**Native American Origin Stories**

*What is an origin story?*

An origin story is a cultural, traditional or religious myth, which describes the earliest beginnings of the present world. Also known as a creation story.

**Cherokee creation story**

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.

When all was water, the animals were above in Gälûñ’lätï, 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 Dâyuni’sï, “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 who did this.

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 again to Gälûñ’lätï. 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.

When the earth was dry and the animals came down, it was still dark, so they got the sun and set it in a track to go every day across the island from east to west, just overhead. It was too hot this way, and Tsiska’gïlï’, 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. This is why the conjurers call the highest place Gûlkwâ’gine Di’gälûñ’lätiyûñ’, “the seventh height,” because it is seven hand-breadths above the earth. Every day the sun goes along under this arch, and returns at night on the upper side to the starting place.

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 reach 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 winter and cooler in summer than the outer air.

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 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 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.”

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 fast 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.

W. Powell, *Nineteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1897-1898, Part I*(Washington: 1900), 239-240.

**Sioux Creation Story (ca. 1910)**

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: “l 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.

**Dakota Creation Story**

The creation story began long, long ago when Waziya, the Old Man, lived beneath the earth with his wife, Wakanka. Their daughter, Ite, grew to be the most beautiful of women, thereby captivating the attention of one of the associate Gods, Tate, the Wind. Though not a Goddess, Ite became the wife of Tate who lived at the entrance of the Spirit Trail. She bore Tate four sons, quadruplets--the North, West, East and South Winds. The first son became cruel and hard to get along with, so Tate took his position as first son and gave it to his boisterous second son, West Wind. Thus, the order of the Winds became West, North, East and South.

Because of the association with the influential good and helpful Gods through the marriage of Ite to Tate, Waziya became dissatisfied and yearned to have the power of the true Gods.

Iktomi, the Trickster, always anxious to further discontentment and promote ridicule, bargained with Waziya and Wakanka and Ite, promising them great power and further beauty for Ite if they would assist him in making others ridiculous. He even promised Ite that her enhanced beauty would rival that of the Goddess Hanwi, the Moon, who was the pledged wife of the great Sun God, Wi. So Waziya, Wakanka and Ite agreed to Iktomi's bargain.

Possessed of a charm given her by Iktomi, Ite became more and more conscious of her beauty and less and less devoted to the welfare of her four sons, the Four Winds. At this time, Sun saw Ite and, struck by her incredible beauty, invited Ite to sit beside him at the feast of the Gods. When the time for the feast arrived, Ite came early. Finding the place next to the Sun vacant, she took it. Sun was pleased. When Moon finally arrived, she saw her seat had been taken, and she was so ashamed that she hid her face from the laughing people, covering it with a robe. And Iktomi, the planner of this event outlaughed everyone.

After the feast, Skan, the Sky God and judge of all the Gods, called a Council. He asked for the stories of Wi, the Sun, who had forsaken his wife; of Ite, who dared take the place of a Goddess; and of Wakanka and Waziya who had wished for godlike powers; and Iktomi, the schemer. Then Skan passed Judgement.

Sun was to lose the comfort of his wife, Moon. He was to rule only in the day, allowing Moon to rule at night. Whenever they were together, Moon would always cover her face in shame. Ite's sentence was severe because of her vanity and negligence of motherly and wifely duties. She would give premature birth to her next son, who would be unlike all other children, and her children would not live with her but with their father, Tate. She was, furthermore, instructed to return to the world and live without friends. Still more, she would remain the most beautiful of women, but only half of her would be so. The other half would be so horribly ugly that people would be terrified at the sight of her. Henceforth, she would be called Anung-Ite, the Doublefaced Woman.

Wakanka and Waziya were banished to the edge of the world until they could learn to do good for young children and old people. They too were renamed for their misconduct, becoming known as the Witch and the Old Man, or Wizard.

Iktomi was also banished to the edge of the world where he was to remain forever friendless. He accepted his judgement with his usual smugness, reminding Skan that he still had the birds and the animals with whom he could live and upon whom he could continue to play pranks.

Tate, who was also judged for marrying Ite, was instructed to raise his children properly and to do a woman's work. Thus he lived along with his four sons, the Winds, and his fifth son, little Yumni, the Whirlwind, in their home beyond the pines in the land of the ghosts. Each day his sons travel over the world according to his instructions.

One day, as the Four Winds were on their tours away from home, a shining object appeared outside of Tate's tipi. Tate looked out and saw a lovely young woman, beautifully dressed. Tate asked her who she was and where she came from. She replied that she came from the Star People, that her father was Sun and her mother, Moon, and that she had been sent to the world to find friends. She also told him that her name was Whope.

When the Four Winds and Whirlwind returned home, they were surprised to find that their father had taken a woman. But after Whope had prepared for each of them, her favorite meal, and no matter how much they ate, their plates remained full, they realized that she was supernaturally endowed. They learned that their father treated her, not as a wife, but as a daughter. They welcomed her into their lodge.

Soon, each brother wanted Whope as his woman and competed with one another in showing her favors. Tate decided to hold a feast, to which all the Gods should be invited. At this feast Tate honored his guests with presents. Many told stories of their power and there was much dancing. Then the Gods asked Tate how they might please him. He told them that if they honored his daughter, Whope, he himself would be pleased. Then they asked Whope what she wanted. Whope arose and stood by Okaga, the South Wind, who folded his robe around her. "I want a tipi for Okaga and myself, a place for him and his brothers." So her wish was granted and Whope became Okaga's wife. And then, as a present for the couple, the Gods made them the world and all there is in it.

The banished Waziya and his family were also involved in the story. In the beginning, the Wizard. the Witch, their daughter, the Double-faced Woman, and Iktomi, the Trickster, were the only people on earth. Iktomi grew tired of playing pranks on birds and animal's. He had fun doing it, but they never showed any shame over their misfortunes. So he, again, went to Anung-Ite, asking her what she most desired. She told him that if she would tell him, he should never resort to tricks and pranks again. She explained that if her people tasted meat and learned about clothes and tipis, they would want such things and come to where they could be had. With these instructions, Iktomi then went to the wolves, seeking their aid in bringing mankind to earth. Again, in return for help, Iktomi swore to abandon his pranks. The wolves agreed to this and Iktomi instructed them to drive moose, deer and bears to Anung-Ite's tipi, where she would prepare food, clothing and tipis to entice mankind.

Then Iktomi gave to one of the wolves a packet, which Anung-Ite had prepared containing tasty meat and fancy clothing for the man and woman. He then directed the animal to take the packet to the entrance of the cave which opened into the world. The wolf did as instructed and when it saw a brave young man apart from the others., it presented the packet, telling the young man to taste the meat and advising him and his wife to wear the clothing. The wolf told the young man that the people also should be allowed to taste the meat and see the clothing, and that there were many such things as these on earth. The young man, Tokahe, the First One, was pleased to do this, for now he would be considered a leader. When the people tasted the meat and saw the clothes Tokahe and his wife wore, they were envious and asked how they too might obtain such things. The old man of the group then directed that three brave men accompany Tokahe to find out where such good things came from and to prove that Tokahe was truthful.

The four young men set out and, led by the wolf, they entered the world from the cave. They were led to a lake where Anung-Ite had pitched her tipi. She appeared to Tokahe and his companions as a beautiful young woman. Iktomi appeared as a handsome young man. The four young men were shown much game which Iktomi had previously arranged with the wolves to have driven past. Anung-Ite gave them many tasty foods and many presents of fine clothing for them and for their people. Iktomi told them that he and his wife were really very old, but by eating this earthly food they remained young and attractive.

When the four young men returned through the cave to their people, they described what they had seen. But an old woman, doubted such wonders, cautioned them to be wary. The people argued, some wishing to go with Tokahe, others saying that he was a wizard. When Tokahe offered to lead any who wished to follow him up to the earth, the chief warned them that whoever ventured through the cave to the earth would never find the way back. Nonetheless, six men and their wives and children joined Tokahe, and they left the underworld guided by the wolf. When they reached the earth it was strange. They became lost and tired, hungry and thirsty. Their children cried. Anung-Ite appeared and tried to comfort them, but they saw the horrible side of her face and ran in terror. Iktomi appeared in his true form and laughed at their misery. Their leader, Tokahe, was ashamed. The revelation of Iktomi's falsity and Anung-Ite's ugliness was then removed by the appearance of the Old Man and the Witch, who, according to the prophecy at the time of their banishment, had come to understand the qualities of mercy and tenderness. They appeared to Tokahe and his followers, bringing food and drink. They lead the disheartened group to the land of the pines, to the world of the Ghosts. They showed them how to live as men now do. Thus Tokahe and his followers were the first people on earth.

Their descendants are the Dakota.