



Glooskap and the Great Wind-Bird

Passamaquoddy People – Canada & USA

The Passamaquoddies believe in a great bird called by them *Wochowsen* or *Wuchowsen*, meaning Wind-Blow or the Wind-Blower, who lives far to the North, and sits upon a great rock at the end of the sky. And it is because whenever he moves his wings the wind blows, they of old times called him that.

When Glooskap was among men he often went out in his canoe with bow and arrows to kill sea-fowl. At one time it was every day very windy; it grew worse; at last, it blew a tempest, and he could not go out at all. Then he said,

‘Wuchowsen, the Great Bird, has done this!’

He went to find him; it was long ere he reached his abode. He found sitting on a high rock a large white Bird.

‘Grandfather,’ said Glooskap, ‘you take no compassion on your *Koosesek*, your grandchildren. You have caused this wind and storm; it is too much. Be easier with your wings!’

The Giant Bird replied,

‘I have been here since ancient times; in the earliest days, ere aught else spoke, I first moved my wings; mine was the first voice, – and I will ever move my wings as I will.’

Then Glooskap rose in his might; he rose to the clouds; he took the Great Bird-giant Wuchowsen as though he were a duck, and tied both

his wings, and threw him down into a chasm between deep rocks, and left him lying there.

The Passamaquoddies could now go out in their canoes all day long, for there was a dead calm for many weeks and months. And with that all the waters became stagnant. They were so thick that Glooskap could not paddle his canoe. Then he thought of the Great Bird, and went to see him.

As he had left him, he found him, for Wuchowsen is immortal. So, raising him, he put him on his rock again, and untied one of his wings. Since then, the winds have never been so terrible as in the old time. □

Adapted by Louis Mitchell, Passamaquoddy member of the Legislature of Maine (1884).

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Comments

About this story, published in 1884 by Charles Leland, its author says: 'This of *Wuchowsen* is from the Passamaquoddy manuscript collection by Louis Mitchell. It is unquestionably the original' (Leland, 1884, p. 113).

That is to say, he considers Mitchell's version to be an original version, being 'Louis Mitchell, Indian member of the Legislature of Maine. To this gentleman I am greatly indebted for manuscripts, letters, and oral narrations of great value' (ibid., p. ix).

We must point out, however, that the transcription we have made is not exact, given that we have changed the term 'Indians' for the name of the people to which this story belongs, *Passamaquoddies*. Their name is an Anglicisation of a word from this people, *peskotomuhkati*, the pronoun form of *Peskotomuhkat* (*pestəmohkat*), which is how the members of this ethnic group call themselves, and means 'pollock-spearer' or 'those of the place where pollock are plentiful' (Passamaquoddy, 2022).

The Passamaquoddies are a tribe belonging to the Algonquian language group, who were part of the Abenaki confederation of tribes –

from *wabunaki*, ‘those who live at sunrise’ – on the New Brunswick Peninsula in Canada and Maine in the United States.

This American original people – estimated to have inhabited this region of North America for more than 10,000 years – were nearly wiped out by the arrival of European settlers. In the 16th century alone, due to diseases such as smallpox and typhus, the Passamaquodies went from more than 20,000 people to only 4,000 (ibid.). By 1804 there were only 130 individuals left. It was from here that their numbers began to increase, although in 1910, the Passamaquoddy population was still estimated at 386 (Passamaquoddy, 2024).

Today, their population is estimated at around 6,000 people, but they are now facing the progressive disappearance of their language, which has been spoken for over 9,000 years. The major problem they face is the small number of speakers, which prevents the necessary linguistic immersion of the Passamaquoddy children, without which its disappearance could be inevitable (Grabin, 2012).

Our acknowledgment to M.C., member of the L’nu (Mi’kmaq) People, whose generosity has allowed us to find adaptations of Glooskap stories told by aboriginal storytellers.

Sources

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Mitchell, L. (1884). How Glooskap bound Wuchowsen, the Great Wind-Bird, and made all the waters in all the world stagnant. In Leland, C. G., *Algonquin Legends of New England* (pp. 111-112). London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington.

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Associated text of the Earth Charter

Principle 8: Advance the study of ecological sustainability and promote the open exchange and wide application of the knowledge acquired.

Other passages that this story illustrates

Principle 5: Protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life.

Principle 5c: Promote the recovery of endangered species and ecosystems.

Principle 6: Prevent harm as the best method of environmental protection and, when knowledge is limited, apply a precautionary approach.

Principle 6a: Take action to avoid the possibility of serious or irreversible environmental harm even when scientific knowledge is incomplete or inconclusive.

Principle 6c: Ensure that decision making addresses the cumulative, long-term, indirect, long distance, and global consequences of human activities.

Principle 8b: Recognize and preserve the traditional knowledge and spiritual wisdom in all cultures that contribute to environmental protection and human well-being.

