

Nanaboozhoo and the First Newebiboon Migwewin (Winter Giveaway)

Editor's note: This is the second of several Ojibwe winter stories that can be told only when there's snow on the ground. They have been shared with us by readers, and will be published over the next few weeks. To learn more, read our previous story on dl-online.com.

A long time ago, when Earth was still young, there was a winter so long that it began just after summer and didn't end until just before the next summer. During this long winter, Nanaboozhoo (a teacher and frequent figure in traditional Ojibwe storytelling) thought that he had better check up on the other animals of the forest.

First he went to visit the squirrels. When he got to where the squirrels were, he heard a loud noise that almost sounded like thunder. He thought to himself that he had never heard thunder in the middle of winter before. Then he overheard the squirrels talking about how hungry they were — “Chibakade” they said, as their bellies rumbled loudly.

“Squirrels,” Nanaboozhoo said, “Why are you so hungry?” The squirrels told him about the other animals eating all of the nuts and seeds they had been saving for themselves. They also explained to him that they didn't mind sharing, but there were so many other animals that came and took their food, there were no more nuts and seeds left over for themselves.

Nanaboozhoo thought about what they had said and told them he would go talk to the other animals about what they had done. Next, he went to visit the deer.

“Deer,” he said, “why did you eat all of the seeds and nuts that the squirrels were saving for themselves?”



On the web

On the web: Learn more about these Ojibwe winter stories, and read others in the series, at dl-online.com.

for how much food he had that he didn't need. So he decided that he would give away his extra food to his friends who needed it. He even made a special gift for the squirrels and other seed and nut eaters. High in the treetops throughout the forest, he had hung pinecones dipped in maple syrup and rolled in wild rice.

The animals were delighted at this newebiboon migwewin (winter giveaway), and danced and feasted all through the night. The seed and nut eaters made sure they saved enough of the special cones to last the rest of the winter, and when the snow got too deep, or the dead trees became too frozen, the animals worked together to help each other out rather than taking the seed and nut eaters' food.

File photo

rel were saving for themselves?”

The deer explained to him that they were not the only ones who took the squirrels' seeds and nuts. They pointed out that the woodpeckers had taken as many as they had. They also explained to Nanaboozhoo that they couldn't dig far enough down to find the grass that they were saving for themselves.

Nanaboozhoo thought about what they had said, and told them he would go talk to the woodpeckers to see why they had eaten the squirrels' nuts and seeds.

On his way over to talk with the woodpeckers, Nanaboozhoo stopped by his wigwam, his house, to get a drink of nibiish (water) and a snack. He had lots of different snacks that he had saved for himself for the winter. He had so much food — meat, apples, carrots, dried berries, wild rice, corn and maple sugar — that he wasn't even worried about the long winter. In fact, he had so much

food saved for himself that he had to build another wigwam just to store it all.

After his snack, he continued his walk over to speak with the woodpeckers. When he finally arrived, he asked them why they had eaten the squirrels' nuts and seeds. The woodpeckers said they weren't the only ones who ate the squirrels' nuts and seeds. They explained that the deer had eaten as many as they had. They also explained that they couldn't peck through the trees because the bark was frozen solid and they would surely break their beaks if they tried.

Nanaboozhoo thought about what they had said, and told them that he had already talked with the deer about why they had eaten the squirrels' nuts and seeds. Then Nanaboozhoo smiled and told the woodpeckers to go tell the deer and the squirrels and all of the other forest animals that they were having a hard time finding food to meet him at the tallest pine tree in the forest.

When all of the forest animals had gathered around the tallest pine tree, Nanaboozhoo explained why he had called them all together.

“My friends,” he said, “It has been a long and hard winter for many of us here in the forest. The seed and nut eaters like the squirrels have been hurt the worst. The other animals have eaten all of the foods that they saved for themselves.”

At that, the other animals tried to tell Nanaboozhoo once again why they had taken the squirrels' nuts and seeds, but Nanaboozhoo stopped them and said, “I understand that you may have had good reasons to take what belongs to others, but that does not help them survive the rest of this winter, nor does it help any of you, as they no longer have any nuts or seeds left for anybody to wiisiin (eat). I have a plan that will help us all.”

At this, the animals gathered closer to listen to what Nanaboozhoo was going to say.

“First,” he said, “We must all work together to clear away some of the snow that covers up the grasses. Then we must all help the insect eaters break apart the dead trees to expose the insects. When this is done, we must all gather back here at the tallest pine tree.”

So, all of the forest animals did as they were told, and by the end of the day, the grasses were cleared of snow, and there were so many dead trees broken open that the woodpeckers were going crazy with excitement. But when they were done, even though they were starving, they all gathered back at the tallest pine tree in the forest as Nanaboozhoo had instructed.

When they arrived back at the tallest pine tree, Nanaboozhoo had decorated the tree with much of the food that had filled his other wigwam earlier that day. He explained that when he had talked to the squirrels about their hunger, and they had said that they didn't mind sharing their food with all of the other animals, he felt bad

When the winter finally went away, spring changed quickly to summer. The animals, one by one, said miigwech (thank you) to Nanaboozhoo for helping them survive the longest winter anyone could remember.

The end. So remember to share with your neighbors whatever you can, whenever you are able. Remember to look around you and see if your neighbors are struggling or need help. And always remember to check on your neighbors when the weather turns cold and the winter gets long. We can get through our long winters if we work together!

— As told by Emily Buermann, born and raised in Pine Point on the White Earth Indian Reservation

Merry Christmas

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