



How Woodchuck Tought Gluskabe

Penobscot People - USA

Here starts my story of Gluskabe.

He lived with his grandmother Woodchuck. She raised him and taught him everything; how to hunt, fish, and how to make his living. When he grew large enough to use a bow and arrow, he said to his grandmother:

‘Make me a bow and arrows, I want to hunt deer, I am already tired of rabbit’s meat and fish.’

Then he roamed away and killed a deer and she was glad. She was very proud of him.

The next day he roamed and killed a bear.

‘What creature is it?’ he asked her when he brought it home.

She was glad and began to dance.

‘You’ve killed a bear, a great piece of meat. Now we shall have plenty of fat. We shall live richly,’ said she.

‘He will be a great magician. He will do great wonders for our descendants as he goes on,’ she thought to herself; ‘because various dangers will in the future endanger their lives, different beasts will seek our lives, also rivers, and he can transform them so they will not be dangerous.’

Then Gluskabe said to his grandmother:

‘I would like you to show me how to build a canoe to that I can hunt ducks.’

‘Surely, I will teach you grandson!’

So she taught him how to build a canoe and at last it was finished. She was glad when he paddled out to get ducks. He got a great many.

Now at last, as time went on, the wind got so strong that he could not paddle about. He tried hunting in the woods, thinking: ‘Hunting is evidently very slow’. So he returned to his wigwam.

Then he lay down on his bedding and commenced to sing, wishing for a game-bag of hair so that he could get the beasts easier.

His grandmother Woodchuck then made him a game-bag of deer hair. When it was finished she tossed it to Gluskabe, but he did not stop singing.

Then again she made one of moose hair and tossed it to him, but he did not stop.

Then pulling Woodchuck hairs from her belly she made one of those. Gluskabe was indeed glad and he thanked her. Then he went into the woods and called all the animals. He said to them:

‘Come on, you animals, the world is coming to an end, and you animals will all perish.’

Then the animals of all kinds came forth and he told them:

‘Get inside my bag, here. In there you will not see the world come to an end.’

Then they entered the bag and he carried it to the wigwam.

‘Now, grandmother,’ said he, ‘I have brought game animals. From now on we will not have such a hard time searching for game.’

Then Woodchuck went and saw all the different kinds of animals which were in the bag. She went into the wigwam and said:

‘You have not done well, grandson. Our descendants will in the future die of starvation. I have great hopes in you for our descendants.

Do not do what you have done. You must only do what will benefit them, our descendants.'

Gluskabe heeded his grandmother. He went and opened the bag and told the animals:

'Go out. The danger has already gone by. Go out!'

And they scattered.

He continued going about. When he returned to his wigwam he saw his grandmother fishing there. At last he thought how hard it was that she really caught so few fish. Then he thought to himself:

'It would be better if I helped my grandmother, so that she would not have so hard a time fishing.'

Then he built a fish trap across the river at its mouth. When he made it he left an opening half way so that the fish could enter in. Then he started out abroad upon the ocean, and shouted aloud as he moved about, saying to the fishes:

'The ocean is going to run dry. The end of the world is coming, and all of you will die. Now I have managed so that you will live, all of the fish kind who hear me. Enter in my river, and you shall live, because my river will always remain. Now, all who hear me, enter.'

Then the fish of all kind entered. At last this fish trap became full. Then he closed it, and there at once they remained continually. Then he went to his wigwam and said to his grandmother:

'Grandma, from now on you will not have so hard a time fishing. You will only need to go and get whatever kind of fishes you want.'

Then Woodchuck went to observe what he had done. When she arrived, there was the fish trap brim full of all kinds of fish, so much so that they almost crowded each other out.

Then Woodchuck went away and when she came to her wigwam, she said:

'Grandson, you have not done well. All the fish will be annihilated. So what will our descendants in the future do to live? Because we have plenty of fish now, as many as we want, do you now go and let them out.'

So then he got up and said:

‘You speak truth, grandma; I will go and open it up now.’ □

As told by an Elder Penobscot, recorded at the dictation by Frank G. Speck (1935).

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Comments

With this story, we continue our commitment not to engage in *cultural appropriation* of materials belonging to peoples who were colonised and unjustly treated by European nations. In this case, the story was freely shared by a Penobscot elder to an American cultural researcher, Frank G. Speck. Moreover, we know that Speck made a faithful transcription of the oral original story insofar as he notes that

All of the more important trickster-transformer and origin myths were taken down in text from the dictation of Newell Lion (...). The stories in this present collection have been obtained at different times from different informants. Among these should be mentioned the names of Governor (Chief) Piel Nicola, Governor Joe Francis, Joe Solomon, ‘Buck’ Andrew, Charley ‘Daylight,’ Mrs. Alice Swassion, ‘Big Frank’ Dana (Denis), Governor Newell Francis, Joe Francis, John Neptune, Governor Sabatis Francis, John Susup and Gabe Paul. (Speck, 1935, pp. 33-34)

We do not know which of them would have transmitted this Penobscot myth to Speck – probably Newell Lion – but we do know, at least, that it is a literal transcription from the mouth of an old man or woman of this First Nation, who generously shared this valuable material from their oral tradition.

Once again we come across an account of that legendary figure of the Wabanaki Peoples whom they called indistinctly Glooscap, Gluskabe, Glooskap, Gluscabi, Koluscap or Kloskomba. He has been mentioned in other stories in this Collection.

What is striking about the story we share here is that it is a traditional story which is able to illustrate many of the principles and

values of the Earth Charter. Specifically, it allows us to illustrate 4 principles, 13 sub-principles, and 7 different excerpts from the preamble and epilogue of the document.

The Penobscot People belong to the Wabanaki or Abenaki Confederacy, made up of a number of First Nations, including the Passamaquoddy, Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet), Mi'kmaq and Penobscot, who share not only the Algonquin linguistic root, but also a mythical character of such great cultural importance for the world as the celebrated Glooscap.

The Penobscot continue to inhabit – for over 10,000 years – the northern part of Maine, along the Canadian border in New Brunswick, and currently have a registered population of 2,398 people. The Penobscot are proud to have the oldest continuous government in the western hemisphere (Wabanaki Alliance, nd).

Sources

Speck, F. G. (1935). Penobscot tales and religious beliefs. *Journal of American Folk-lore*, 48(187), 1-107.

Wabanaki Alliance (nd). Penobscot Nation, *penawahpkekeyak*. Available on <https://www.wabanakialliance.com/penobscot-nation/>

Associated text of the Earth Charter

Principle 14: Integrate into formal education and life-long learning the knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life.

Other passages that this story illustrates

Preamble: Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.



Preamble – Earth, Our Home: The resilience of the community of life and the well-being of humanity depend upon preserving a healthy biosphere with all its ecological systems, a rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure waters, and clean air.

Preamble – The Challenges Ahead: Fundamental changes are needed in our values, institutions, and ways of living. We must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more.

Preamble – The Challenges Ahead: We have the knowledge and technology to provide for all and to reduce our impacts on the environment.

Preamble – Universal Responsibility: Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world.

Principle 4: Secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations.

Principle 4a: Recognize that the freedom of action of each generation is qualified by the needs of future generations.

Principle 4b: Transmit to future generations values, traditions, and institutions that support the long-term flourishing of Earth's human and ecological communities.

Principle 5e: Manage the use of renewable resources such as water, soil, forest products, and marine life in ways that do not exceed rates of regeneration and that protect the health of ecosystems.

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 7: Adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard Earth's regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being.

Principle 7f: Adopt lifestyles that emphasize the quality of life and material sufficiency in a finite world.



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

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

Principle 8c: Ensure that information of vital importance to human health and environmental protection, including genetic information, remains available in the public domain.

Principle 9b: Empower every human being with the education and resources to secure a sustainable livelihood, and provide social security and safety nets for those who are unable to support themselves.

Principle 12b: Affirm the right of indigenous peoples to their spirituality, knowledge, lands and resources and to their related practice of sustainable livelihoods.

Principle 12c: Honor and support the young people of our communities, enabling them to fulfill their essential role in creating sustainable societies.

Principle 14a: Provide all, especially children and youth, with educational opportunities that empower them to contribute actively to sustainable development.

Principle 15c: Avoid or eliminate to the full extent possible the taking or destruction of non-targeted species.

The Way Forward: Life often involves tensions between important values. This can mean difficult choices. However, we must find ways to harmonize diversity with unity, the exercise of freedom with the common good, short-term objectives with long-term goals.

The Way Forward: Every individual, family, organization, and community has a vital role to play.