, a spirit. Without a companion she became lonely. Gzhe Minidoo took compassion on the Sky-woman and sent her a companion.

She became pregnant and gave birth to twins. Sky-woman remained content but weary.

The water creatures below observed what was happening in the heavens and pitied the spirit woman with compassion. They began looking for ways to help her and eventually persuaded a giant turtle to rise to the surface of the waters to offer his back as a haven for Sky-woman. The water beings then invited Sky-woman to come down and visit with them.

The Sky-woman accepted the invitation and left her home in the skies and rested on the back of Mishiikenh. When she had settled on Mishiikenh, she asked the water animals to get some soil from the bottom of the great seas.



Gladly all the animals tried to serve the spirit woman's request. Amik was one of the first to plunge into the depths. He soon surfaced out of breath and without the precious soil. Ojiig too tried, but he too failed. Waabizheshii went down, came up empty handed, reporting that the water was too deep. Maang tried. Although he remained out of sight for a long time he too emerged, gasping for air. He said it was too dark. All tried to fulfill Sky-woman's request. All failed. All were ashamed.

Finally the least of the water creatures, Zhasgkoonh volunteered to dive. At his announcement the others laughed in scorn, because they doubted this little creature's strength and endurance. Had not they, who were strong and able, been unable to grasp soil from the bottom of the great seas? How could he, Zhasgkoonh, the most humble among them, succeed when they could not?

Nevertheless, the little Zhasgkoonh was determined to dive. Undaunted he disappeared into the waves. The onlookers smiled. They waited for the muskrat to emerge as empty handed as they had done. Time passed. Smiles turned into worried frowns. The small hope that each had nurtured for the success of Zhasgkoonh turned into

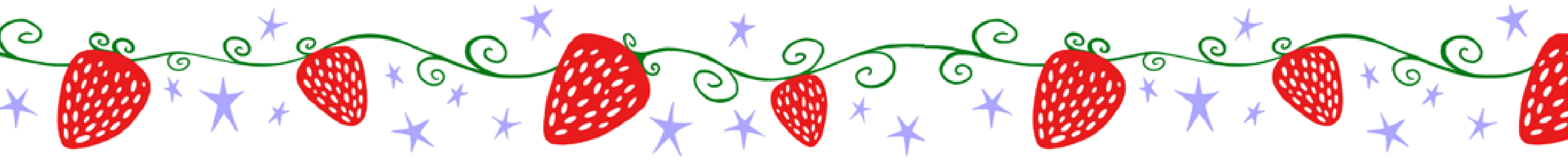
despair. When the waiting creatures had given up, Zhasgkoonh floated to the surface more dead than alive, but he clutched in his paws a small morsel of soil. Where the great had failed the small had succeeded!

While Zhasgkoonh was tended to and restored to health, Skywoman painted the rim of Mishiikenh's back with the small amount of soil that had been brought to her. She breathed upon it and into it, the breath of life. Immediately the soil grew, covered the turtle's back and formed an island. The island formed in this way was called, Mishee Mackinacong, the place of the Great Turtle's back, now known as Michilimackinac.

For his service to mankind and the spirit woman, the turtle became the messenger of thought and feeling that flows and flashes between beings of different natures and orders. He became a symbol of thought given and received. Mishiikenh, slowest of all creatures, represented speed and communication between beings.

The island home grew in size. The waters subsided, the animal beings brought grasses, flowers, trees and food bearing plants to the Sky-woman. Into each she infused her life-giving breath and they lived.

(adapted from *Ojibway Heritage* by Basil Johnston, by permission of the author)



When Nokomis Annie finished the story, her grandchildren began to shuffle restlessly.

"Gosh, I love that story," said Noodin. "I remembered the turtle in the story, but I did not know that turtles could teach us so much! Are there other things we can learn from Turtle Teachings, Nokomis?" Noodin asked.

"I am so happy you asked that. As a matter of fact, just the other night I had a dream about an old turtle. This turtle's name was *Miskwaadesi*. She spoke to me about her turtle troubles," Nokomis Annie explained.



The first stars were beginning to sparkle in the night sky when Nokomis Annie started to share her dream, "The *Miskwaadesi* family and turtle cousins have lived in the waterways and wetlands of Turtle Island since Creation. As keepers of stories and knowledge about the *nibi* and wetlands, they have responsibilities to communities and to the Creator. Turtles live very long lives and tell the stories of wetlands and waterways. *Miskwaadesi* asked me, who will take over those responsibilities when the turtles are gone? There are fewer of them to fulfil the responsibilities given by the Creator," Nokomis Annie said quietly.

She paused for a few moments with her eyes closed, remembering the words and the sad voice of the old turtle. "*Miskwaadesi* reminded me about a traditional Turtle Teaching. Her shell is our calendar. In my dream, she used her claws to draw a turtle shell in the soft sand at the edge of the marsh. She then cut the shell into thirteen parts, which represent the thirteen full moons of every year. With each changing moon, there are different seasonal activities. For example, during *Odemiin Giizis*, which is Strawberry Moon, we gather strawberries." Nokomis explained.

Noodin asked, "Nokomis is that in June? I remember going to the strawberry farm with my class to pick strawberries in June."

"Yes, that is right Noodin," said Nokomis Annie with a smile. "*Miskwaadesi* also told me about thirteen challenges for each moon. The *first challenge* is something we do daily, and that is to *give thanks for all that exists in Creation*. Her *second challenge* asks us to *understand Turtle Teachings*, such as the calendar she carries on her back and the Creation Story. The rest of the challenges will help us to show respect for Mother Earth. That will help to make the world a better place! As you can see my grandchildren, there are many things to learn from *Miskwaadesi*. Walking in her footsteps may be challenging, but it is important so we can learn that there are different ways of knowing."

"Wow, Nokomis, there is a whole lot to learn," Waaban said as he yawned. "But gosh, I am tired! This has been such a great day and I am looking forward to learning more about *Miskwaadesi* and what her challenges can teach us," said Waaban.

"We should get ready for bed," Nokomis Annie said.

Waaban hopped on his bike. Noodin and Ziigwan said their goodbyes and scurried off to brush their teeth and change into pajamas.

"Goodnight my grandchildren," said Nokomis Annie. "Tomorrow will be a busy day."

Each of the children said their goodnights and crawled into bed, looking forward to the exciting day ahead.





ONTARIO'S TURTLE FAMILIES AND SPECIES AT RISK

CHAPTER 3 - EKO-NSING GINJIGAN

"Good morning Nokomis," said Noodin and Ziigwan, as they bounced into the brightly lit kitchen for breakfast.

"Good morning my children! Did you sleep well?" their Nokomis asked.

With a big smile Noodin gave his Nokomis a big hug and pulled out a chair to sit beside her while Ziigwan sat down across from them. "What are you working on today?" he asked. Nokomis Annie was sitting at the kitchen table with her journal, a poster decorated with turtles, and a few pamphlets beside her cup of tea.

"Here children, take a look at this poster from the Toronto Zoo. It shows turtles and it is in our language. Can you recognize any of the turtles in the poster? I thought about what *Miskwaadesi* said to me and I wondered about the turtles that are disappearing," Nokomis Annie said to her grandchildren.

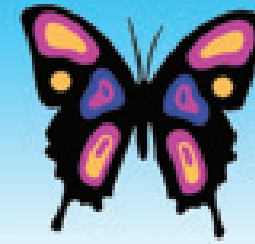
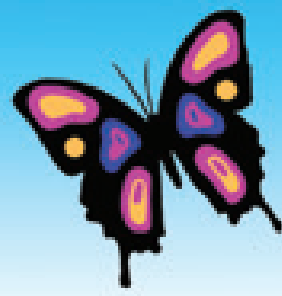
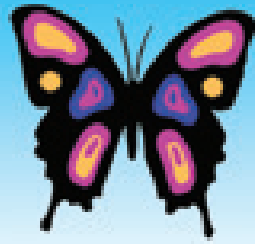
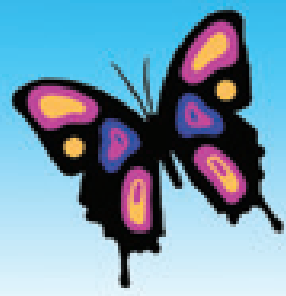
"Oh Nokomis, look! There is *Miskwaadesi*. I saw that beautiful turtle here last summer when we were

playing down by the creek," Noodin said excitedly. "I like that it is called the turtle that carries the sunset on its back. It sure does have a lot of red, orange, and yellow on its shell and I like the stripes on its neck and feet!" he exclaimed.

Ziigwan jumped in, "Those turtles like to sit on the big logs which stick out of *nibi*." Nokomis Annie nodded her head in agreement.

Looking at the poster Noodin added, "I have seen snapping turtles on the edge of the road. Mom said that they were trying to lay their eggs. I always wondered why they wanted to put their eggs along a road instead of someplace safer."

Nokomis Annie smiled at Noodin and said, "I remember seeing some of them when I was young. We used to go down to the big marsh and the other wet places in the summer to pick medicine plants. In the fall, we dug roots there as well. For many years, Uncle Buddy trapped *zhashkoonh* and *amik* in the big marsh with his grandfather. They knew almost every trail and waterway through the cattails. I think



that he knows about some of the other turtle species that lived around here. He always talked about a turtle that carried a map on its back. We will have to go and talk to him about *Miskwaadesi*. I remember Uncle Buddy saying that he knows when it is time to prepare for hunting season when he no longer sees *Miskwaadesi* basking in the sun. This is because *Miskwaadesi* is one of the first turtles to dig down into the mud at the bottom of the ponds to begin its winter sleep."

Nokomis Annie looked over at the poster Noodin was holding, "Now that I think about it, I have not seen the pretty little turtle with the stars on its back for a long time. They used to be in the big marsh, out by the bay. I remember them laying their eggs in the soft gravel near the edge of the marsh, just at the beginning of *Odemiin Giizis*." The children continued looking at the turtle posters, wondering what turtle eggs looked like.

"Nokomis, this poster says that seven turtle species in Ontario are at risk. What does that mean?" asked Noodin.

"Here are some pamphlets that talk about Species at Risk" said Nokomis Annie. "I was reading them and thinking about what it means to be at risk or threatened. I wrote down some ideas in my journal. Do you want to hear them?" The children nodded their heads with excitement.

"There is supposed to be room for everyone and everything. That is biodiversity. Turtle history is a part of our history. If a life form disappears, the entire community suffers and it will never be the same again," explained Nokomis Annie.

She continued speaking, "You know, my grandchildren, my Auntie Sadie once told me that no

life form is able to change the place where it lives, its habitat, at will. Changes within a community happen, but they take place over long periods of time so the life forms can adapt. That means we cannot move an animal or plant to someplace new and expect it to survive. After thousands of years of watching, listening, and thinking about the world around us, we *Anishinaabeg* have come to an understanding that all life forms are interdependent. That means that everything is connected together." Nokomis Annie finished her thought and then paused for a moment.

"Wait Nokomis," said Ziigwan. "I noticed something interesting the other day while walking to the pond. The milkweed plants caught my eye and I noticed that all around them were beautiful orange butterflies! Are butterflies connected to everything?" she asked.

"Yes," answered Nokomis Annie. "Ziigwan, do you remember last summer when we found that pretty monarch butterfly? The young monarch only eats milkweed leaves, so if these plants are sprayed with pesticides, there will be no food for the young monarchs. This butterfly goes all the way to Mexico in the fall because it cannot survive Canadian winters with the ice and snow."

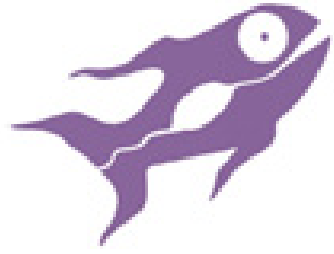
"It sure is cold here in the winter," Noodin said to Ziigwan. "Good thing I have my winter coat. But butterflies do not have coats!"

"Imagine that! A winter without a coat? They would have no way to keep warm and nothing to eat! *Zoogpo* covers everything in the winter," agreed Ziigwan.

Nokomis Annie nodded in agreement and sipped her tea. She thoughtfully continued, "As they travel south, the monarch sleeps in oyamel *mitigook*, which look like our spruce *mitigook*. However, these *mitigook* are being cut down for wood and soon there may be no place for monarchs to spend their winters. There may come a time when those beautiful butterflies do not dance in our fields." Ziigwan's eyes quickly filled with tears thinking about the loss of butterflies. She treasured a pair of beautiful butterfly earrings she was given as a little girl from Nokomis Annie. This gift sparked Ziigwan's love for butterflies.

Noodin understood his sister's feelings and wondered, "How do other plants and animals survive in the winter, Nokomis?"





“Some plants and animals can adjust to seasonal weather changes. Our brothers the deer, grow an extra coat of fur for the winter,” explained Nokomis Annie. “Some, like bears, find shelter underground in caves. Others must move away, like geese and ducks in the fall, or leave behind a seed for next season, just as some plants do.”

Nokomis continued, “Many animals, plants, and elements are under stress or ‘at risk.’ It is important that science acknowledges how fragile our ecosystems are. First Nations people have understood this for thousands of years, or as some say, ‘since the beginning of time.’ This is why we are asked to be respectful of other life forms.” Nokomis Annie sipped her tea. Ziigwan opened the Toronto Zoo’s Species at Risk pamphlet on the table.

“Nokomis, listen to this! Many of the Species at Risk in Canada are found around bodies of *nibi*. The pamphlet says over seventy percent of the wetlands in our Great Lakes watershed have been drained, yet many of our fish used for food begin as eggs in a wetland. Wow! Wetlands are a great place to grow! We all need to worry about the loss of wetland habitat. I never realized how many plants and animals are dependent on our *nibi*,” said Ziigwan. Noodin shook his head in agreement with his sister.

“When you think about it,” said Nokomis Annie, “our wetlands are important for our health and wellness too. This is true because they clean our water and many of our medicine plants grow around wetlands. My *Okomisan* spent a lot of time harvesting healing plants from the marsh near our home. I still go there when I need to make medicinal teas. There are



many medicine plants that depend on *amik* to create wetlands to help them grow and stay healthy.”

Noodin and Ziigwan continued listening to their Nokomis. They wondered where they might find medicine plants around the lake.

“Our turtle brothers and sisters tell us that wetland communities are also at risk. Turtles have the role and responsibility in wetlands to keep *nibi* clean. They do this by looking after animals that die and by eating some of the insects that grow and reproduce in the wetland. When I see turtle species on a poster like this from the Toronto Zoo, it makes me sad. It is not just turtles who are at risk, but it is the entire wetland community. Animals, like our First Nation communities, all depend upon one another,” said Nokomis Annie.

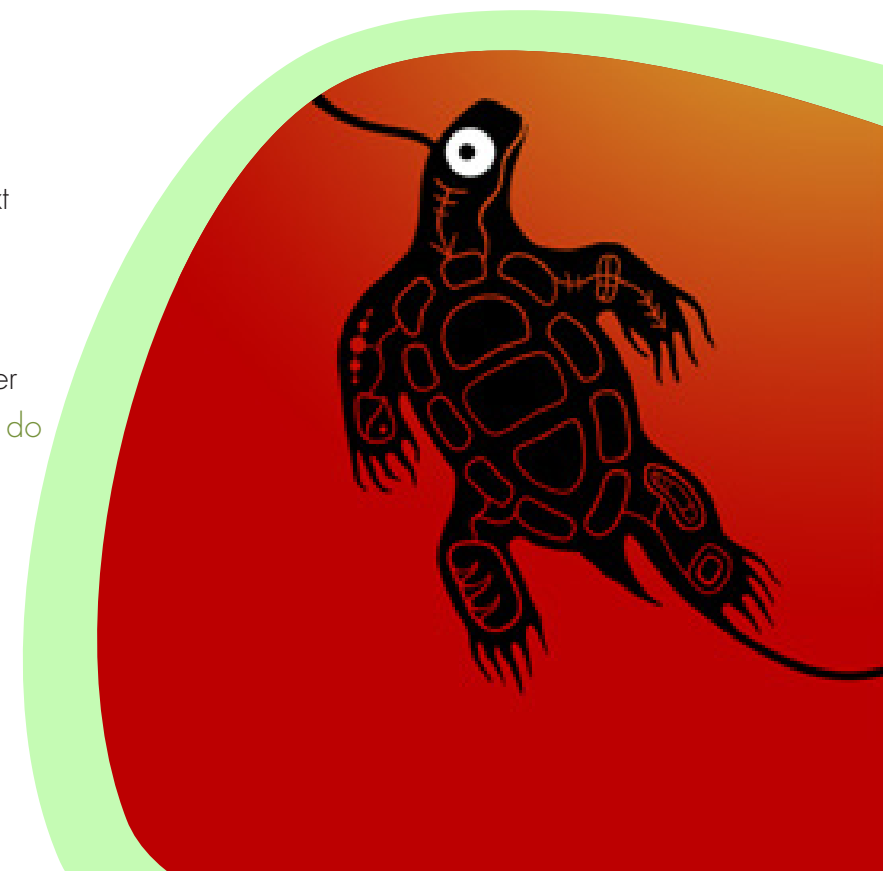
Noodin sat very quietly, thinking about his grandmother’s words, “What is *Miskwaadesi*’s next challenge for us?” he asked.

Nokomis Annie reflected on *Miskwaadesi*’s words, as she recalled the *third challenge* from her dream: “Who are the turtles in Ontario and what do they look like? Where can you find them?”

Noodin and Ziigwan excitedly jumped up out of their chairs as their grandmother repeated *Miskwaadesi*’s words.

“Nokomis, it is not only turtles that are important. We will have to find out about *nibi*, wetlands, communities, and more if we are to have a good understanding of how we are all connected. This is going to be a big challenge!” exclaimed Noodin with a smile.

Nokomis Annie gave her grandson a big hug. “You are right, my boy! I am so glad that you are here to help us. Now I understand why *Miskwaadesi* has come to see me. There is a lot of work to be done!”





NEIGHBOURS AND FRIENDS

CHAPTER 4 - EKO-NIIWING GINJIGAN

After a morning spent with their grandmother, Noodin and Ziigwan went outside for a bike ride to the *nibi* with Waaban. It was a hot day and perfect for a swim! Nokomis Annie packed a delicious picnic lunch of fried fish and *bannock* for the children. Once they were down at the *nibi*, Waaban unpacked the picnic lunch for everyone to enjoy. After a quick swim, the children gathered up all of their belongings and headed back to Nokomis Annie's house. At home, the children began asking Nokomis Annie more questions about *Miskwaadesi*.

"Nokomis, what is *Miskwaadesi's* fourth challenge?" Waaban asked.

His grandmother answered, trying to clearly recite the old turtle's words, "Who are my friends and neighbours in the wetlands? How are they related?"

"Nokomis, there are so many different animals and plants in the world. How does anyone understand all the relationships in a wetland?" asked Ziigwan.

"I wonder that too," said Waaban, as he sat in his favourite chair on the porch.

Nokomis Annie replied, "There are many animals that are part of the web of life which support *Miskwaadesi*. I remember my *Okomisan* explaining the many ways things are connected.

Every life form, no matter how small or large, needs food, water, shelter, and space. All things exist within a web of interdependence. If the web is damaged or changed, all life forms are affected." Nokomis Annie enjoyed explaining these relationships to her grandchildren, just like her *Okomisan* explained to her long ago.

The grandchildren continued listening with interest. "Living within this web over thousands of generations, First Nations people have come to understand some of the delicate relationships that are necessary for life to continue in balance. Imagine the berries that ripen to feed the bear before a long sleep. We too depend on the berry harvest to feed us over our long winter. This is all part of our Traditional Knowledge passed down from one generation to the next. We give thanks to the sun and understand that the sun provides energy which all life forms need."

"I knew that already," exclaimed Ziigwan. "I learned in my science class that animals who eat plants are called herbivores! They get their energy from the sun too!" she said with excitement.

Nokomis Annie continued speaking. "Some animals get their energy by eating other animals. What are these called, Ziigwan?"

"That is a carnivore," she answered. "Omnivores eat both plants and animals to get their energy," she said proudly.

“Good job, my girl!” exclaimed Nokomis Annie. “The relationships between animals are similar to the relationships between First Nations clans. We understand that our *doodemwan* or clans have interconnected responsibilities based on their original instructions given by the Creator. We must acknowledge that our First Nations communities function best when clans work together for the health of all. These understandings are thousands of years old and they are very important to Our People,” Nokomis Annie explained. The children stretched their legs while contemplating the wisdom of First Nations. This made them think about their own *doodemwan*.

Nokomis continued. “The Anishinaabe Nations are divided into clan groupings. Anishinaabe clans are inherited through their fathers. Traditionally, these clans have special characteristics and responsibilities within the community. Clans also serve as a system of traditional government. Today there are five recognized clans including the crane, bear, marten, turtle and fish,” Nokomis Annie explained.

“Each of these clans hold different traditional roles. The Crane clan’s traditional responsibility is leadership, the Bear clan’s is defense, sustenance falls under the Marten clan, learning under the Fish clan, and



medicine under the Turtle clan’s responsibilities. This is the community model we followed representing the five needs of people and the five functions of society in Anishinaabe traditional teachings. Later, other clans were added.”

Noodin wondered aloud if all First Nations people use the clan system. His Nokomis answered, “My friend Jan, from the community of Tyendinega, explained to me that the Haudenosaunee People are also divided into clan groupings. The three main clans are Turtle, Bear, and Wolf. Clans sit together for ceremony in specific areas of the longhouse. Haudenosaunee clans are inherited through their mothers.”

These clan relationships helped Ziigwan and Noodin understand their connection to Wasauksing

and to their family members they had outside of the city! The children understood the importance of their family ties. It was also exciting to learn that clan members are not always blood related and that one can meet new clan members in all sorts of places, even in the city.

The summer had come to an end and Nokomis Annie was going to miss her grandchildren when they went back to school. However, Nokomis Annie had faith that Ziigwan and Noodin were leaving with knowledge that they would share with their classmates and friends. They had made so many plans to help *Miskwaadesi* that Nokomis Annie could hardly wait for them to come back to continue their work!



HEALTHY HABITATS

CHAPTER 5 - EKO-NAANANING GINJIGAN

During a visit to the marsh, Nokomis Annie stopped to observe changes in the season. She placed an offering of *asemaa* at the edge of *nibi*, sat down on her favourite rock, and closed her eyes while she focused on the sounds of the community. When Nokomis Annie first sat down, there were few sounds coming from the marsh. After she had settled down on that old *Mishomis* rock, the animals went back to their work and she heard their sounds again.

Nokomis Annie remembered when she was a little girl, helping her grandfather catch minnows in the marsh. There were many things to look at and listen to at the *nibi* such as *bineshiinh* singing and *mogkii* croaking. It was a place full of life! Her grandfather talked to her about the marsh and the wonderful gifts it had to offer. He talked about how much it was needed. Nokomis Annie's grandfather told her that all living things have four basic needs—food, water, shelter, and space.

However, the food must be nutritious and healthy, the *nibiish* drinkable and clean, and the shelter must protect creatures from weather and predators. Every plant and animal needs enough space to find food, water and shelter. He also explained that shelter includes a place to be cared for. Shelter is more than a house, it is a home!

There is an understanding in Creation that each plant and animal on *Aki* has its own special place. Nokomis Annie thought about her needs and realized that because humans were the last created, they depend upon every other member of Creation.

The sun was warm on Nokomis Annie's back and she was starting to nod off when she sensed something watching her. She opened one eye slowly and there at her feet sat *Miskwaadesi*! The old turtle's shell was wet and sparkling in the afternoon sun.

"*Aaniin* Nokomis, it is good to see you today. I was hoping that you would come by," said *Miskwaadesi*.

Nokomis Annie told the old turtle that she was grateful for all of the sights and sounds of life in the wetland. *Miskwaadesi* nodded her ancient head in agreement.



The old turtle spoke again in her quiet voice, "It is your responsibility to be thankful for the gifts that have been given to you. This reminds me of a very old teaching from long ago. After the Creator thought everything into existence and placed all the elements, plants, and animals on *Aki*, the Creator gave each their responsibilities. Then, when everything was ready, the Creator created humans," said *Miskwaadesi*.

"My turtle ancestors shared this story with me. They talked about how much the humans depended on us. We, the older brothers and sisters of Creation,

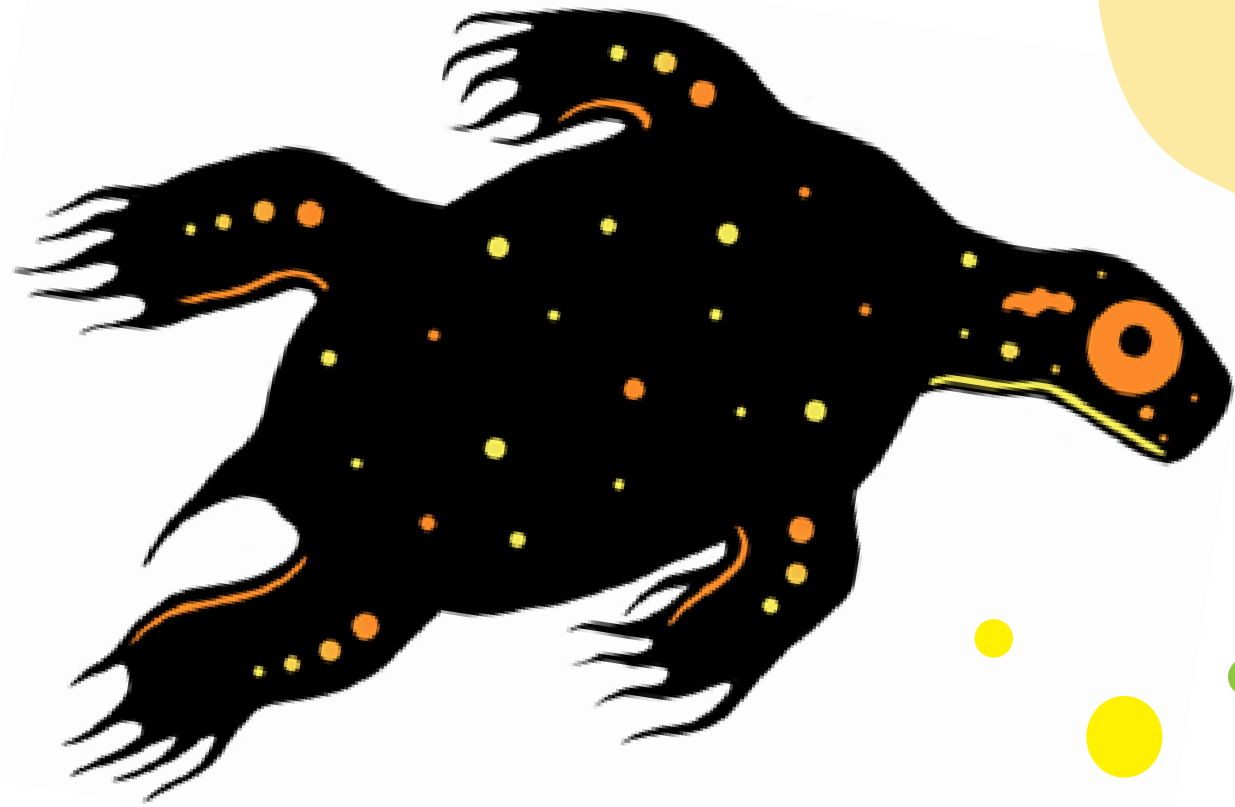
were given the responsibility to provide humans with food and to make sure that *nibi* stayed clean and healthy," explained the old turtle. *Miskwaadesi* paused briefly to observe a beautiful, red dragonfly zip across the pond.

"All that the Creator asked of you, the youngest of Creation, was that you show gratitude and give thanks for the other members of Creation who so

readily shared themselves with you. Those first humans agreed and showed their gratitude every morning by offering their *asemaa*, prayers, and thanksgiving to *Gzhe Minidoo*," explained *Miskwaadesi*.

The old turtle continued, "As time went by, the humans became forgetful. They were so busy enjoying the gifts of Creation that they forgot to be grateful. *Gzhe Minidoo* looked down upon all of Creation and was very disappointed to see that humans were not showing gratitude. The Creator decided to destroy *Aki* and everything on it. The *Migizi* understood the Creator's thoughts and spoke up in defence of humans who were young and weak. The *Migizi* asked that humans be given another chance. The Creator sent *Migizi* to fly over all of Creation, from east to west, looking for a lodge where humans were showing thanks and gratitude. The Creator promised to spare Creation if good news was brought back. At dawn the next day, the *Migizi* set out on his journey across Turtle Island, flying from east to west, searching for signs of thanks. At the very last village, in a tiny lodge at the end of the trail, the *Migizi* saw a thin plume of smoke rising up to the sky. The smoke was from the *asemaa* which an old *Nokomis* and *Mishomis* placed on their morning fire. The elderly couple was offering a prayer of thanksgiving, speaking to all the different plants, animals, elements, and helpers that surrounded them. The *Migizi* flew back to the Sky-world to report to the Creator that he had found a couple who remembered to be grateful. The Creator was pleased and promised to spare Creation as long as there was evidence of thanks and gratitude." *Miskwaadesi* took a deep breath and closed her eyes.





Nokomis Annie remembered the story and thanked *Miskwaadesi* for bringing it back to her memory.

The turtle continued her teaching, "The Old People say that is why humans need to begin the day with a prayer of thanks, acknowledging all other members of the great community which work together to make life possible. When *Migizi* flies from east to west every morning as the sun rises, it gathers up humankind's prayers and takes them to the Creator."

This teaching helped Nokomis Annie to understand the importance of gratitude and thanks for Creation. It was important that she also teach this to her grandchildren so they could continue giving thanks to the Creator for the world around them.

"My Auntie Jan is Turtle clan," Nokomis Annie explained to *Miskwaadesi*, "She knows a lot about turtles. She told me that turtle families have specific needs for food, water, shelter, and space. Some of their needs are similar, but



each member of the turtle family is unique and has a special place, responsibility, and role. Sometimes, more than one turtle family will live in a wetland," said Nokomis Annie.

"I am pleased your Auntie Jan knows so much about my turtle family!" said *Miskwaadesi*. "Those of us who wear the colours of *Miskwaadesi* only like to eat plants and seeds, tiny water plants, little minnows, snails, tadpoles, worms, and sometimes little insects found along the shore," the old turtle shared.

"My family can only live in marshes, ponds, and bays that have rocks and logs where we can bask in the sun to soak up its warm rays. I did not start making nests until I was ten years old. When it was time to lay eggs, I returned to my nesting area near the shoreline. My hatchlings climbed out of the nest and hurried back to the *nibiing*. When they hatch they need to find shelter in the water and plants to be safe from the herons, raccoons, and big fish who like to eat them." Nokomis Annie thought about the eggs she saved last year by placing a protective covering over them. She hoped that most of those turtle babies survived.



Miskwaadesi continued to explain to Nokomis Annie, "One of the responsibilities carried on by my turtle babies is to ensure that *nibi* in the marsh is clean and safe. We are also responsible for bringing the message of changing seasons to other animals and plants which live in the wetlands. The Painted turtle is one of the first turtles to hibernate in autumn. I think that is why my shell has those pretty, fall leaf colours on it! I still need plenty of space to live, sunning logs, and rocks to warm my body after the long winter. I communicate with the Creator and all other plants and animals in the wetland."

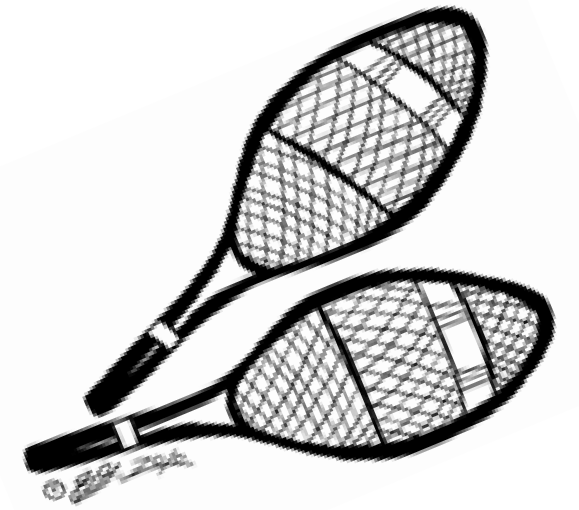
"Did you know that if my environment is healthy, some of my cousins can live to be over one hundred years old?" *Miskwaadesi* asked. "However, many of my family members are not living as long anymore. Changes in the marsh are making it difficult for us. You know, Nokomis Annie, when you were a little girl, you could not sit on that *Mishomis* rock where you are sitting now because it was under *nibi*! The marsh has been shrinking in size and that means every living thing has less space to live. Where did all the *nibi* go?" *Miskwaadesi* asked in a troubled voice.



"The *nibi* is warmer than it used to be and it is not as good to drink. I am trying hard to keep *nibi* clean but there used to be many more turtles to help. Now there are only a few cousins and myself. We cannot keep up with all the work that must be done." *Miskwaadesi* blinked, snapped at a damselfly that landed near the edge of *nibi*, and slowly turned away from the shore.

"My *fifth challenge* asked you to find out what turtles need to survive. What does a healthy habitat look like? Do you think the habitat in your community is healthy for you and me?" *Miskwaadesi* asked.

Nokomis Annie thought about *Miskwaadesi's* words as the old turtle slipped quietly into *nibi*. She watched as *Miskwaadesi* swam out of sight, leaving behind ripples in the water and time to think about the teaching which was shared. She wondered what happened to the *nibi*. Where did it go? What might happen if *Miskwaadesi* and her turtle cousins are gone? How are we to keep our obligation to *Gzhe Minidoo*? Who will keep *nibi* clean in the wetland? She got up slowly and walked back to the house. Nokomis Annie had a lot to think about.



TURTLE STORIES

CHAPTER 6 - EKO-NGODWAACHING GINJIGAN

Noodin and Ziigwan were back from the city to visit with Nokomis Annie over the winter holidays. There was snow in the bush and the snow banks along the roads were getting high. Noodin was looking forward to using the old *aagimog* and spending some time on Uncle Buddy's trap line. The swamps and marshes were frozen and it was time to set traps on the muskrat push-ups. After supper, Noodin eagerly looked in the shed for all the equipment he needed for the morning when Uncle Buddy arrived. Everything was ready for their big adventure! It would be fun to travel over the frozen marsh and the swamp without getting wet feet.

When it was time for bed, Noodin had trouble falling asleep because he was so excited about the next morning! He turned over and over on the beds.

"Nokomis, Noodin will not settle down. I cannot go to sleep. He will not stop rolling around and making noise!" complained Ziigwan.

Nokomis Annie came into the room. "What is happening in here?" she questioned.

"Nokomis, I am having trouble getting to sleep. Will you tell us a story about the animals and the plants?" asked Noodin.

Nokomis Annie had her old journal tucked under her arm. She settled down in the big rocking chair and opened her journal to a page where she had drawn a turtle's shell. She looked at the drawing for a few moments thoughtfully and started to speak in her quiet, calm voice. "Winter time is *Atsokanan*. This is the time of stories and teachings," she began. "Our People say that we should wait until the snow is on the ground and the plants and animals are sleeping before we begin telling stories about them."

"Yes Nokomis, I remember. Can you share a story about the animals that live in the marsh? I am looking forward to going out with Uncle Buddy tomorrow. It will be the first time I have been out on the marsh in the winter time," said Noodin.

Nokomis Annie nodded and was quiet for a few moments while she gathered her thoughts. "I can remember the stories that my *Mishomis* used to



tell us in the winter time when we were small. He and my *Okomisan* lived in a two-room log house. We used to sleep in one room and the other room was our kitchen. The wood stove in the kitchen kept us nice and warm in the winter time. There was always a line of mittens and socks drying behind the stove. I also remember a big table and benches to sit at, and a cupboard for our food and dishes. In the day time, we rolled up the mattresses and sat on them like a couch. We went to bed when it got dark, used a coal oil lamp for light in the house, and carried our *nibi* from the well down the road. There was always a pot of *giishkaandag-niibiishaaboo* on the stove and fresh bannock to eat. At night, when we were all tucked into our blankets, my grandfather would tell us stories about *Nanaboozhoo* and the animals and plants. Do you remember who *Nanaboozhoo* is?" asked Nokomis Annie.

"Of course we do! We love stories about him!" exclaimed Ziigwan.

Nokomis Annie recalled one of her favourites her grandfather used to tell.

"One time when *Aki* was new, *Nanaboozhoo* was out walking along the banks of a small stream naming all of Creation. His stomach was rumbling and grumbling and he was looking for something to eat. He just finished eating a small handful of ripe *odemiinan*. As he walked, he sang a song of thanksgiving to the leader of the berries for giving its life to feed him. Still, his stomach rumbled and grumbled because *Nanaboozhoo* needed more than a sweet snack!"

"The rumbling and grumbling sounds got louder. The sounds woke a small green *mishiikenh*, who was hiding inside a hollow log nearby. The timid *mishiikenh* peeked out her head from inside the log,

trembling in fear that it was otter returning to catch the turtle for lunch. At that time, *mishiikenh* did not wear a hard shell as it does today and she had no way of protecting herself from danger. She heard someone coming along the path, making loud grumbling and rumbling sounds, just like thunder! Quickly, the timid *mishiikenh* pulled her head back into the shade of the hollow log before she was seen. Her little heart beat like a *dewegan*."

"She was so shy and used to hiding away because the other animals always made fun of her. At that time long ago, the little *mishiikenh* had a very hard time getting around safely. She had four legs, a beautiful tail, a long neck, and pretty face, but her body looked as though something was missing." Nokomis Annie paused for emphasis and continued with the story.



"The little green *mishiikenh* did not like to come out during the day because the hot summer sun burned the soft skin on her back. She had to hunt for food in the early morning and just before nightfall. Life was very hard for the shy *mishiikenh*. When she was looking for food, she had to be alert and listening for the sounds of danger. *Nanaboozhoo* passed very close by the old hollow log but he did not notice the little *mishiikenh* who watched him. Along the shore, *Nanaboozhoo* found an overturned bark *jiimaan*. How inviting it looked! This gave *Nanaboozhoo* an idea. He would catch some *giigoonh* and have a feast!"

"He got into the *jiimaan* and paddled up the stream. He had his spear ready, but he could not see any *giigoonh* swimming. Where were the *giigoonh*, he wondered? His stomach still grumbled loudly. He paddled around and around the stream

looking for his *giigoonh* supper. The sun was shining down on *Nanaboozhoo's* back as he paddled the *jiimaan* back to shore. He was just about to give up when the little green *mishiikenh* crept out of the hollow log and offered to help.

"*'Nanaboozhoo, Nanaboozhoo,'* called the soft voice of *mishiikenh*. 'If you want to catch *giigoonh*, go down to the bend in the stream where the big beautiful *mitig* hangs over the *nibi*. Look under the *mitig* roots and you will find lots of *giigoonh*.'

"*'Ah-ho,'* said *Nanaboozhoo*. 'Gchi- miigwech, little *mishiikenh*! I will try there.' *Nanaboozhoo* turned the *jiimaan* downstream. He paddled right down to the bend and there stood a great old black willow *mitig* with its branches tickling the surface of the *nibi*. The branches made little ripples as the *nibi* flowed past. *Nanaboozhoo* pulled the *jiimaan* into

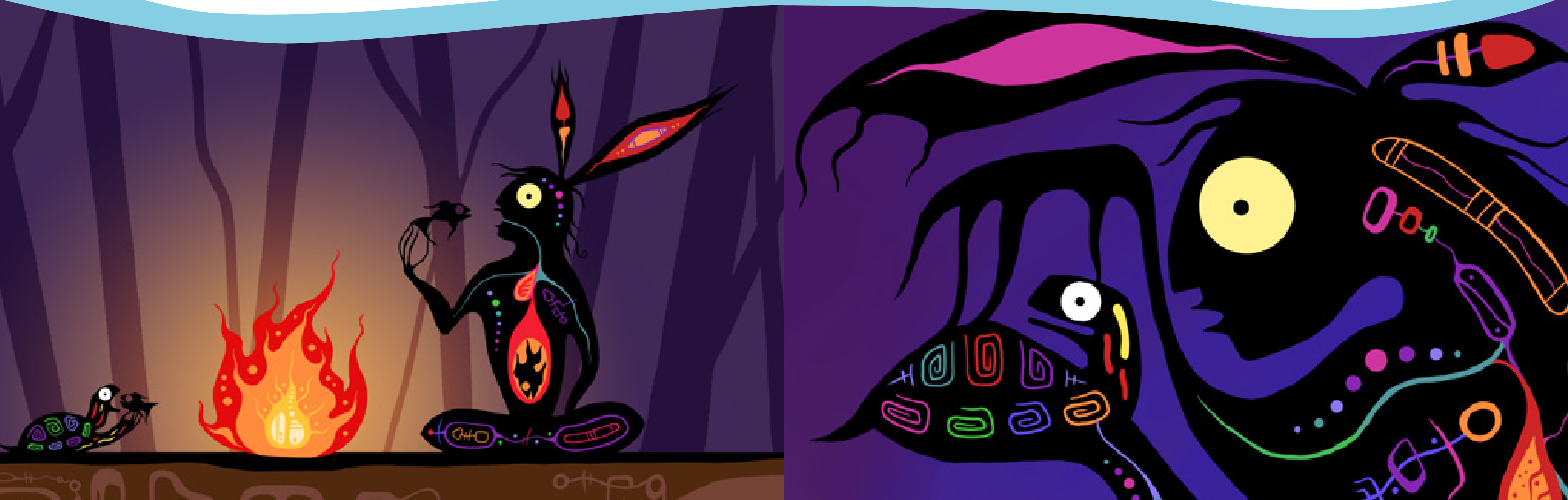
the shadows of the *mitig* and spotted a fine rainbow trout resting in the shade of the *mitig* roots. Carefully, *Nanaboozhoo* aimed his spear and sent it through the *nibi*. Before you could blink, he was holding a fat trout on the end of his spear. *Nanaboozhoo* placed the trout in the bottom of the *jiimaan* and tried again. After a few moments he caught enough *giigoonyag* for a feast!"

"*Nanaboozhoo* returned the *jiimaan* back to the stream bank where *mishiikenh* rested. Then, *Nanaboozhoo* made a fire for his feast. Soon, the air around him was filled with the wonderful smells of *giigoonh* cooking. Delicious! *Nanaboozhoo* looked around, trying to spot the little *mishiikenh* who had helped him catch his supper. He found the little *mishiikenh*, still hiding in the hollow log."

"*'Come on out and share some giigoonh with me,'* invited *Nanaboozhoo*. The little *mishiikenh* could smell *giigoonh* and it smelled so good! She carefully looked to the left, and then to the right. There was no one else around. Cautiously, *mishiikenh* took a step out of her hiding place and scurried over to the fire to nibble on some *giigoonh*."

"*Nanaboozhoo* looked down at the little green *mishiikenh* and noticed the stripes on her body. 'Little *mishiikenh*, why were you hiding in the log?' he asked. *Mishiikenh* blushed and told *Nanaboozhoo* how embarrassed she was to have no way of protecting herself. She spoke about the other animals teasing her, poking her with sticks, and scratching her with their claws when they played games."

"*Nanaboozhoo* sat by the fire for a few moments deep in thought. He was grateful to *mishiikenh* for her help and he wanted to honour her. 'I have an



idea!' exclaimed *Nanaboozhoo*. He picked up a round, gray *siniis* from the edge of the stream and he set the *siniis* on the little turtle's bare back. It fit nicely. *Nanaboozhoo* took a stick and carefully carved the *siniis* so it would fit over top and under the little *mishiikenh* like a coat. *Nanaboozhoo* showed *mishiikenh* how to put her legs through the holes on the sides of the *siniis*. He helped her stick her tail out of the back and her long beautiful neck and head out of the front. She could no longer scurry and run about because the *siniis* was quite heavy. Now she had to learn to crawl and move slowly. The little *mishiikenh* cried tears of joy and felt gratitude as she moved in her new shell."

"*Nanaboozhoo* then took out his paint brush and his paints. 'Come here little *mishiikenh*. You have such beautiful stripes. I will paint the colours of the sunset on your back if you sit still.' *Mishiikenh* trembled with excitement. She dragged her shell over to *Nanaboozhoo's* side and sat patiently while he tickled her back and belly with the paintbrushes. *Nanaboozhoo* took a sharp stick and carefully scratched out thirteen large sections for each moon, and to honour each day of the moon, he marked out twenty-eight smaller sections on the back of *siniis*. He painted the edges of the shell with colours. The little turtle was now covered with green, brown, yellow, red, and orange stripes. When *Nanaboozhoo* was done, the little *mishiikenh* carried her shell down to the stream to look at her new covering. How beautiful she looked! The shell was as hard as the *siniis* had been and now she would not have to hide away in fear. This little *mishiikenh* would now be

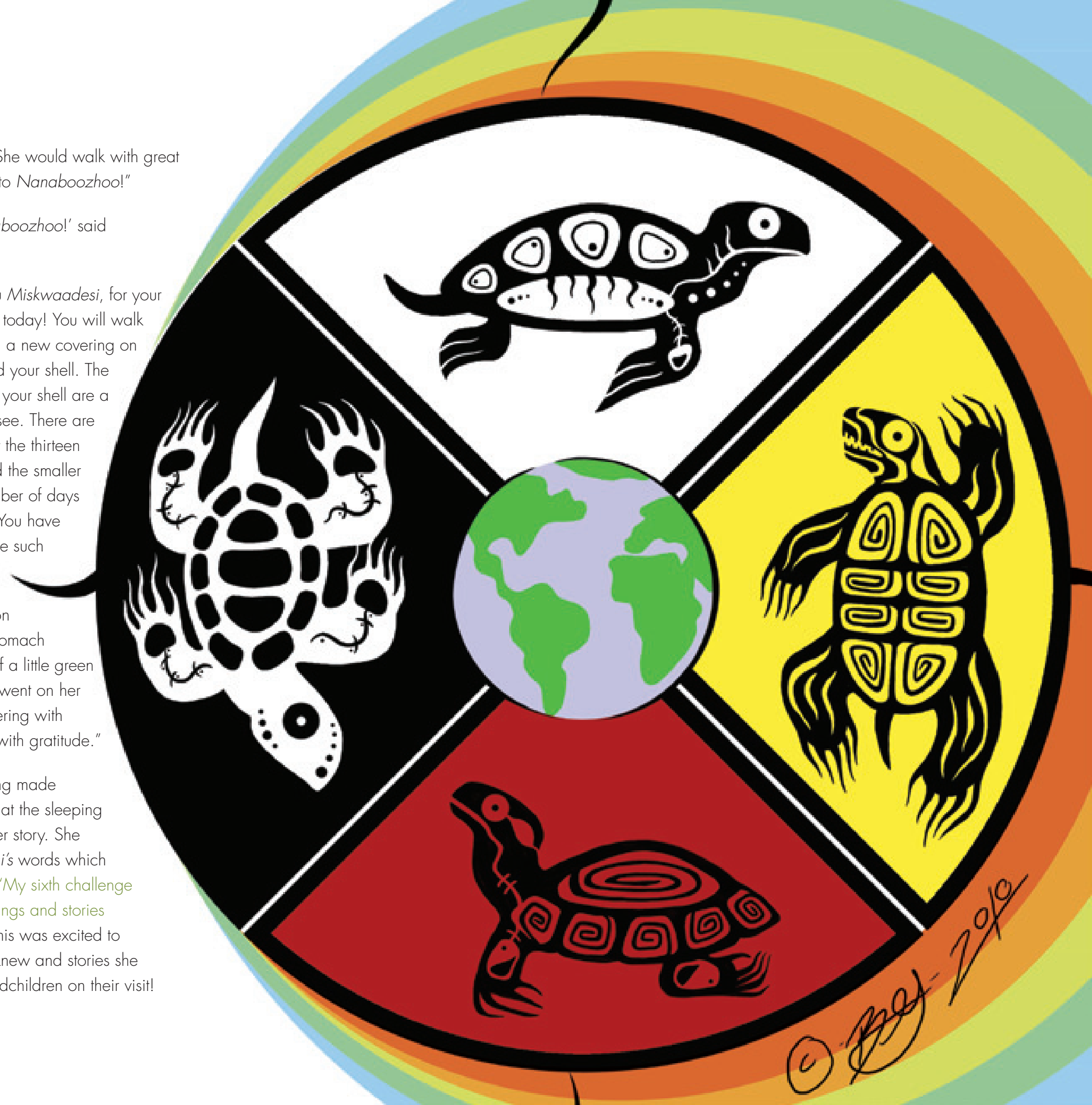
known as *Miskwaadesi*. She would walk with great dignity and pride, thanks to *Nanaboozhoo*!"

"*Gchi-miigwech Nanaboozhoo!*' said *Miskwaadesi* happily."

"*Gchi-miigwech* to you *Miskwaadesi*, for your kindness has been repaid today! You will walk from this day onward with a new covering on your back. It will be called your shell. The sections I have carved on your shell are a calendar for everyone to see. There are large sections to represent the thirteen full moons every year, and the smaller sections represent the number of days between each full moon. You have earned this for showing me such kindness on this day."

"*Nanaboozhoo* went on his way, rubbing his full stomach because of the kindness of a little green *mishiikenh*! *Miskwaadesi* went on her way, wearing a new covering with dignity and a heart filled with gratitude."

The sound of soft snoring made *Nokomis Annie* look over at the sleeping children as she finished her story. She remembered *Miskwaadesi's* words which described the challenge: "My sixth challenge asks you to listen to teachings and stories about *mishiikenh*." *Nokomis* was excited to share the stories that she knew and stories she would learn with her grandchildren on their visit!



TURTLE FAMILIES OF THE WORLD

CHAPTER 7 - EKO NIIZHWAACHING GINJIGAN



Nokomis Annie was sleeping in her favourite rocking chair when she woke up suddenly. She had been watching Aboriginal People's Television Network. Noodin and Ziigwan were back in the city after their winter holidays in Wasauksing. They kept very busy during their visit and Nokomis Annie was tired! She had fallen asleep and dreamt about *Miskwaadesi* talking about the various challenges.



The television was still on and it was playing a special show about turtles. It showed images of baby sea turtles hatching on the sandy shores of Australia. This reminded Nokomis Annie of distant brothers and sisters, the Aborigines, and their connection to turtles. It seemed that Indigenous people worldwide had many teachings about turtles.

The sea turtle story is a journey of many kilometres and years. The baby turtle hatches from its egg and swims through the seas and oceans of the world. It comes back to lay eggs on the very same beach it was born, instinctively finding its way home. This reminded Nokomis Annie of young people who often journeyed from her community to find a job, go to school, or find their own path.

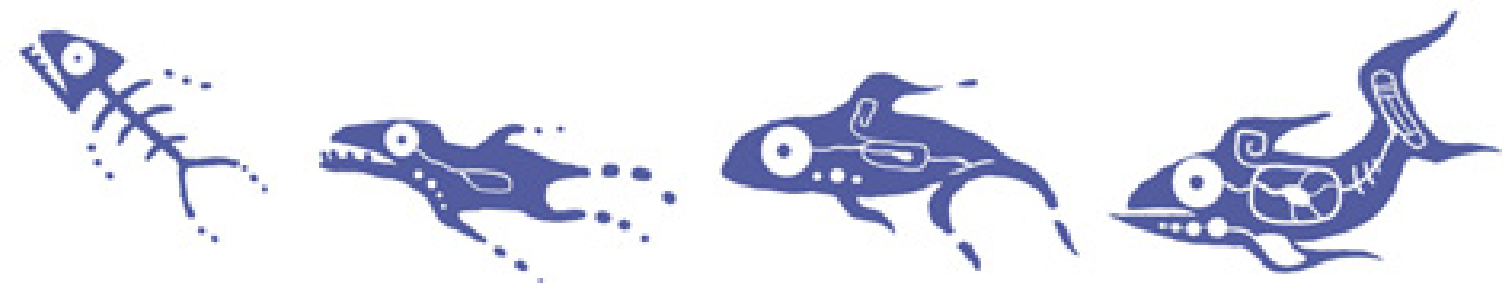
“Youth need to remember the sea turtle and its life journey home,” she said out loud. Nokomis Annie understood how strong the sea turtle’s call to return home was.

Nokomis Annie thought back to when she was younger and had to move to the city to go to school. It was so hard for her to be away from home. She remembered how she used to sit outside at night and look up at the stars, thinking about home and the family and friends that she missed. She was so lonely for home then and realized that sea turtles must feel that way too.

Imagine, she thought, walking into the sea as a tiny baby turtle and spending the next twenty years swimming through the oceans, far from home. How happy that turtle must be when it returns to the beach where its life began, so it can lay its eggs and begin the cycle of life over again!

Nokomis Annie remembered reading about turtles caught in fish nets and beaches being turned into parking lots, hotels, and resorts. She thought it must be confusing for turtles to travel to their birth place and not find their home.

This made her think about something a teacher once told her. She was learning about animals and her teacher said that the turtle is one of the few animals that has a home on its back. She thought a lot about this. The turtle may have a house on its back, but a home is more than just shelter—it includes food, a special place to live



in, clean *nibi*, and shelter too. This was the moment that Nokomis Annie realized that there is no place like home, even for turtles!

The television show explained that sea turtles are under great stress with the loss of habitat and pollution of ocean *nibi*. Plastic bags and rings floating in the *nibi* cause many turtles to die when they mistakenly eat the plastic, thinking it is food.

"This is so sad!" Nokomis Annie exclaimed out loud. "We have similar problems that affect our turtles here in our wetlands too."

The television show continued talking about a sea turtle called the leatherback who feeds on

jelly fish in the ocean near Nova Scotia. Nokomis Annie was happy to hear that fishermen were helping the rescue of turtles trapped in nets. Scientists have found these same turtles near the Island of Trinidad in the Caribbean Ocean—a journey of over 3 000 kilometres! It made her sad to think about the terrible difficulties turtles must overcome to survive in today's world.

Later that day, Nokomis Annie walked through the wet slush to the school to ask for help to find out more about *Miskwaadesi's seventh challenge*, "find out about turtles located around the world." The librarian helped Nokomis Annie search for information on sea turtles and tortoises. She found an interesting website

and spent some time reading and thinking about sea turtles, comparing them to fresh water turtle species. Nokomis Annie was excited to share this new information with her grandchildren.

Nokomis Annie explained to the librarian that turtles have been around for 225 million years and that worldwide, many turtles are in danger from loss of habitat. The librarian was very surprised when she learned this new information.

Nokomis Annie began to realize that *Miskwaadesi* and her turtle relatives have so much knowledge to share! Humans must try very hard to change destructive behaviours so that turtles around the world will survive for generations to come.

That night, Nokomis Annie went home thinking about the importance of wetland conservation. She thought about turtle species around the world and their need for help. Suddenly the world seemed so much smaller to her. If everyone worked together, they could help make a big difference.





THE IMPORTANCE OF WATER

CHAPTER 8 - EKONWAACHING GINJIGAN

After learning about turtles from around the world, Nokomis Annie was excited to learn about turtles close to home. All winter, she hoped *Miskwaadesi* would visit her in a dream. It was in the early months of spring when Nokomis Annie finally heard from her friend *Miskwaadesi*.

“Nokomis, the Spirit of *nibi* has spoken to me,” said the turtle. “It is telling me that Elder Josephine Mandamin is coming. Go and meet her. She has a message for you. Josephine has thought about the seven generations that came before us and she is thinking about the seven generations to come. Josephine is honouring the *nibi* and the Spirit of *nibi*. She will arrive soon with her group of Water Walkers. Listen to what they have to share and take their message home to your community. When you walk for the *nibi*, you will be walking for me and for all that live in our *nibi*. Listen to Josephine’s message and then you will understand my *eighth challenge*: Walk for the *nibi*, walk for the turtle, walk for yourself, and your future.”

Miskwaadesi’s words blazed in Nokomis Annie’s heart. She called the Friendship Centre to find out if they knew about Josephine’s visit. Those at the Friendship Centre said Josephine and the Water Walkers were coming soon and they planned to stop in the community. Josephine would speak about her walk around the Great Lakes, focused on her concerns about the health of *nibi*. She began her very special journey in 2003. At that time, she spoke to the *kwewag* in her community and encouraged them to join her Great Lakes Water Walk. On this walk, they would pray for the *nibi* and teach others about the importance of *nibi*.

Nokomis Annie went to bed early that night. She was looking forward to meeting this wonderful woman from Manitoulin Island!

When and Nokomis Annie got to the Friendship Centre, there were many people gathered to welcome Josephine and her Water Walkers. It was inspiring to hear her message about the importance of *nibi*. Josephine asked everyone to remember to

pray daily for *nibi* and her gentle, motivating words touched all!

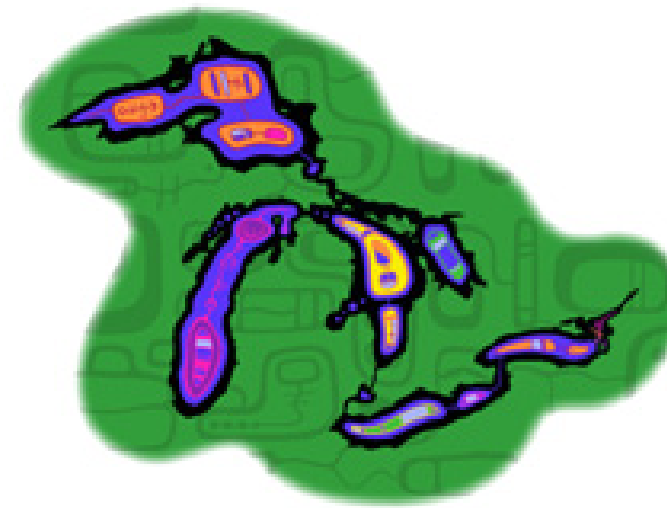
Nokomis Annie continued feeling honoured after meeting Josephine Mandamin, the Elder who journeyed around all of the Great Lakes. Josephine's message was a reminder to everyone about the importance of fresh *nibi* for all people, not just First Nations.

After this visit, Nokomis Annie realized that Josephine took her responsibilities as an Elder very seriously. Josephine reminded First Nation communities about the traditional responsibilities that women have as *nibi* keepers. She shared with Nokomis Annie the understanding that *nibi* is precious and sacred. It is one of the basic elements

needed for all life to exist. She also explained that all people need to be concerned about local *nibi* use. This would build awareness of how much *nibi* is being used or wasted.

Nokomis Annie remembered some of the facts Josephine talked about. Nokomis Annie was surprised to learn that over forty million people live within the beautiful Great Lakes watershed. This helped her realize why Josephine was worried about *nibi*. People surrounding the Great Lakes have clean and fresh *nibi* available to them but some have taken it for granted. *Nibi* that flows underground has become sick with the pollution of industry and population. Many people do not understand that they have an effect on those living downstream. They must make sure that the *nibi* they send downstream is clean and healthy.

Nibi is essential for survival and health because everything is related to *nibi*. First Nations people living in Ontario were aware of *nibi* pollution in the Great Lake when settlers began polluting the *nibi*. Since the beginning of time, the *Anishinaabeg*



peoples living along the shores and rivers of the Great Lakes watershed have carried within their hearts an ongoing responsibility for *nibi*. The need to keep *nibi* clean and healthy was understood. It is *nibi* that cleanses and heals body, mind, and spirit, and everything depends on *nibi* for continued life. There is a connection between *nibi* and all life forms, gifted to humans by Creation.

Nokomis Annie remembered Elders speaking of the need to keep *nibi* clean and pure for the sake of the seventh generation yet to come. Ceremonies include *nibi* for its healing and nourishing power. The First Nations people of Turtle Island believe that *nibi* is sacred and it is the life-blood of our First Mother, *Aki*. There is a need to come together with all people living in the watershed and share awareness of *Aki's* freshwater.

Josephine's words were still rippling through Nokomis's thoughts as she went to bed. Before she knew it, she was dreaming about sitting by the marsh in the early morning,

listening to the Red-winged Blackbirds. *Miskwaadesi* peeked out from under some floating duckweed.

"*Aanii Miskwaadesi*. It is so good to see you. *Mino giizhigad!* I met Josephine Mandamin, the wonderful Elder you told me about. Josephine and the Water Walkers have been walking around the Great Lakes watershed, carrying a bucket of *nibi* to remind everyone about the importance of *nibi*. I spoke to her about the challenges you have shared with me. Josephine reminded me that turtles need clean and healthy *nibi*, just as we do. She thought that if the women and children got together, they could walk around the wetlands and *nibiing* in their communities. By carrying a bucket of *nibi* to symbolize its sacred nature, the walk would let everyone know that there is a serious concern for *nibi*. Josephine hoped that any litter or garbage found would be picked up, so when the turtles awoke from their winter sleep, they would find a cleaner and healthier place to live. She reminded everyone that women have a responsibility to care for *nibi*, just as the turtles do. *Miskwaadesi*, I am so inspired. What is my next challenge?" The old turtle blinked in the bright sunlight.

"Nokomis, your *ninth challenge* is to look at how much water you use. Honour the *nibi* Spirit for its gifts by protecting it. *Nibi* for drinking, washing, cooking, and bathing is becoming scarce. Many people use too much and do not consider the effects of their use on wetlands and the creatures that live in them. My turtle family members and friends cannot live in a wetland if *nibi* is not plentiful and healthy."

Miskwaadesi swam away under the duckweed, leaving Nokomis Annie to her thoughts. The old woman knew that her use of *nibi* had changed over time, but she was determined to make positive changes for the future.





WATER: OUR BUSINESS

CHAPTER 9 - EKO-ZHAANGCHIING GINJIGAN

One spring afternoon, Nokomis Annie was walking along the road by the marsh. The sun shone warmly on her face and the sky was bright blue. The bugs were not biting yet, so it was a good day for a walk.

Nokomis Annie was happy to find *Miskwaadesi* basking on a large, moss covered log. It was the first time Nokomis Annie had seen her since she went to the bottom of the marsh to sleep for the winter. The old turtle seemed to be enjoying the beautiful spring day.

She was thinking a lot about *Miskwaadesi*, ever since the *kwewag* of the community met and planned their *nibi* walk. Nokomis Annie was certain that *Miskwaadesi* would approve of the turtle posters they created and their walk around the marsh.

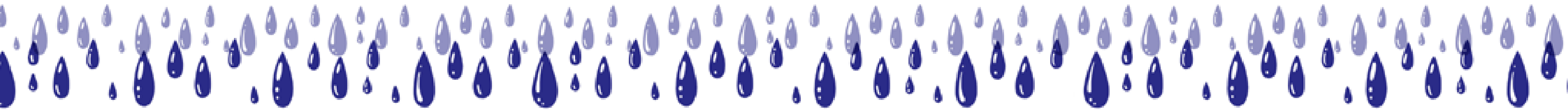
"*Aaniin Miskwaadesi*. It is so good to see you today," said Nokomis Annie.

"*Ho-wah! Aaniin* Nokomis Annie. I have just woken from my winter sleep. It is a nice afternoon to sit by the *nibi* and soak up some sun to warm my body after a long, cold winter." The old turtle's quiet voice seemed stronger than before.

Nokomis Annie sat down beside *Miskwaadesi*. She told the old turtle what the community was doing to learn about the different turtle species. Nokomis Annie spoke about Josephine Mandamin, the Water Walkers, and how the *kwewag* in the community organized a *nibi* walk for the youth. All the children took turns carrying buckets of *nibi* around the wetland while singing songs for *nibi*. The youth were learning to protect the sacred resource.

Miskwaadesi blinked slowly. Nokomis Annie noticed a few tears forming at the corners of the old turtle's eyes. She seemed to nod her head with grateful approval.

"*Nibi* is so important to my turtle family and friends." said *Miskwaadesi*. "I spend almost all of my days and nights in *nbiing*. The elements of *nibi*, sun, air, and earth are all a part of our lives. I sleep under the ice of the *nbiing* for six moons of the year. I am surrounded by *nibi* when I am swimming and when I am looking for dinner. I need fresh and clean *nibi* every day for my life."



The *nibi* looked so inviting to Nokomis Annie on the beautiful spring afternoon. She thought that *Miskwaadesi* must enjoy the water when it looked like this. The little *nibi* bugs swam around, a few minnows dashed between *nibi* plants, while some tiny tadpoles wiggled in the shallow *nibiing*.

Nokomis Annie thought about *Miskwaadesi's* dependence on the *nibi*. It was as important as air for breathing! She thought about the elements

and how important they are for both *Miskwaadesi*, herself and all living things.

Nokomis Annie started to think about the amount of *nibi* her *Okomisan* used when she lived in the bush without running *nibi*. She fondly remembered her childhood summers at her *Okomisan's* little house. Nokomis Annie spoke to the turtle about some of her memories, "I remember spending a lot of time with my *Okomisan* when I was small. We used to carry *nibi* from the creek to use in the house. She taught me to fill my bucket by scooping

downstream, so the *nibi* was not disturbed. We always had a little bit of *asemaa* to place as an offering at the edge of the *nibi*. My *Okomisan* said that the *asemaa* was to say *miigwech* to the *nibi* and to honour it."

Miskwaadesi continued listening to Nokomis Annie. "My *Okomisan* said we needed to take care of *nibi* because it is important for our health. We did not waste any *nibi* in those times. I remember that she gave me a little cup of *nibi* for my toothbrush. She had an outhouse that was behind the house, away from the *nibi*. When it was time to bathe, we would use a basin to scrub our hands and face

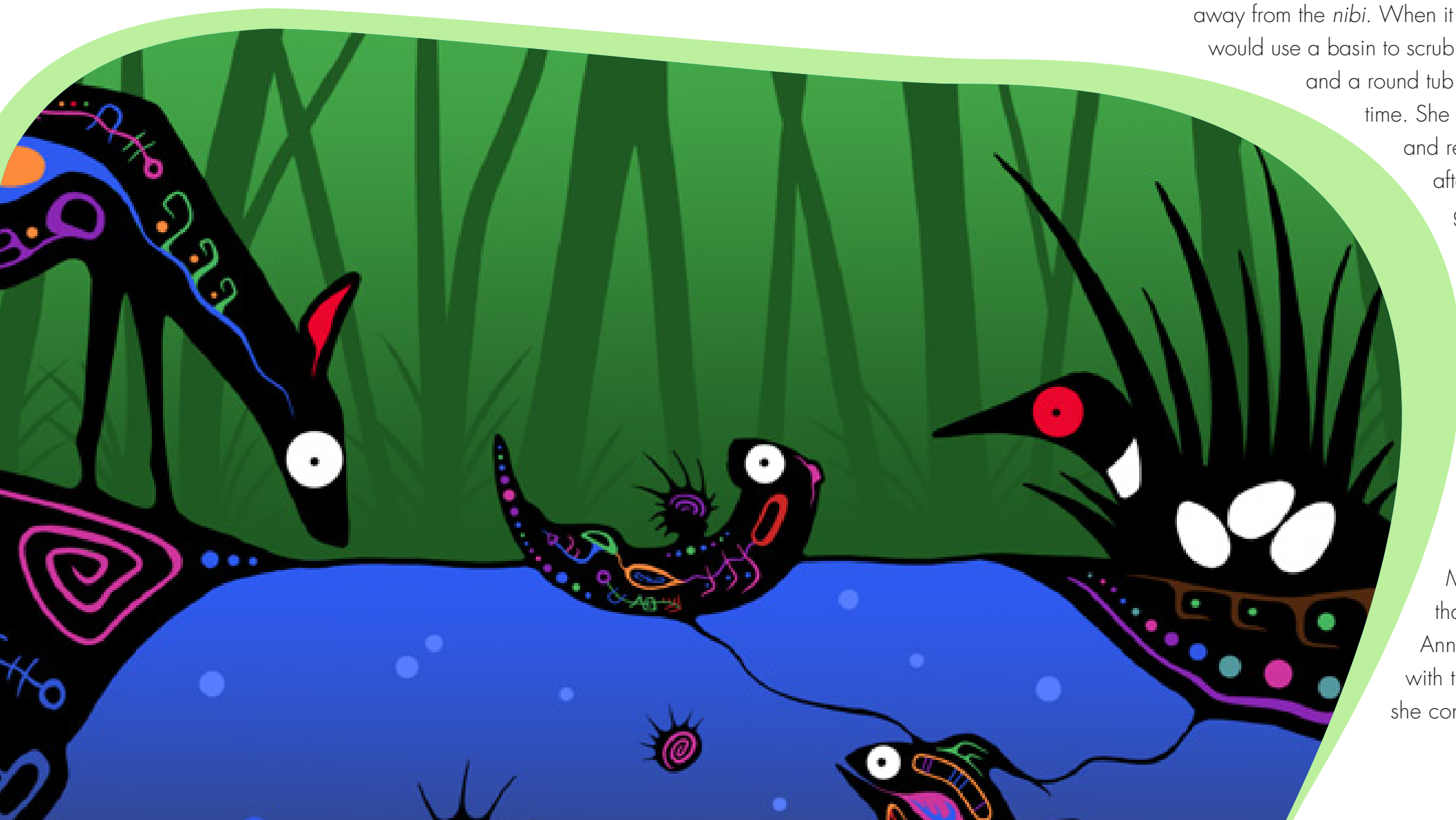
and a round tub for a bath in the winter time. She always respected *nibi* and reminded me to look after the creek and be grateful for the good, cold *nibi* that came to us. My *Okomisan* understood that *nibi* is alive and that it has a Spirit. I think that my *Okomisan* was a good keeper of *nibi*! She had a very small *nibi* footprint on the earth. Mine is much bigger than hers was." Nokomis Annie was uncomfortable with this realization as she continued speaking to

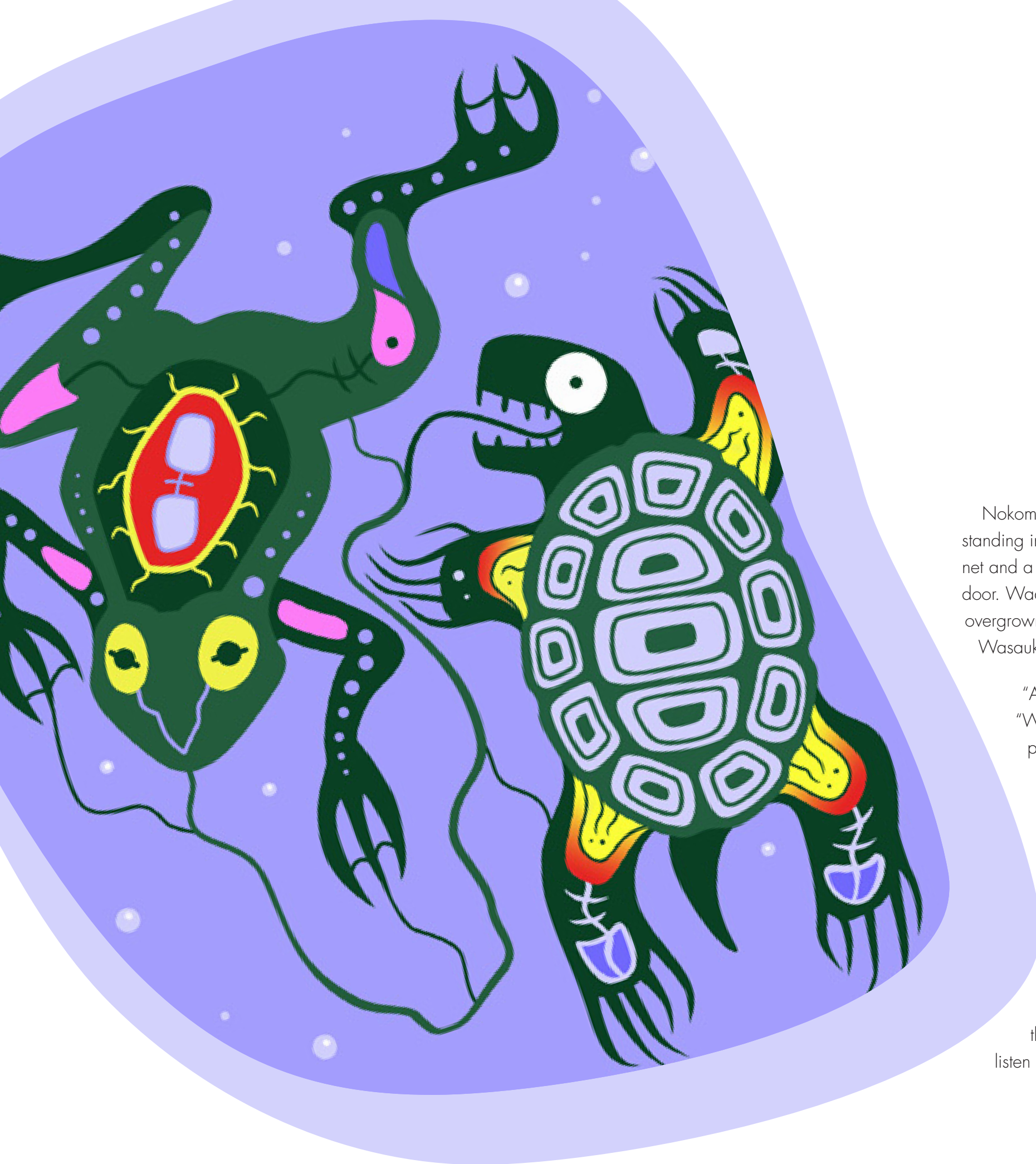
Miskwaadesi. "I have to be careful with my use because my *nibi* comes from a well and I do not want it to run dry. It is so tasty, cold, and clean! I know it keeps me healthy!"

The old turtle reminded Nokomis Annie to place her *asemaa* as an offering every day to offer her personal prayers, "Remember, your ancestors have lived in the watersheds of Turtle Island and prayed for its health for thousands of years," said *Miskwaadesi*. "They were very careful to keep *nibi* clean. *Kwewag* are responsible for *nibi* and this is taken very seriously. Their ceremonies, prayers, and actions teach children how important *nibi* is."

Miskwaadesi continued, "Too much *nibi* is wasted and polluted and it cannot clean itself quickly enough. Every drop of this sacred resource saved provides life for plants and animals. Can you help the *nibi*, Nokomis?" challenged *Miskwaadesi*. "Now that you know how much water you use, come back down to the *nibi*. Listen to the *mogkii*. What are they saying? Look at the little creatures in and around the *nibi*, then record what you see. This is your *tenth challenge*."

Miskwaadesi snapped at a buzzing fly and suddenly plopped into the *nibi*. The minnows and tadpoles swam for cover as the ripples spread out around her shell. As she swam away, the ripples reminded Nokomis Annie that everything humans do causes a ripple on *Aki*, affecting everything else in Creation. Thinking about her water use, Nokomis Annie completed the ninth challenge, and now she was excited for the next!





FROG FRIENDS

CHAPTER 10 - EKO-MDAACHING GINJIGAN

Nokomis Annie went to find her rubber boots standing in the corner of the closet. A home-made net and a small white basin were sitting by the door. Waaban was cheerfully walking down the overgrown path. It was a bright spring afternoon in Wasauksing and it was time to count the *mogkiig*.

"Aaniin Waaban," smiled Nokomis Annie. "What a beautiful day! Look at the *mog'kii* poster I picked up at the Band Office. It is from the Toronto Zoo. It shows all the *mogkiig* that we might see in Ontario."

Waaban looked excitedly at his Nokomis as she continued, "There was also a *mogkiig* call CD from the Toronto Zoo. They have recorded all of the different *mog'kii* calls. I listened to it last night. It is in our *Anishinaabe* language! Did you know that the children at the school are going to listen to it this week in their language class?"

Waaban was excited to learn about *mogkiig* in his language. He loved *mogkiig*!

Nokomis Annie told Waaban that she was asked to take some of the students out for a short walk down to the edge of the *nibi* every afternoon for the next week to listen for *mogkiig*. "The students are going to listen to the calls and practice filling in forms to tell the Zoo about the *mogkiig* they hear. They are really excited to be included in the FrogWatch program."

Waaban looked at all of the materials they needed waiting by the door. "Hey, I like that basin you found," he said.

"It is white so we will be able to see all those little swimmers that we catch with our net," said Nokomis Annie.

"I brought my bug book and some *giishkaandag-niibiishaaboo* in case we get thirsty," said Waaban.

"I am anxious to see if I can find some medicine plants near the shore because I used all the medicines picked last year. Let's get going!" said Nokomis Annie.

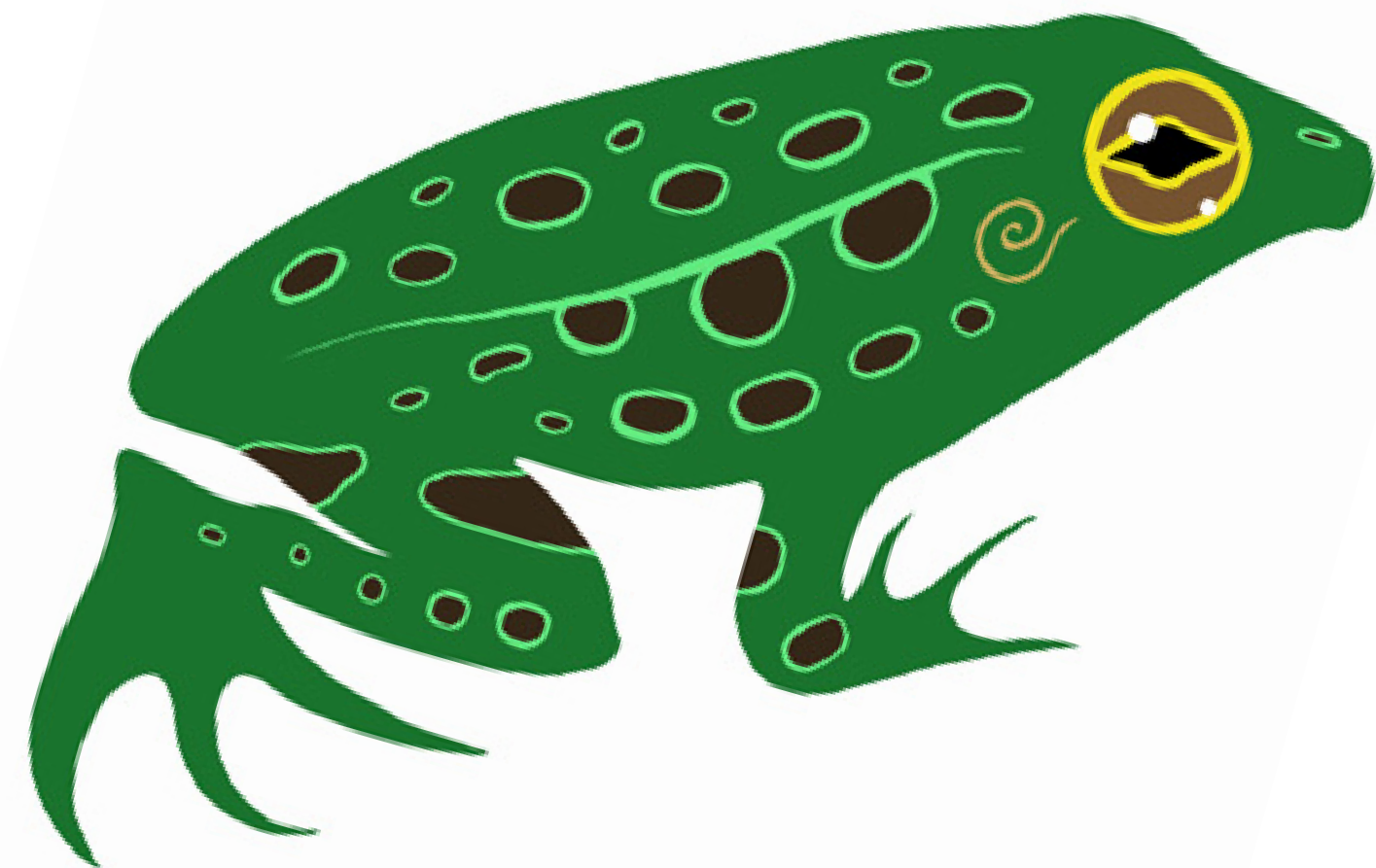
Waaban and Nokomis Annie walked down the path to the road and turned towards the shimmering *nibi*. Nokomis Annie brought *asema* and she spoke about the importance of placing an offering to thank and honour the *nibi*. Together they set their nets, basins, and notebooks on the big *Mishomis* rock that waited for them at the edge of the marsh.

Soon they were busy scooping marsh *nibi* into the basin to look for signs of life. The sun shone down on the pair as they worked with lots of laughter and chatting. Waaban was busy taking pictures to send to his cousins, Noodin and Ziigwan in the city. As they scooped, they counted the tiny insect babies that they saw.

Nokomis Annie helped Waaban look in the wetland to understand what each insect meant in relation to *nibi* cleanliness. The Toronto Zoo had sent them a 'Wetland Report Card' which explained how to check the *nibi* oxygen levels and cleanliness according to the types of insects found.

Working together, they had their 'Wetland Report Card' finished quickly. They found many insects, which was good news, because it meant that the wetland was fairly healthy! Maybe this spring it would need a litter cleanup, followed by *nibi* testing. From the far side of the marsh came the 'peep, peep' of the Spring Peepers, singing a song of joy and thanksgiving for the return of spring. Nokomis Annie and Waaban were excited to see the marsh waking up!

Nokomis Annie thought about some of the teachings her Elders taught her when she was young. When another season of life begins in the watershed, one of the very first *bineshiinh* of



spring to return to the waterways is the Red-winged Blackbird. The male Blackbirds arrive when there is still ice on the ponds and waterways. Some of the Old People say that it is this bird's call that wakes up those little Spring Peepers and encourages them to start climbing out of their mud beds to join the new season.

Another teaching Nokomis Annie remembered says that when the Spring Peepers start to call, it is time to take the spiles out of the maple *mitigook* because sap season is coming to an end. Science shares the accuracy of this teaching. When the temperature is warm enough in the waterways and wetlands, the first frog singers come out. This is when the sap in the maple *mitigook* begins to get cloudy and the sweetness fades from the sap.

"Waaban, next week when we come back, can you bring your iPod and digital recorder to record some of the sounds of spring in our wetland?" asked Nokomis Annie. She gently returned the insect babies to *nibiing* and rinsed out the basin.

"Of course I can Nokomis! I will also listen to the *mog'kii* calls CD so I am ready for next week. I can already sing like a Spring Peeper. Peep! Peep! Peep! Each week a new frog sings its song for us" Waaban exclaimed.

"This is going to be fun, listening for *mogkii* while we are out walking for our health. I really like the return of spring! The weather is nice for walking," said Nokomis Annie.

She sat on the *Mishomis* rock for a few moments longer, listening to the sounds of spring before she and Waaban began their walk home. Nokomis Annie remembered *Miskwaadesi's eleventh challenge*: "Come down to *nbiing*, Nokomis Annie. Bring your family with you. Show them how to help the *mishiikeniyag*. Tell the Elders where we lay our eggs so our nesting sites can be protected. Come to *nbiing*, Nokomis Annie, and visit with me and my relatives. Count all of the turtle species in your wetland."

TURTLE TALLY

CHAPTER 11 - *EKO-MADAACHING-SHI-BEZHIG GINJIGAN*

The loud ringing of the phone startled Nokomis Annie. Ziigwan was calling from the city and she sounded very excited. "Nokomis, guess what Noodin and I found when we were looking at the Toronto Zoo's Adopt-A-Pond website at school yesterday? They need communities to go out and watch for turtles. It is called Turtle Tally. The website asked that we go walking and look for turtles in June. This is around the time when they lay their eggs," said Ziigwan.

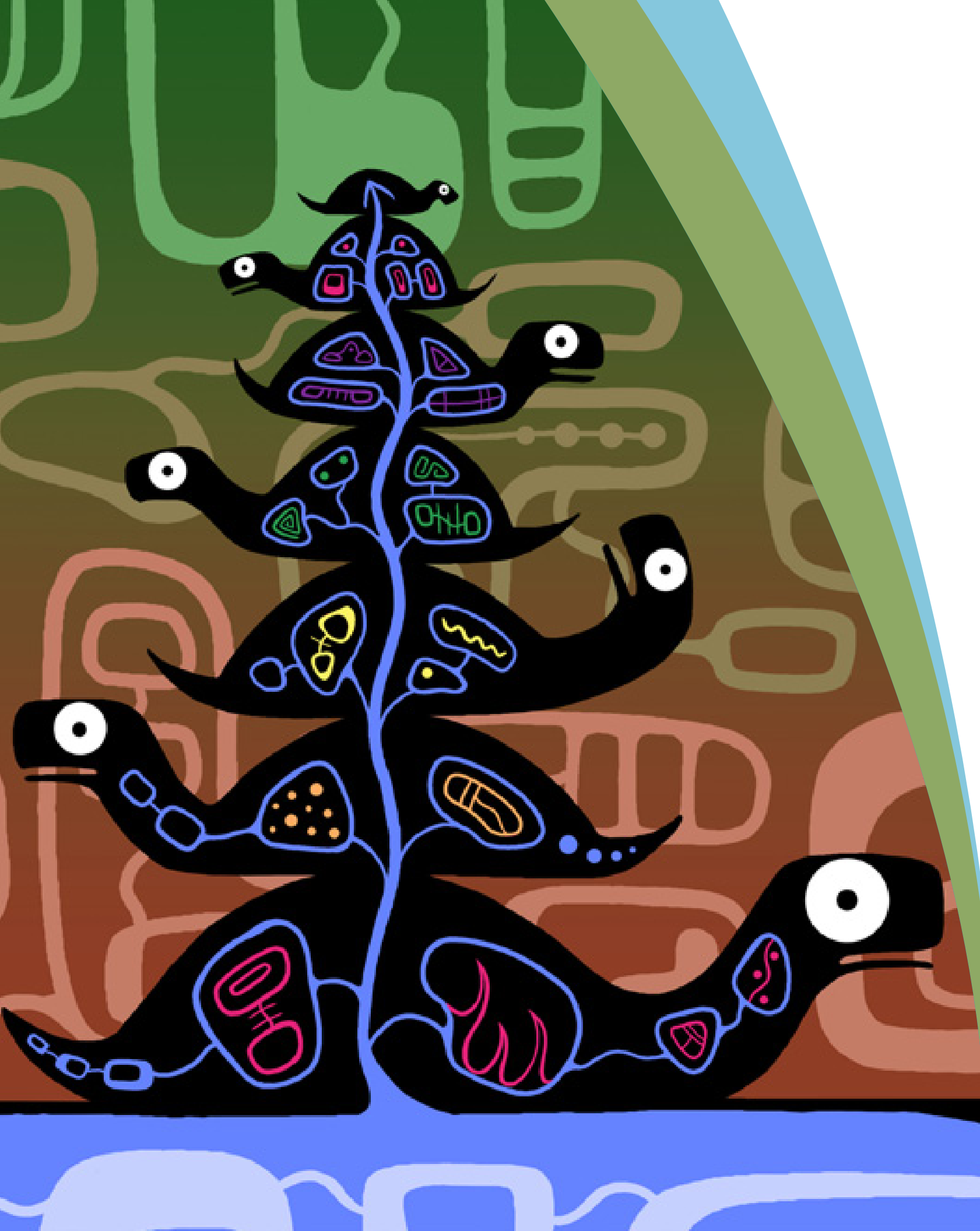
"Nokomis, can we visit and take a walk with you to the wetland? Maybe we will find some of *Miskwaadesi's* friends," exclaimed Ziigwan excitedly. "Uncle Buddy is coming out to the reserve from the city and he said that he will bring us if it is okay with you." This idea was very exciting for the children. They hoped Nokomis Annie would say yes!

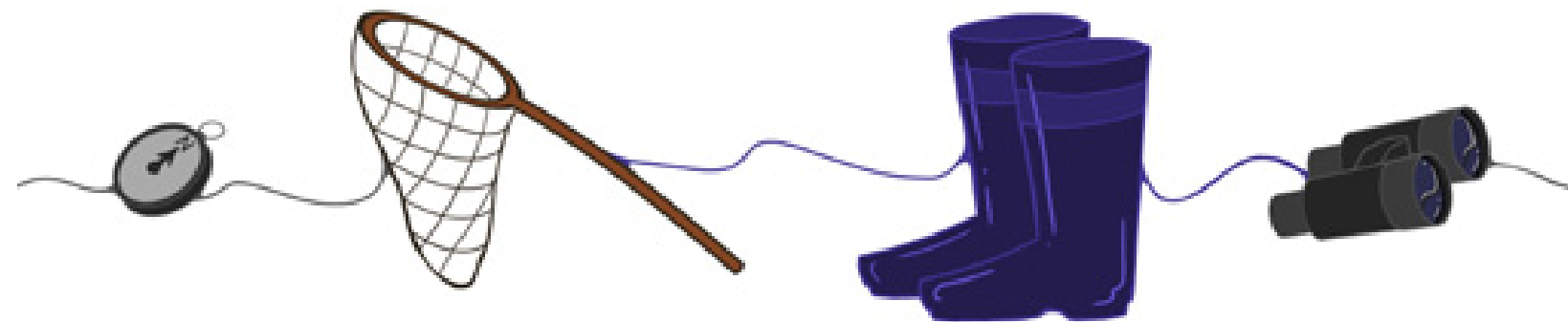
Nokomis Annie was so happy to hear from her grandchildren. It was always nice when they came to visit. She missed them, especially during the long winter. Soon the children would be visiting for the summer.

Nokomis Annie exclaimed, "How kind of Uncle Buddy. If it is okay with your mom, it is okay with me." Her grandchildren were always welcome.

"The *kwewag* of the 'Friends of the Turtle' walking group have been out every afternoon and on some evenings too. They are looking

and listening for signs of spring while they walk," Nokomis Annie explained. "You will be surprised with some of the things they saw and heard as the marsh and the wetland awakened this spring. Red-winged Blackbirds, Mallard Ducks, frogs, and even a couple of moose down by the open area in the little bay were spotted. I am sure they would welcome some more eyes and ears," said Nokomis Annie.





Ziigwan copied the Turtle Tally information from the website to read to her Nokomis. “We need to go and watch for signs of turtles, basking in the sun, while looking for places where they might lay eggs. We can even look for signs of turtle nests. I can bring a pair of binoculars and a copy of the Turtle Tally form. We should bring the turtle poster too! Noodin says that he is bringing his new rubber boots just in case we need him to go looking right into the *nibi*. We must copy down what we see and then send the information to the Toronto Zoo website. They will take our information and add it to the Turtle Tally results. This will help save turtles!” Ziigwan explained. “Then we can add what we see to our community map!” Ziigwan was very excited to help her community.

This sounded like a great idea to Nokomis Annie as she said goodbye to Ziigwan. Nokomis Annie started getting things ready for her grandchildren’s arrival. The sleeping bags and extra pillows were taken out of the closet and hung outside in the fresh air. She decided to bake a big pan of *bannock* and fry up some fresh fish on Friday for their supper. She knew how much her grandchildren loved this meal! Nokomis Annie called Waaban and asked if he would like to come over for dinner as well. She went to bed early that night, eagerly looking forward to everyone’s arrival.

That night, *Miskwaadesi* came to Nokomis Annie in her dreams to remind her of the eleventh challenge. “Go to the *nibi*. Count the turtles. You must be quiet to see the turtles. Learn what we look

like and where we like to live. This information will help you protect us.”

It seemed as if the old turtle had heard Ziigwan’s phone call. Nokomis Annie listened carefully to the soft voice of the old turtle so that she would remember what was said. She pictured *Miskwaadesi* sitting on the edge of the wetland, calling to her and her grandchildren. Nokomis Annie wanted to do the challenge the best she could!

When Noodin and Ziigwan arrived, they were excited to hear what their Nokomis had planned for the weekend! It was a beautiful day and they were going to be outdoors all day. Staying at Nokomis Annie’s house was fun because there was so much space to play. Their weekends in the city were very different than their visits with Nokomis Annie.

“Good morning, my children! *Miskwaadesi* came to me in a dream and asked me to check on her family members and where they are living. Get ready, we have lots to do today!” said Nokomis Annie.

Nokomis Annie explained to Ziigwan and Noodin the responsible and respectful way of interacting with plants and animals in *nbiing* and the wetland. She also pulled out the turtle poster from the Toronto Zoo. The poster displayed all eight Ontario species of turtles, which helped to explain the differences between each species, making it easier to identify them in the wetland. “The Turtle Tally says to report turtle nests too,” said Nokomis Annie. “We want to make sure we are aware of turtle behaviours to understand how to help them.”

Once Nokomis Annie, Noodin, and Ziigwan had their binoculars, snacks for the journey, and Turtle Tally forms ready, they were on the way to *Miskwaadesi's* wetland. When they arrived, they quickly realized how quiet they must be in order to spot any wetland creatures.

"I wonder what we will see today?" said Noodin. A couple of chipmunks scurried away quickly at the sound of his voice.

"Shhh, you are going to scare everything away!" said Ziigwan.

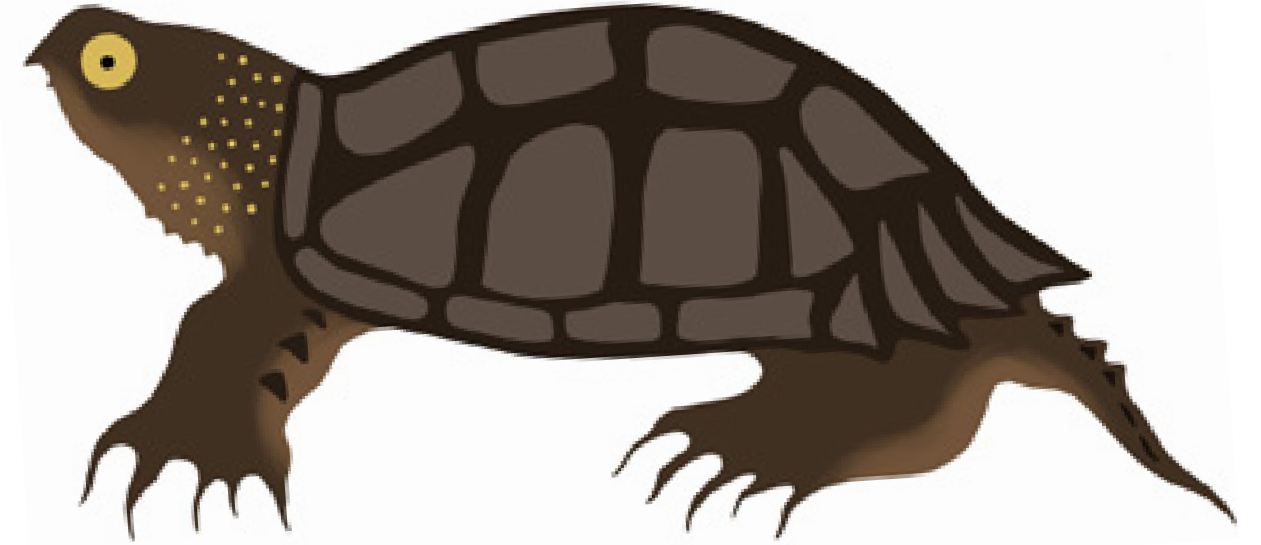
Nokomis Annie smiled and appreciated how dedicated her grandchildren were to helping the Turtle Tally program. As they walked further into the wetland, they stepped with care. Ziigwan looked



intently into the pond and noticed something that looked like a rock sitting on top of a log.

"Nokomis! What is that?" Ziigwan asked excitedly, but in a hushed voice. Nokomis Annie quickly looked through her binoculars and spotted a basking turtle with a yellow neck.

"That is a Blanding's turtle, my child," answered Nokomis Annie. "My father called this the turtle with the sun under its chin. He is sitting on that log to absorb heat from the sun. This is very exciting! Blanding's turtles are a threatened species, according to the turtle poster we have. We must be quiet and not disturb him. Noodin, write down on



our Turtle Tally forms what we see." Noodin quickly recorded the type of turtle.

They continued their walk through the wetland, sharing knowledge about the different plant species they could identify, and the special places they needed in order to grow. Ziigwan and Noodin began to realize how many different types of plants and animals there were living together. They were also grateful for this special time with their Nokomis and grateful for the turtles who shared this special place.

On the way home that night, Nokomis Annie and her grandchildren helped a turtle cross the road. This made them think about the challenges turtles must overcome. In her dreams that night, Nokomis Annie heard *Miskwaadesi* give directions for the *twelfth challenge*, "Nokomis Annie, help my turtle relatives by doing something else for turtles."

Nokomis Annie woke the next morning determined to make a difference!





WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO?

CHAPTER 12 - *EKO-MDASSVI-SHI-NIIZHVVAACHING*

Nokomis Annie decided it was time to get active! She would need to call upon Noodin, Ziigwan, and Waaban for some ideas. She wondered what else they could do to help turtles and their wetland homes. They would need to tell others about what they saw living in the wetland. She would invite Elders to come with them to speak about the medicine plants, traditional places, and the importance of turtles.

Nokomis Annie would begin by mapping her community. She knew that this was important because the sacred spaces and special places would be respected and protected for future generations. A clean up of the waterways and the shoreline would be a great idea too, thought Nokomis Annie. She would put out garbage boxes and recycling bins. Turtle crossing signs must also be put up to help protect turtles on their way to nesting areas. Water should be tested to ensure it will be safe for future generations to come. Most importantly, Nokomis Annie and the children would have to

share what they learned with Chief and Band Council. They needed much more help to get all the work done!

Nokomis Annie decided to tell Ziigwan and Noodin right away about the plans she had for the day. With so much to do, they had to get right to it! Cleaning the wetland was first on the list and Nokomis Annie knew that Ziigwan, Noodin, and Waaban would do a great job!

“Invite your friends to take part in our very special project today,” encouraged Nokomis Annie as she gathered all of the outdoor clothing she could find and quickly filled a backpack with a delicious lunch. It was going to be a long day!

Everyone gathered at Nokomis Annie’s house to walk to the shoreline together. Children from the community came to help, along with their parents. Nokomis Annie thought it was nice to see parents as excited as their children.

The group walked down to the wetland and broke up into groups to walk the shoreline. This would ensure the most thorough clean up. Everyone carried a garbage bag, along with a bucket for recyclable litter. Noodin and Ziigwan went with Nokomis Annie and three other groups went in different directions to start the clean up.

Noodin and Ziigwan were so excited Nokomis Annie could barely keep up with them. “Hey slow down, you two! If we go too quickly, we might miss some litter that needs to be picked up!” Their *Nokomis* was right! There were many little pieces of litter and fishing line which were easy to miss, but could make a big difference to the creatures living in the wetland.

“Hey guys! I will make it my responsibility to pick up all of these bottle caps and plastic rings! I heard that these can be very harmful to turtles and other species living in the wetland,” said Noodin with concern.

“Yes, that is a great idea Noodin! I will be in charge of cans and bottles. We can recycle them when we get back to Nokomis’s house later” said Ziigwan. Nokomis Annie was proud that her grandchildren were



developing an appreciation for the land and a greater understanding and responsibility of the importance of taking care of *Aki*.

Before they knew it, their section of the wetland looked as clean as it could be! Noodin and Ziigwan were proud of the work they completed and Nokomis Annie was happy to see their wetland looking so beautiful. The group came together once everyone was finished working to enjoy lunch. The local paper came to report on the good work of the community. What a successful day and what a wonderful story the children could tell when they got back to school! Nokomis Annie was sure that this was the beginning of a special new task that the community would continue for years to come.





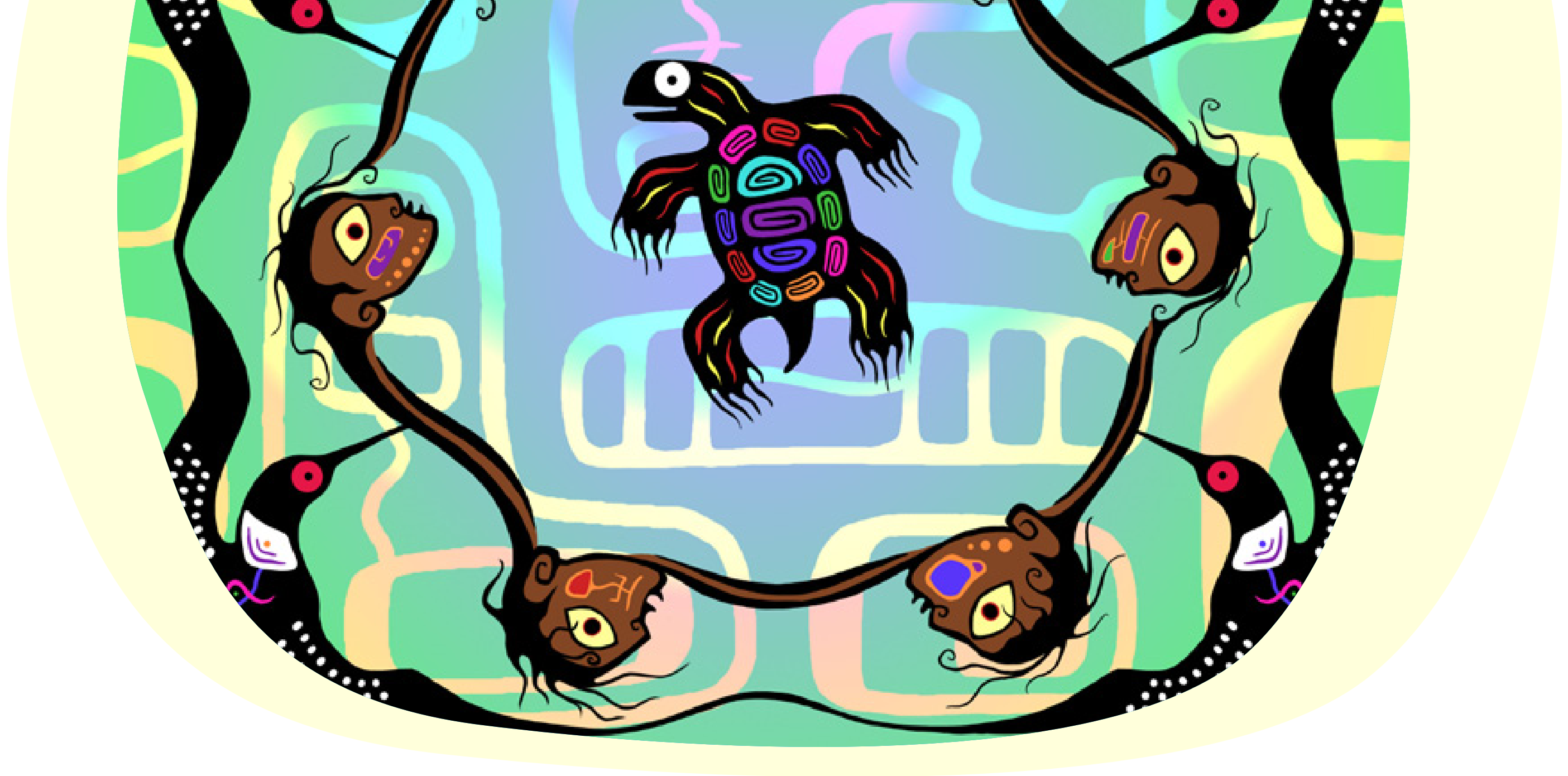
CELEBRATION

CHAPTER 13 - EKO-MDASSWI-SHI-NSWI GINJIGAN?

As Nokomis Annie sat by the *nibi* speaking to *Miskwaadesi*, she reflected on the many challenges given. She thought about all they learned and the great adventure she shared with her grandchildren.

Nokomis Annie said, "I have learned about the eight Ontario turtle families in this part of Turtle Island and how much help they need to continue living here. I discovered a whole new world of life in the marsh down the road from my little house. I remembered stories and teachings that were shared with me when I was a little girl. This helped to create a better understanding of how everything

needs to work together. I really enjoyed sitting, before the blackflies woke up, listening to the songs of the frogs and toads as they raised their voices in thanksgiving for the arrival of another spring. My daily walks down to the marsh and the wetland have given me more energy! I especially enjoyed learning with my beautiful grandchildren Noodin, Ziigwan, and Waaban. It was a special occasion when we walked together, looking for signs of turtles in the wetlands. We also showed our respect by picking up garbage in the marsh and planned how we could help our turtles survive right here in Wasauksing."



Miskwaadesi nodded her head in approval of Nokomis Annie's work.

Nokomis Annie continued, "I will never forget meeting Josephine Mandamin and her story of the Water Walk. She is such an inspiration to all of us! There are so many gifts which we have been given in Creation. I am grateful to you, *Miskwaadesi*, for opening my eyes, my ears, and my heart to the joys of *nibi* and the wetlands that are home to our turtle relations."

"Everyone felt great when the wetland clean-up was complete. The youth brought down wooden benches they made and set them up at the edge of the marsh near the Elders' Lodge. Future visits can now be done comfortably with this new seating contributed by the youth. Now the Elders can go and sit next to the *nibi* to enjoy the sights and sounds, *Miskwaadesi*," Nokomis Annie said proudly. "Just as we finished cleaning up, one of the little girls from the school came to tell me that she saw a turtle sitting on top of a log over by the muskrat push-up.

I looked and I was sure it was you *Miskwaadesi*. It looked like you were smiling and then I waved to you. I paused for a moment and said a special *gchi-miigwech* to you for all your guidance. After our clean up, everyone went to the Band Hall for the feast. We were feasting our connections to the turtle in celebration of all that you have shared!" Nokomis Annie explained.

"Please tell me about your feast," encouraged *Miskwaadesi*. "This celebration was your *thirteenth* and final *challenge*."

"Everyone brought their favourite food to the feast, while the children set up all of the tables for the Elders to sit at. It was a great opportunity for the community to get together and discuss all of their accomplishments! Our children shared their stories of the Thirteen Moons, prompted by the calendar hanging in the Band Hall donated by the Toronto Zoo. Everyone mingled and laughed. Then an Elder offered a prayer of thanksgiving to the Creator for the food, the community, and *Eskakimig-kwe*. The Elder exclaimed '*Wiisniin*,' once the prayer of

thanks was completed." Nokomis Annie gently laughed, remembering the great time she had at the feast.

Nokomis Annie continued to tell *Miskwaadesi* about the feast, "Everyone enjoyed sharing their experiences working through your challenges. The children who helped me with the project received special certificates from the Toronto Zoo for helping with the Turtle Tally program," she explained. Nokomis Annie then paused for a moment.

"This experience taught me to understand how much one person can do to make a change in the community. I will continue working for *mishiikeniyag* and *nibi*. After experiencing all of these challenges, I will think about ways that I can conserve *nibi* so that there will be more in the wetland and the watershed for everyone to share. I will write letters to the Band Office and to the newspaper about turtles and their needs for clean and healthy habitats. Then our whole community will know about our special places, the places that provide us with clean water, medicine plants, animals to feed us, and the places which are home to *Miskwaadesi* and her relatives."

Nokomis Annie promised, "My evening walks will continue year round. While I am walking, I will think of you, *Miskwaadesi*, and your family. I have

made a commitment to become your *Oshkabewis*. I will share turtle stories and teachings with others. *Gchi-miigwech Miskwaadesi*, to you and your family, for helping me see, listen, think, and act in a new way!"



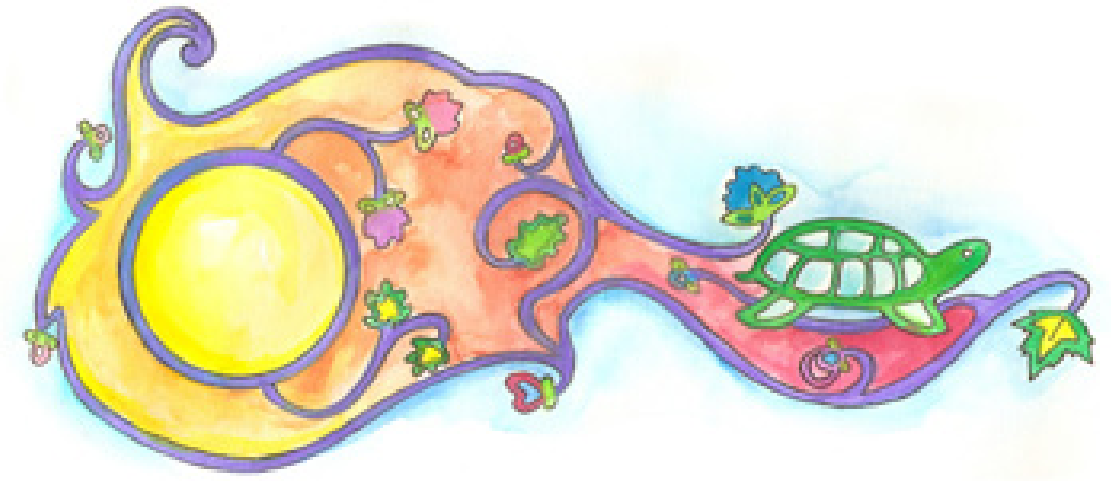
GLOSSARY



Please note all language words used in this book are written in the dialect spoken on Manitoulin Island, Ontario, Canada. They are in the double vowel written form as translated by Shirley Ida Williams who is an Anishinaabe language Professor of Emeritus at Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario Canada.

Aagimog (*ah-KEE-mowg*) - snowshoes
Aaniin (*AH-neen*) - greetings or hello
Aki (*AH-kee*) - Earth
Amik (*AH-mick*) - beaver
Anishinaabeg (*ah-NISH-in-naw-beg*) - Ojibway pluralized
Asemaa (*say-MAW*) - Traditional Tobacco
Atsokanan (*AT-so-canan*) - legends that are told in the wintertime
Bannock (*BAN-nuck*) - traditional baked bread
Berry Moon - June "Odemin Giizis"
Biidaaban (*bee-DAW-bin*) - the coming dawn
Bineshiinh (*bin-NAY-she*) - bird
Dewegan (*duh-WAY-gun*) - drum
Doodemwan (*doh-DEM-wan*) - their clans
Eko mdaaching Ginjigan (*echo-MDAW-shing GEEN-jih-gan*) - Chapter ten
Eko mdaaching-shi-bezhig Ginjigan (*echo-MDAW-shing she-BAY-zhig GEEN-jih-gan*) - Chapter eleven
Eko mdaaswi-shiniizhwaaching (*echo-MADAW-sway-shin-NEEZH-waa-shing*) - Chapter twelve
Eko mdaaswi-shi-nsing Ginjigan (*echo-MADAW-sway-shin-sing GEEN-jih-gan*) - Chapter thirteen
Eko naananing Ginjigan (*echo-na-NANING GEEN-jih-gan*) - Chapter five
Eko ngodwaaching Ginjigan (*echo-NGOD-WAA-shing GEEN-jih-gan*) - Chapter six
Eko niwing Ginjigan (*echo-NEE-wing GEEN-jih-gan*) - Chapter four
Eko niizhing Ginjigan (*echo-NEEZH-ing GEEN-jih-gan*) - Chapter two
Eko niizhwaaching Ginjigan (*echo-NEEZHWA-shing GEEN-jih-gan*) - Chapter 7
Eko-nsing Ginjigan (*echo-NSING GEEN-jih-gan*) - Chapter three
Eko-nwaaching (*echo-NWAA-shing*) - Chapter 8
Eko-zhaangchiing Ginjigan (*echo-ZHAN-shing GEEN-jih-gan*) - Chapter nine
Elder (*EL-der*) - First Nation community recognized and accepted Traditional Knowledge holder/practitioner
Eshkakimig-kwe (*SHKA-kee-me-kway*) - Earth Mother
Gchi-Miigwech (*gchee-MEE-gwetch*) - thanks very much or many thanks
Giigoonh (*gee-GONH*) - fish
Giigoonyag (*gee-GONH-yug*) - fish (plural)
Giishkaandag-niibiishaaboo (*GEESH-can-dawg nee-BEESH-shah-bo*) - cedar tea
Giizis (*GEE-sis*) - the Sun
Gzhe Minidoo (*gazhay minnow-DOUGH*) - Good kind spirit
Haudenosaunee (*HO-den-oh-SHOW-knee*) - Iroquois Nation, People of the Longhouse
Heartberries (*heart berries*) - strawberries
Ho-wah (*HO-waa*) - greeting, exclamation of surprise
Jiimaan (*JEE-man*) - canoe

Kwewag (*KWAY-wug*) - women
Maang (*mung*) - loon
Mandamin (*man-DAA-min*) - corn, kernel of corn
Manitoulin Island (*man-i-TWO-lynn eye-land*) - In the Ojibway language this means Spirit Island and is considered sacred by the Odawa, Ojibway and Potawatomi nations known as People of the Three Fires, the largest island in a freshwater lake in the world
Migizi (*MEG-ee-zee*) - eagle
Miigwech (*MEE-gwetch*) - Thank you
Mino-giizhigad (*minnow-GEE-she-gad*) - It's a nice day
Mishee Mackinakong (*mi-SHEE MACK-ina-gong*) - Place of the Great Turtle's back
Mishomis (*mi-SHOW-miss*) - Grandfather
Mishiikenh (*mi-SHE-ken*) - turtle
Mishiikenyag (*mi-SHE-ken-yug*) - turtles (plural)
Mishomis (*mi-SHOW-miss*) - Grandfather
Miskwaadesi (*miss-SQUAW daisy*) - Painted turtle
Mitig (*MI-teeg*) - tree
Mitigook (*MITT-tee-guck*) - trees
Mogkii (*MOKE-kee*) - frog
Mogkiig (*MOKE-keeg*) - frogs (plural)
Nanaboozhoo (*nana-BOW-zhow*) - Demi-god of the Anishinaabe people who is part man and part spirit with human-like characteristics, a trickster
Nibi (*ne-BEH*) - water
Nbiing (*nee-BING*) - in the water
Nbiish (*nee-BEESH*) - water, an amount of water
Nokomis (*NO-co-miss*) - Grandmother
Noodin (*NO-din*) - the wind
Ntam Ginjigan (*tam-GEEN-jih-gan*) - Chapter one
Odemin Giizis (*o-DAY-min GEE-sis*) - Strawberry Moon, calendar month similar to June
Odemiinan (*o-DAY-min-an*) - strawberries (plural)
Okimisan (*OAK-ih-miss-an*) - her Grandmother
Pow Wow (*pow-wow*) - First Nations cultural gathering similar to a festival with music, dancing, food, artwork and Traditional teachings
Siniis (*sin-EE-sis*) - small stones
Thirteen Moons (*thur-teen moons*) - Reference to Anishinaabe lunar calendar
Turtle Island (*turtle island*) - name of North America used by First Nations communities based on Creation stories
Waaban (*WAA-bun*) - East (used in the story as a character name)
Waabizhesh (*WAAB-i-shesh*) - marten
Wausauksing (*WAAH-sock-sing*) - First Nation community located on Parry Island, Ontario Canada
Wiigwaas (*WIG-wass*) - birch bark
Wiisniin (*WEE-si-nin*) - you eat
Zhasgkoonh (*ZHAASG-koneh*) - muskrat
Ziigwan (*ZIG-wan*) - Spring (used as a girl's name in this story)
Zoogpo (*ZOKE-poh*) - snow



ANISHINAABE MORNING PRAYER TRANSLATION

Great Spirit,
Kitchi-manidoo!

Today I give thanks so that I may see and once more, a new day.
Miigwetch noongwa wabdaamaa miinwaa ngoding giizhigak.

Thank you for all the things you put on earth
Miigwetch kina gego gaa-miishiyang,
so that original beings could serve themselves.

kina kiig gaa-tooyin aw sa Nishnaabe wii-miigkadaawsod.

Thank you for the 4 directions that go by,
Miigwetch newining nekyaa mebimiseg,
thank you for the animals so that we can eat,
Miigwetch wesiinyag gi-miishiyang wii-wiisiyang,
thank you for the birds that we hear them sing,
Miigwetch bineshiiyag noodoonogwaa nagamwaad,
thank you for the water to cleanse our bodies,
Miigwetch nbi biinaakizigoyang,
and thank you for the work you gave us!

Miigwetch gi-miizhiyang noiwin!

Give us peace in our hearts, so that we can work together well,
Miinshinaag mina-de'ewin, wii-mina nokiitaadiyang,
help us to walk our culture well, help us to live well in a healthy way.
naadimooshingaa wii-ni-mosaadimaang.

Thank you Great Spirit, Thank you, Thank you!
Miigwetch Kitchi Minidoo! Miigwetch! Miigwetch!

(by permission of Shirley Ida Williams)

THE WAYS OF KNOWING PARTNERSHIP

TURTLE ISLAND CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

The Toronto Zoo's Ways of Knowing Partnership Turtle Island Conservation programme shares the hopes and goals of First Nation partners in our commitment to the preservation of wild life and wild places for those yet to come. The Turtle Island Conservation programme at the Toronto Zoo partners with Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee First Nation communities, in the province of Ontario, Canada to incorporate Traditional Knowledge into turtle and wetland conservation programming.

The intention of this partnership is to bring together Keepers of Traditional Knowledge, Elders, First Nation community members and Turtle Island Conservation programme team members to support community cultural and natural history priorities incorporating Traditional Knowledge while building awareness with non-Aboriginals.

The programme employs First Nation youth and is guided by a First Nation Advisory group. All teachings and knowledge remain with our partner communities for their decisions on how it is to be used.

Mission

Turtle Island Conservation partners with First Nation Communities to preserve cultural and natural landscapes.

Vision

Preservation of First Nation Ways of Knowing will be utilized to preserve Traditional Knowledge to guide communities for generations to come.

Our Objectives are:

1. To foster respect for self, community, Mother earth and the Creator.
2. To recognize and record significant landscapes valued by First Nations communities.
3. To integrate traditional ways of knowing with western science to monitor, protect, respect and restore landscapes.
4. To integrate language, art, and crafts to sustain traditional ways of knowing and living.
5. To facilitate understanding of the diversity of First Nation culture and way of knowing among non-Aboriginals



For further information and companion resources available from this programme please visit:

www.turtleislandconservation.com

www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/FrogWatchOntario.asp

www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/TurtleTally.asp

Or write to:

Turtle Island Conservation, Toronto Zoo

361A Old Finch Avenue

Toronto, ON Canada M1B 5K7

T 416 393-6362

F 416-392-4979

turtleisland@torontozoo.ca

CHAPTER IMAGE EXPLANATIONS

COVER IMAGE

It was important to me to emphasize two main topics, a cultural and content identity, in the cover illustration. My feelings about this image were that it had to be reflective of the content, but also representative of the key information and characters who share knowledge with us in this book. *Miskwaadesi* is the focal point, and her wisdom had to be portrayed clearly.

I opted to create a scene where the reoccurring characters, some of whom play vital roles in the *Anishinaabe* traditional teachings of the book, would be depicted listening intently to *Miskwaadesi*. Even the loon seen off to the very left appears eager to be included, perched as if on tiptoes stretching closer to hear what *Miskwaadesi* has to say. *Nanaboozhoo* holds a central position in the image as he is both an important cultural figure to the *Anishinaabe* people as well as a personal favourite of mine.

CHAPTER 1

The Morning Prayer in my opinion is one of the most important ceremonial practices conducted by First Nation people. It is at this time that we give thanks for everything we are about to receive during the course of the day, and give thanks to all that continues to sustain our well being and our livelihoods. This acknowledgment not only develops a perception of our place amongst the living populaces of this earth, but helps remind us that we live co-dependently.

It was in this image I strived to reflect wholesome interconnectedness that is a gentle and spiritual practice. My main focus here was the central figure of the person making the offering. The key element is the heart which is directly connected to the hand which is offering the tobacco. The hand is connected to the turtle, fish, and water reinforcing acknowledgment of the inter-dependence between the species. I deliberately painted the rays of sunlight as connection lines that are touching everything.

CHAPTER 2

Every creature has its medicine and its own teachings. Each teaching is always given to us from the heart. I wanted to depict the turtle with the heart showing figuratively within its belly shell (plastron) reminding us that teachings are always from the heart, and given directly to our own. The spiral encloses and points toward the heart reflecting the focus of these emotions and their importance.

CHAPTER 3

I wanted to convey the urgency and attention this chapter reflects on species conservation. Extinction is far more than just losing something forever. It is a direct reflection of our ignorance, cruelty, and selfishness that begins a chain reaction within an entire ecosystem. Nothing creates more sadness for me than to realize that the selfishness, of some people, who think their overindulgent life styles take precedence over the very earth that created them.

The internal decorations are symbolic of the abundance of life these species have, and are drawn from the local environments they call home. The connection lines connect them with the land, yet their bodies are not as decorated as the one firmly on the land mass. This was symbolic of the dependence that these creatures have to the land, yet there are those that are being driven to extinction due to loss of habitat and are slowly becoming disconnected and fading away. The vibrant reds in this image stand out in stark contrast to the blues seen throughout the series of images produced for this project as a reminder that perhaps it should remain just as visibly important in our own minds.

CHAPTER 4

The title of this chapter made me re-think a basic fact of life: Our neighbors whatever species they may be are ALSO our friends. It's easy to forget that fact in our modern day living as we constantly block ourselves from our neighbors with fences and walls, where "privacy" has become an issue even in political debates. We forget that nothing is actually independent of anything. The commonly held contemporary outlook is to view nature and the natural world as something to be exploited and disconnected from ourselves, is uneducated and simply an incorrect perception. Our livelihoods depend on interconnected values of everyone working together in a community. Be it human and/or non human, we are all related to one another in some way. In this image I wanted to capture a very intimate friendship between the inhabitants of the wetlands, and their connection's to one another.

CHAPTER 5

A good habitat is one that can provide any species with all that it needs: Shelter, Food, and abundance. These things let all creatures thrive peacefully, with the capacity to create families of their own. I wanted the focal point of this image to be

the bright white of the eggs in the ground which is a pure indication of the healthy and abundant landscape that the turtle lives in. I included the Loon in this image for a symbolic reason as I was taught that the Loon is the protector of children. Sitting on top of the log is both a symbol of the relaxed and peaceful environment, as well as a Loon guardian for the turtle's children. The fish is a representation of the food chain and co-dependence of each species with one another.

CHAPTER 6

Storytelling and Oral Traditions have always played a key role in the culture of First Nations people. To me it is the heart of perpetuating the culture so I wanted the fire to be the main source of the image, as well as the smoke turtle design. Symbolically these images represent the essence of life that propels First Nations cultural values forward. It is also the element that gathers the community around much like oral traditions.

CHAPTER 7

The Sacred Circle's teachings remind us of the; unity of our world, ethnicities and cultures, as well as life stages, seasons and plays a key role in the understanding of our relationships with the world. As an image that represents all the turtles that exist in our entire world, I thought it would be important to incorporate this symbol as the key element that sets the stage for the image to unfold upon. The turtles chosen for this chapter image relate to the traditional colors within the circle: Yellow Belly Slider, Red Ear Slider, Black Tortoise and Albino Sea Turtle.

CHAPTER 8

I wanted to highlight the First Nations traditional responsibility of women as Keepers of the Water. I drew association both physically in form while utilizing the figure of a woman. Her hair and body merge with the flowing wavy patterns of the ripples in the water. The nurturing quality of the water connects the female figure, with arms

over her breasts and heart, as a gesture of caring while depicting the concept of "Mother Nature" in the female form. We even see the womb bearing life- in this case a turtle which supports the concept of women and water as the fetus is carried and guarded by a water sac.

CHAPTER 9

This image focuses solely on the water while providing an introspective moment to value its fundamental importance, our use of it, our dependence on it, and lastly our responsibility for it. This image is a simple one visually highlighting the most common gesture humans take with water which is the cupping of hands beneath a falling cascade of liquid. It's such a simple gesture and yet it isn't unlike praying with our hands as they are raised to our faces while in deep thoughts of our proceeding actions. This is such a simple gesture yet striking in that it might soon come to an end if we are not careful with our resources. There may come a time when the simple task of washing our face or freely enjoying the pleasure of quenching our thirst will be looked upon as a past luxury with envy and regret if we do not take action towards the preservation of our water now.

CHAPTER 10

Frogs and Turtles enjoy more than just environmental connections they are also close friends in an ecosystem that depends on each other for survival. Both are environmental indicators and their health and abundance in a specific ecosystem can indicate the overall health or danger of an ecosystem. They become key factors and facilitators in keeping those ecosystems alive and well. My image focused on this connection and relationship to each other. Their poses indicate a circular, cyclical and whole form where each is dependant, a part of, and completing the other.

CHAPTER 11

I was thinking about "Stackable turtles" when I was considering the concept of "Tallying the numbers". Like many other things we stack for the sake of numerical clarity, I recalled that turtles themselves could be viewed as "stacked" upon one another. This gave way to a comical image of a "Babushka Doll" made up of turtles in my creative mind. I also wanted to share another message about the fundamental dependence on water and show that Life was given to us by water which allows us and all living things to grow and multiply

CHAPTER 12

The focus of this image is to depict a special bond between Human and Turtle. When a friend is hurt we often ask them "what can I do?" Reflecting on this, I wanted to create an image where the Human engages the Turtle with the same inquiry "What can we do?" Turtle and Human are connected by the universe in a more enlightened way rather than with words. I wanted to convey that knowledge is the key way we can help, by educating ourselves utilizing the wisdom of the Turtle and by learning ways of conserving them.

CHAPTER 13

This illustrated image was created with the intent of sharing visually as much awe and joy as a celebration can. The central figure of the turtle is our focus. Around the turtle all the water folk are creating a dazzling celebratory dance presentation of life. Colors were kept light hearted to emphasize this joyous occasion.

BERNICE GORDON

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Born and raised in Toronto, Canada Bernice Gordon has been drawing since she was two and a half years old. While growing up she developed a passion for animals, science fiction, cartoons, and ancient cultures. These subjects of interest have become the center stage for her images and illustrations.

Bernice is a graduate of the Sheridan Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning in Ontario and uses a wide variety of mediums to express all of her interests visually, sometimes merging the traditional with contemporary.





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