Cherokee Creation Story

[1] The earth is a great island floating in a sea of water, and suspended at each of the four cardinal points by a cord hanging down from the sky vault, which is of solid rock. When the world grows old and worn out, the people will die and the cords will break and let the earth sink down into the ocean, and all will be water again. The Indians are afraid of this.

[2] When all was water, the animals were above in Galunlati, beyond the arch; but it was very much crowded, and they were wanting more room. They wondered what was below the water, and at last . . . “Beaver’s Grandchild,” the little Water-beetle, offered to go and see if it could learn. It darted in every direction over the surface of the water, but could find no firm place to rest. Then it dived to the bottom and came up with some soft mud, which began to grow and spread on every side until it became the island which we call the earth. It was afterward fastened to the sky with four cords, but no one remembers this.

[3] At first the earth was flat and very soft and wet. The animals were anxious to get down, and sent out different birds to see if it was yet dry, but they found no place to alight and came back to Galunlati. At last it seemed to be time, and they sent out the Buzzard and told him to go and make ready for them. This was the Great Buzzard, the father of all the buzzards we see now. He flew all over the earth, low down near the ground, and it was still soft. When he reached the Cherokee country, he was very tired, and his wings began to flap and strike the ground, and wherever they struck the earth there was a valley, and where they turned up again there was a mountain. When the animals above saw this, they were afraid that the whole world would be mountains, so they called him back, but the Cherokee country remains full of mountains to this day. 2

[4] When the earth was dry and the animals came down, it was still dark, so they got the sun and set in a track to go every day across the island from east to west, just overhead. It was too hot this way, and . . . the Red Crawfish, had his shell scorched a bright red, so that his meat was spoiled; and the Cherokee do not eat it. The conjurers put the sun another hand-breadth higher in the air, but it was still too hot. They raised it another time, and another, until it was seven handbreadths high and just under the sky arch. Then it was right, and they left it so. . . . Every day the sun goes along under this arch, and returns at night on the upper side to the starting place.

[5] There is another world under this, and it is like ours in everything—animals, plants, and people—save that the seasons are different. The streams that come down from the mountains are the trails by which we read this underworld, and the springs at their heads are the doorways by which we enter it, but to do this one must fast and go to water and have one of the underground people for a guide. We know that the seasons in the underworld are different from ours, because the water in the springs is always warmer in the winter and cooler in the summer than the outer air.

[6] When the animals and plants were first made—we do not know by whom—they were told to watch and keep awake for seven nights, just as young men now fast and keep awake when they pray to their medicine. They tried to do this, and nearly all were awake through the first night, but the next night several dropped off to sleep, and the third night others were asleep, and then others, until, on the seventh night, of all of the animals only the owl, the panther, and one or two more were still awake. To these were given the power to see and to go about in the dark, and to make prey of the birds and animals which must sleep at night. Of the trees only the cedar, the pine, the spruce, the holly, and the laurel were awake to the end, and to them it was given to be always green and to be the greatest for medicine, but to the others it was said: “Because you have not endured to the end you shall lose your hair every winter.”

[7] Men came after the animals and plants. At first there were only a brother and sister until he struck her with a fish and told her to multiply, and so it was. In seven days a child was born to her, and thereafter every seven days another, and they increased very fact until there was danger that the world could not keep them. Then it was made that a woman should have only one child in a year, and it has been so ever since.

Iroquois Creation Story

Among the ancients there were two worlds in existence. The lower world was in great darkness – the possession of the great monster – but the upper world was inhabited by mankind; and there was a woman conceived who would have the twins born. When her travail drew near and her situation seemed to produce a great distress on her mind, she was induced by some of her relations to lay herself on a mattress which was prepared so as to gain refreshments for her wearied body. While she was asleep the very place sunk down towards the dark world.

The monsters of the great water were alarmed at her appearance of descending to the lower world. In consequence all the species of the creatures were immediately collected into where it was expected she would fall. When the monsters were assembled they made consultation, and one of them was appointed in haste to search the great deep in order to procure some earth, if it could be obtained. Accordingly the monster descends, succeeds, and returns to the place. Another requisition was presented: who would be capable to secure the woman from the terrors of the great water? None was able to comply until a great turtle came forward and proposed to endure her lasting weight. A small quantity of earth was varnished on the back part of the turtle. The woman alights on the seat prepared, and she receives a satisfaction.

While holding her, the turtle increased every moment and became a considerable island of earth, and apparently covered with great bushes. The woman remained in a state of unlimited darkness, and she was overtaken by her travail. While she was in the limits of distress one of the infants in her womb was moved by an evil opinion and he was determined to pass out under the side of the parent’s arm, and the other infant in vain endeavored to prevent his design. The woman was in a painful condition during their disputes and the infants entered the dark world by compulsion, and their parent expired in a few moments. They had the power of sustenance without a nurse, and remained in the dark regions.

After a time the turtle increased to a great island and the infants were grown up, and one of them possessed a gentle disposition and was named Eni-gorio, or “the good mind.” The other youth possessed an insolence of character and was named Enigon-ha-het-gea, or “the bad mind.” The good mind was not content to remain in a dark situation and he was anxious to create a great light in the dark world; but the bad mind was desirous that the world should remain in a natural state. The good mind took the parent’s head, of which he created an orb and established it in the center of the firmament, and it became of a very superior nature to bestow light to the new world – now, the sun. And again, he took the remnant of the body and formed another orb which was inferior to the light – now, the moon.

Whenever the light extended to the dark world the monsters were displeased and immediately concealed themselves in the deep places. The good mind continued the works of creation, and he formed numerous creeks and rivers on the Great Island, and then created numerous species of animals of the smallest and the greatest to inhabit the forests, and fishes of all kinds to inhabit the waters.

Lakota Creation Story

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

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

**Kangi** pleaded with the Great Spirit to make him a new place to rest.

So, the Great Spirit decided the time had come to make his new world. From his huge pipe bag, which contained all types of animals and birds, the Great Spirit selected four animals known for their ability to remain under water for a long time.

He sent each in turn to retrieve a lump of mud from beneath the flood waters.

First the loon dove deep into the dark waters, but it was unable to reach the bottom. **Ptan**, the otter, even with its strong webbed feet also failed. Next, the **cápa** (beaver) used its large flat tail to propel itself deep under the water, but it too brought nothing back. Finally, the Great Spirit took the **kéya** (turtle) from his pipe bag and urged it to bring back some mud.

[Turtle](http://aktalakota.stjo.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=8589) stayed under the water for so long that everyone was sure it had drowned.

|  |
| --- |
| Kyea - turtle |

Then, with a splash, the turtle broke the water's surface! Mud filled its feet and claws and the cracks between its upper and lower shells.

Singing, the Great Spirit shaped the mud in his hands and spread it on the water, where it was just big enough for himself and the crow. He then shook two long eagle wing feathers over the mud until earth spread wide and varied, overcoming the waters.

Feeling sadness for the dry land, the Great Spirit cried tears that became oceans, streams and lakes. He named the new land “Turtle Continent” in honor of the turtle, which provided the mud that formed the land.

The Great Spirit then took many animals and birds from his great pipe bag and spread them across the earth.

From red, white, black and yellow earth, he made men and women. The Great Spirit gave the people his sacred pipe and told them to live by it. He warned them about the fate of the people who came before them.

He promised all would be well if all living things learned to live in harmony. But, the world would be destroyed again if they made it bad and ugly.

Sioux Creation Story

There was a world before this world, but the people in it did not know how to behave themselves or how to act human. The Creating Power was not pleased with that earlier world. He said to himself: “I will make a new world.” He had the pipe bag and the chief pipe, which he put on the pipe rack that he had made in the sacred manner. He took four dry buffalo chips, placed three of them under the three sticks, and saved the fourth one to light the pipe.

The Creating Power said to himself: “I will sing three songs, which will bring a heavy rain. Then I’ll sing a fourth song and stamp four times on the earth, and the earth will crack wide open. Water will come out of the cracks and cover the land.” When he sang the first song, it started to rain. When he sang the second, it poured. When he sang the third, the rain-swollen rivers overflowed their beds. But when he sang the fourth song and stamped on the earth, it split open in many places like a shattered gourd, and water flowed from the cracks until it covered everything.

The Creating Power floated on the sacred pipe and on his huge pipe bag. He let himself be carried by waves and wind this way and that, drifting for a long time. At last the rain stopped, and by then all the people and animals had drowned. Only Kangi, the crow, survived, though it had no place to rest and was very tired. Flying above the pipe,“Tunkasllila, Grandfather, I must rest soon”; and three times the crow asked him to make a place for it to light.

The Creating Power thought: “It’s time to unwrap the pipe and open the pipe bag.” The wrapping and the bag contained all manner of animals and birds, from which he selected four animals known for their ability to stay under water for a long time. First he sang a song and took the loon out of the bag. He commanded the loon to dive and bring up a lump of mud. The loon did dive, but it brought up nothing. “I dived and dived but couldn’t reach bottom,” the loon said. “I almost died. The water is too deep.”

The Creating Power sang a second song and took the otter out of the bag. He ordered the otter to dive and bring up some mud. The sleek otter at once dived into the water, using its strong webbed feet to go down, down, down. It was submerged for a long time, but when it finally came to the surface, it brought nothing.

Taking the beaver out of the pipe’s wrapping, the Creating Power sang a third song. He commanded the beaver to go down deep below the water and bring some mud. The beaver thrust itself into the water, using its great flat tail to propel itself downward. It stayed under water longer than the others, but when it finally came up again, it too brought nothing.

At last the Creating Power sang the fourth song and took the turtle out of the bag. The turtle is very strong. Among our people it stands for long life and endurance and the power to survive. A turtle heart is great medicine, for it keeps on beating a long time after the turtle is dead. “You must bring the mud,” the Creating Power told the turtle. It dove into the water and stayed below so long that the other three animals shouted: “The turtle is dead; it will never come up again!”

All the time, the crow was flying around and begging for a place to light.

After what seemed to be eons, the turtle broke the surface of the water and paddled to the Creating Power. “I got to the bottom!” the turtle cried. “I brought some earth!” And sure enough, its feet and claws—even the space in the cracks on its sides between its upper and lower shell—were filled with mud.

Scooping mud from the turtle’s feet and sides, the Creating Power began to sing. He sang all the while that he shaped the mud in his hands and spread it on the water to make a spot of dry land for himself. When he had sung the fourth song, there was enough land for the Creating Power and for the crow.

“Come down and rest,” said the Creating Power to the crow, and the bird was glad to.

Then the Creating Power took from his bag two long wing feathers of the eagle. He waved them over his plot of ground and commanded it to spread until it covered everything. Soon all the water was replaced by earth. "Water without earth is not good," thought the Creating Power, "but land without water is not good either." Feeling pity for the land, he wept for the earth and the creatures he would put upon it, and his tears became oceans, streams and lakes. "That's better," he thought.

Out of his pipe bag the Creating Power took all kinds of animals, birds, plants and scattered them over the land. When he stamped on the earth, they all came alive.

From the earth the Creating Power formed the shapes of men and women. He used red earth and white earth, black earth and yellow earth, and made as many as he thought would do for a start. He stamped on the earth and the shapes came alive, each taking the color of the earth out of which it was made. The Creating Power gave all of them understanding and speech and told them what tribes they belonged to.

The Creating Power said to them: "The first world I made was bad; the creatures on it were bad. So I burned it up. The second world I made was bad too, so I drowned it. This is the third world I have made. Look: I have created a rainbow for you as a sign that there will be no more Great Flood. Whenever you see a rainbow, you will know that it has stopped raining."

The Creating Power continued: "Now, if you have learned how to behave like human beings and how to live in peace with each other and with the other living things—the two-legged, the four-legged, the man-legged, the fliers, the no-legs, the green plants of this universe—then all will be well. But if you make this world bad and ugly, then I will destroy this world too. It's up to you.”

The Creating Power gave the people the pipe. “Live by it,” he said. He named this land the Turtle Continent because it was there that the turtle came up with the mud out of which the third world was made.

“Someday there might be a fourth world,” the Creating Power thought. Then he rested.

Top of Form

Bottom of Form

Abenaki Indian Corn Legend

**Abenaki Legend**

A long time ago, when the Indians were first made, one man lived alone, far from any others. He did not know fire, and so he lived on roots, bark, and nuts. This man became very lonely for companionship. He grew tired of digging roots, lost his appetite, and for several days lay dreaming in the sunshine. When he awoke, he saw someone standing near and, at first, was very frightened.

But when he heard the stranger's voice, his heart was glad, and he looked up. He saw a beautiful woman with long light hair! "Come to me," he whispered. But she did not, and when he tried to approach her, she moved farther away. He sang to her about his loneliness, and begged her not to leave him.

At last she replied, "If you will do exactly what I tell you to do, I will also be with you."

He promised that he would try his very best. So she led him to a place where there was some very dry grass. "Now get two dry sticks," she told him, "and rub them together fast while you hold them in the grass."

Soon a spark flew out. The grass caught fire, and as swiftly as an arrow takes flight, the ground was burned over. Then the beautiful woman spoke again: "When the sun sets, take me by the hair and drag me over the burned ground."

"Oh, I don't want to do that!" the man exclaimed.

"You must do what I tell you to do," said she. "Wherever you drag me, something like grass will spring up, and you will see something like hair coming from between the leaves. Soon seeds will be ready for your use."

The man followed the beautiful woman's orders. And when the Indians see silk on the cornstalk, they know that the beautiful woman has not forgotten them.

# How Coyote Stole Fire

 **(With Help from Squirrel, Chipmonk and Frog)**

Long ago, when man was new to the world, there were some days when he was a very happy creature. Those were the days when spring brushed across the willows, when his children fed richly on wild blueberries in the summer’s sun or when the goldenrod bloomed in the autumn haze.

But always the mists of autumn evenings grew more chill, and the sun's rays grew shorter. Then man saw winter moving near, and he became fearful and unhappy. He was afraid for his children, and for the grandfathers and grandmothers who carried in their heads the sacred tales of the tribe. Many of these, young and old, would die in the long, icy bitter months of winter.

Coyote, like the rest of the People, had no need for fire. So he seldom concerned himself with it, until one spring day when he was passing a human village. There the women were singing a song of mourning for the babies and the old ones who had died in the winter. Their voices moaned like the west wind through a buffalo skull, prickling the hairs on Coyote's neck.

"Feel how the sun is now warm on our backs," one of the men was saying. "Feel how it warms the earth and makes these stones hot to the touch. If only we could have had a small piece of the sun in our teepees during the winter."

Coyote, overhearing this, felt sorry for the men and women. He also felt that there was something he could do to help them. He knew of a faraway mountain-top where the three Fire Beings lived. These Beings kept fire to themselves, guarding it carefully for fear that man might somehow acquire it and become as strong as they. Coyote saw that he could do a good turn for man at the expense of these selfish Fire Beings.

So Coyote went to the mountain of the Fire Beings and crept to its top, to watch the way that the Beings guarded their fire. As he came near, the Beings leaped to their feet and gazed searchingly round their camp. Their eyes glinted like bloodstones, and their hands were clawed like the talons of the great black vulture.

"What's that? What's that I hear?" hissed one of the Beings. "A thief, skulking in the bushes!" screeched another.

The third looked more closely, and saw Coyote. But he had gone to the mountain-top on all fours, so the Being thought she saw only an ordinary coyote slinking among the trees.

"It is no one, it is nothing!" she cried, and the other two looked where she pointed and also saw only a grey coyote. They sat down again by their fire and paid Coyote no more attention.

So he watched all day and night as the Fire Beings guarded their fire. He saw how they fed it pine cones and dry branches from the sycamore trees. He saw how they stamped furiously on runaway rivulets of flame that sometimes nibbled outwards on edges of dry grass. He saw also how, at night, the Beings took turns to sit by the fire. Two would sleep while one was on guard; and at certain times the Being by the fire would get up and go into their teepee, and another would come out to sit by the fire.

Coyote saw that the Beings were always jealously watchful of their fire except during one part of the day. That was in the earliest morning, when the first winds of dawn arose on the mountains. Then the Being by the fire would hurry, shivering, into the teepee calling, "Sister, sister, go out and watch the fire." But the next Being would always be slow to go out for her turn, her head spinning with sleep and the thin dreams of dawn.

Coyote, seeing all this, went down the mountain and spoke to some of his friends among the People. He told them of hairless man, fearing the cold and death of winter. And he told them of the Fire Beings, and the warmth and brightness of the flame. They all agreed that man should have fire, and they all promised to help Coyote's undertaking.

Then Coyote sped again to the mountain-top. Again the Fire Beings leaped up when he came close, and one cried out, "What's that? A thief, a thief!"

But again the others looked closely, and saw only a grey coyote hunting among the bushes. So they sat down again and paid him no more attention.

Coyote waited through the day, and watched as night fell and two of the Beings went off to the teepee to sleep. He watched as they changed over at certain times all the night long, until at last the dawn winds rose.

Then the Being on guard called, "Sister, sister, get up and watch the fire."

And the Being whose turn it was climbed slow and sleepy from her bed, saying, "Yes, yes, I am coming. Do not shout so."

But before she could come out of the teepee, Coyote lunged from the bushes, snatched up a glowing portion of fire, and sprang away down the mountainside.

Screaming, the Fire Beings flew after him. Swift as Coyote ran, they caught up with him, and one of them reached out a clutching hand. Her fingers touched only the tip of the tail, but the touch was enough to turn the hairs white, and coyote tail-tips are white still. Coyote shouted, and flung the fire away from him. But the others of the People had gathered at the mountain's foot, in case they were needed. Squirrel saw the fire falling, and caught it, putting it on her back and fleeing away through the tree-tops. The fire scorched her back so painfully that her tail curled up and back, as squirrels' tails still do today.

The Fire Beings then pursued Squirrel, who threw the fire to Chipmunk. Chattering with fear, Chipmunk stood still as if rooted until the Beings were almost upon her. Then, as she turned to run, one Being clawed at her, tearing down the length of her back and leaving three stripes that are to be seen on chipmunks' backs even today. Chipmunk threw the fire to Frog, and the Beings turned towards him. One of the Beings grasped his tail, but Frog gave a mighty leap and tore himself free, leaving his tail behind in the Being's hand---which is why frogs have had no tails ever since.

As the Beings came after him again, Frog flung the fire on to Wood. And Wood swallowed it.

The Fire Beings gathered round, but they did not know how to get the fire out of Wood. They promised it gifts, sang to it and shouted at it. They twisted it and struck it and tore it with their knives. But Wood did not give up the fire. In the end, defeated, the Beings went back to their mountain-top and left the People alone.

But Coyote knew how to get fire out of Wood. And he went to the village of men and showed them how. He showed them the trick of rubbing two dry sticks together, and the trick of spinning a sharpened stick in a hole made in another piece of wood. So man was from then on warm and safe through the killing cold of winter.

# How Rabbit & Owl Were Created

**Iroquois Legend**

Raweno, the Everything-Maker, was busy creating all the types of animals. One day he was hard at work on Rabbit. Rabbit said to him, "I want long, strong legs and long ears like the Deer, and sharp teeth and claws like the Panther."

"I do them they way they ask for them to be," said Raweno. He made Rabbit's hind legs very long, just the way Rabbit had described.

Owl, still not formed, was sitting on a tree nearby waiting his turn. "Whoo, whoo," he sang, " I want a long graceful neck like Swan's, and bright red feathers like Cardinal's, and a nice long beak like Egret's, and a beautiful crown of plumes like Heron's. I want to be the most beautiful, fastest and wondrous of all birds."

"Hush," said Raweno. "Turn around and look somewhere else. Close your eyes too. Don't you know that you are not allowed to watch me while I work?" Just at that moment Raweno was making Rabbit's ears quite long, just as Rabbit had asked him for.

Owl refused to turn away. "Whoo, whoo," he sang again. "Nobody can forbid me to watch. Nobody can tell me to close my eyes. I'm going to keep watching you, because I want to."

This made Raweno angry. He grabbed Owl and pulled him off the branch, stuffed his head deep into his body and shook him until Owl's eyes were wide with fright. He pulled at Owl's ears until they stuck out from both sides of his head.

"That will teach you," said Raweno. "Now you won't be able to crane your neck to watch things you are not supposed to watch. Now you have big ears to hear when someone tells you what not to do. Now you have big eyes - but not so big you can watch me, because you will be awake only at night. And your feathers will not be red like Cardinal's but gray like mud. This is your punishment for disobeying me."

Owl went off pouting.

Then Raweno went back to finish Rabbit, but Rabbit had been so frightened by Raweno's anger that he ran off half-done. As a consequence, only Rabbit's hind legs are long, and he has to hop instead of run. And since he was frightened before the work was complete, Rabbit has remained scared of almost everything, and never got the claws and sharp teeth he asked for. Had he not run away then, Rabbit would have been a very different animal.

As for Owl, he remained as Raweno shaped him in anger - with big eyes, a short neck and ears that stick out the sides of his head. To make matters worse, he has to sleep during the day and only come out at night.

# How the Fly Saved the River

 **Ojibway Legend**

Many, many years ago when the world was new, there was a beautiful river. Fish in great numbers lived in this river, and its water was so pure and sweet that all the animals came there to drink.

A giant moose heard about the river and he too came there to drink. But he was so big and drank so much that soon the water began to sink lower and lower. The beavers were worried because the water around their lodges was disappearing and soon their homes would be destroyed.

The muskrats were worried, too. What would they do if the water vanished? And, of course, the fish were very worried. The other animals could live on land if the water dried up, but they surely could not.

All the animals tried to think of a way to drive the moose from the river, but he was so big that they were too afraid to try. Even the bear was afraid of him.

At last the fly said he would try to drive the moose away. All the animals laughed and jeered. How could a tiny fly frighten a giant moose? The fly said nothing, but that day, as soon as the moose appeared, he went into action.

He landed on the moose's foreleg and bit sharply. The moose stamped his foot harder, and each time he stamped, the ground sank and the water rushed in to fill it up. Then the fly jumped about all over the moose, biting and biting and biting until the moose was in a frenzy. The moose dashed madly about the banks of the river, shaking his head, stamping his feet, snorting and blowing, but he couldn't get rid of that pesky fly. At last the moose fled from the river, and didn't come back.

The fly was very proud of his achievement, and boasted to the other animals, "Even the small can fight the strong if they use their brains to think."

# How the Buffalo Hunt Began

**Cheyenne Legend**

The buffalo formerly ate man. The magpie and the hawk were on the side of the people, for neither ate the other or the people. These two birds flew away from a council between animals and men. They determined that a race would be held, the winners to eat the losers.

The course was long, around a mountain. The swiftest buffalo was a cow called Neika, "swift head." She believed she would win and entered the race. On the other hand, the people were afraid because of the long distance. They were trying to get medicine to prevent fatigue.

All the birds and animals painted themselves for the race, and since that time they have all been brightly colored. Even the water turtle put red paint around his eyes. The magpie painted himself white on head, shoulders, and tail. At last all were ready for the race, and stood in a row for the start.

They ran and ran, making some loud noises in place of singing to help themselves to run faster. All small birds, turtles, rabbits, coyotes, wolves, flies, ants, insects, and snakes were soon left far behind. When they approached the mountain, the buffalo-cow was ahead. Then came the magpie, hawk, and the people. The rest were strung out along the way. Dust rose so that nothing could be seen.

All around the mountain the buffalo-cow led the race, but the two birds knew they could win, and merely kept up with her until they neared the finish line, which was back at the starting place. Then both birds swept by her and won the race for man. As they flew the course, they had seen fallen animals and birds all over the place who had run themselves to death turning the ground and rocks red from their blood.

The buffalo then told their young to hide from the people, who were going out to hunt them and also told them to take some human flesh with them for the last time. The young buffaloes did this and stuck that meat in front of their chests beneath the throat. Therefore, the people do not eat that part of the buffalo, saying it is part human flesh.

From that day forward the Cheyennes began to hunt buffalo. Since all the friendly animals and birds were on the people's side, they are not eaten by people, but they do wear and use their beautiful feathers for ornaments.

Another version adds that when coyote, who was on the side of buffalo, finished the race, the magpie who even beat the hawk, said to coyote, "We will not eat you, but only use your skin."