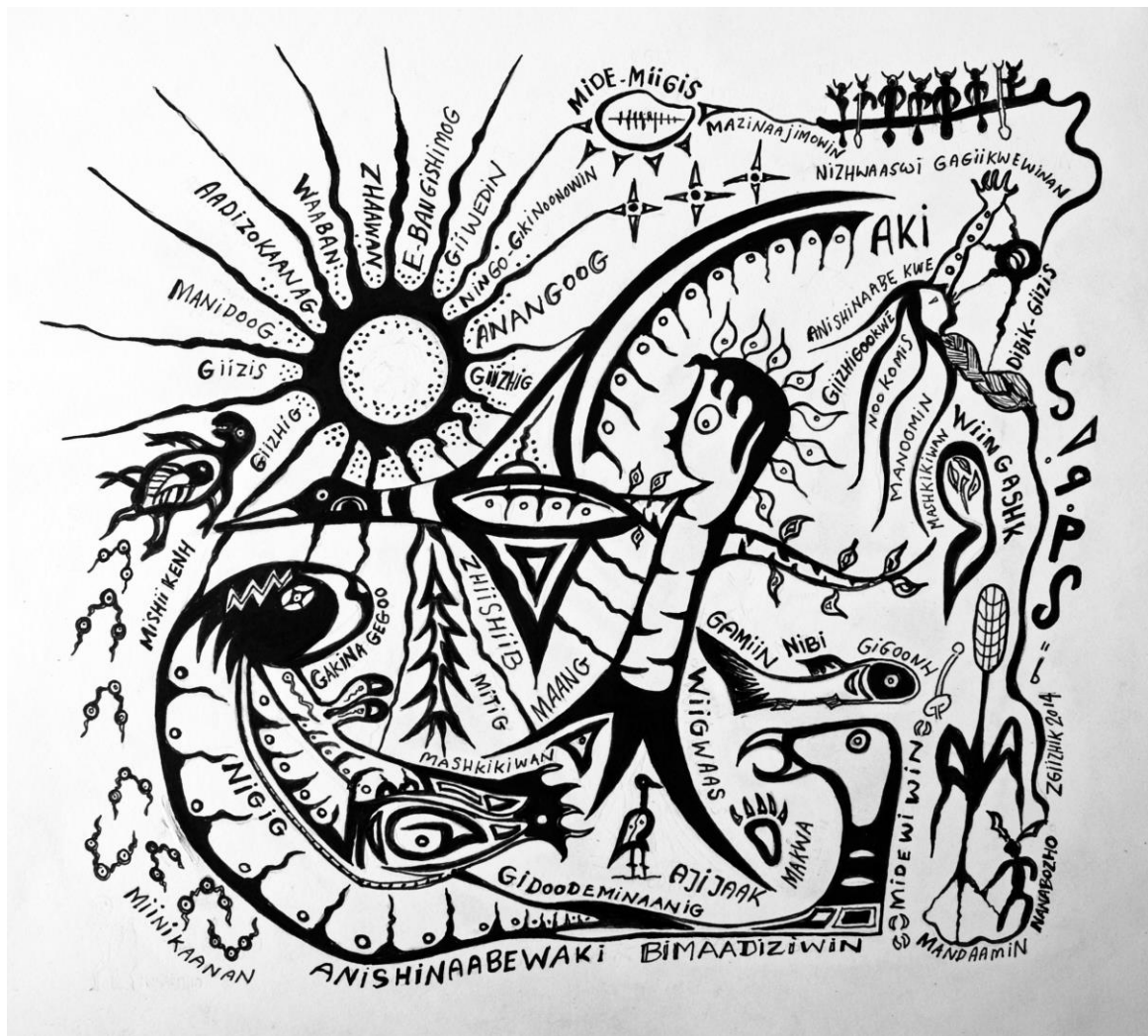


# THE UNIVERSE OF THE OJIBWE ANISHINAABEG



An illustrated glossary by Zhaawano Giizhik\*



The above outline drawing, which I created in the 'Pictorial Legend' fashion of the Canadian Woodland (or Medicine) Painters, depicts several images – representing various layers of symbolic, metaphorical meaning – and their corresponding **NAMES**. The images demonstrate a cross section of **Anishinaabe Izhinamowin**: the traditional world-view of the **Ojibwe Anishinaabeg**, who for the past 1000 years inhabit the North American Great Lakes area. Below is an illustrated glossary with the **NAMES** that go with the images. The **NAMES** in the drawing, 42 in total, have been listed below in alphabetical order.

\*In the process of composing this document, I respectfully borrowed and adapted some **passages** from the [Noongwa e-Anishinaabemijig](#) website, the book "Rites of Conquest" by **Charles E. Cleland** (University of Michigan 1992), **ZhaawanArt art blog**, the books "Ojibway Ceremonies" and "OjibwayHeritage" by **Basil Johnston** (Bison Book, University of Nebraska Press 1990), The Iconology, Manitou(s) and Metaphors of Josh Kakegamic by **Leah Fontaine**, the Article "The Spirit Powers of Ojibwe and Odawa Art" by **Winona LaDuke** (NMAI, fall 2000), Anishinaabemowin Circle Learning Guide Reference Book September 2010, Living With Animals by **Michael Pomedì** (University Of Toronto Press 2014), and "Minjimendaamowinon Anishinaabe" by **Janice Acoose/Miskwonigeesikokwe** (University of Saskatchewan). Also, sometimes text sources and images are marked by a [hyperlink](#). The **graphic art and jewelry** shown on these pages are works by Woodland artists [Norval Morrisseau](#) (Miskwaabik Animikii; 1932-2007), [Jackson Beardy](#) (1944-1984), [Alex Janvier](#) (1935), [Carl Ray](#) (1943-1978), Abe Kakepetum, [Frank Polson](#) (1952), [Leland Bebaminojmat Bell](#) (1953), [James Mishibinijima Simon](#) (1954), [Simone McLeod](#) (Aki-egwaniizid; 1962), Iwan Shawana, [Chris Angecone](#), [Zhaawano Giizhik](#) (1959), [Christi Belcourt](#), and others.

I gratefully and respectfully dedicate this illustrated glossary to my **Ojibwe Anishinaabe ancestors** who left their spirit and footprints at the beautiful rapids and falls of **Baawitigong** (Sault Ste. Marie, MI); to my sons **Niiwino Djibikag** (Odji) and **Wiigwaas Gitchiode'** (Gitchy) and each of their **cousins** so they will not forget where they come from; to **Aki-egwaniizid** (Simone McLeod) because she is my best friend and lovingly included me in her life and her amazing artistic and spiritual journey to the Dawn Land; and to my Kaniienkehaka /Odaawaa Nishnaabe nijiji, *oshkinawe-ogichidaa* **Phillip Meshekey** because he aspires to utilize his contemporary Turtle Medicine-inspired art expressions to build bridges between the younger and older Anishinaabeg generations. *Chi-miigwech gakina awiyya inawemaaganag, miigwech gibzindaw*, thank you all my relatives for listening.

## Pronunciation Guide

All jewelry shown here and on Zhaawano's [web pages](#) and [blog posts](#) have Ojibwe Anishinaabe (Chippewa) names. The language, Anishinaabemowin, forms one of the daughters of the great Algonquian (linguistic) stock, and is composed of a large variety of dialects; the disparities between, for instance, the northern (Canadian) and southern (U.S.) dialects are quite substantial. The words and names that you find on these pages more or less reflect these dialect differences. Being a spoken language, only recently people have begun to write it. Although there is no standard international orthography (yet), the below list is based on the [Fiero Double Vowel orthography system](#). It is currently used in over 200 Anishinaabe communities in and around Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, North Dakota, Michigan, Wisconsin, and the international boundary.

In the list below, Ojibwe vowels and consonants and English equivalents of the Ojibwe sounds are given. Although for written communication purposes the Fiero system was chosen as a cross-community and international orthography, the list does not represent the full range of vowels or the tones, nor does it reflect the enormous diversity of pronunciations and intonations that are typical of a specific region or community. Please note that accurate pronunciation cannot be learned without respectfully consulting a Native Ojibwe Anishinaabe speaker either in the U.S. or in Canada.

**13** approximate sounds of Ojibwe Anishinaabe vowels and consonants are given below.

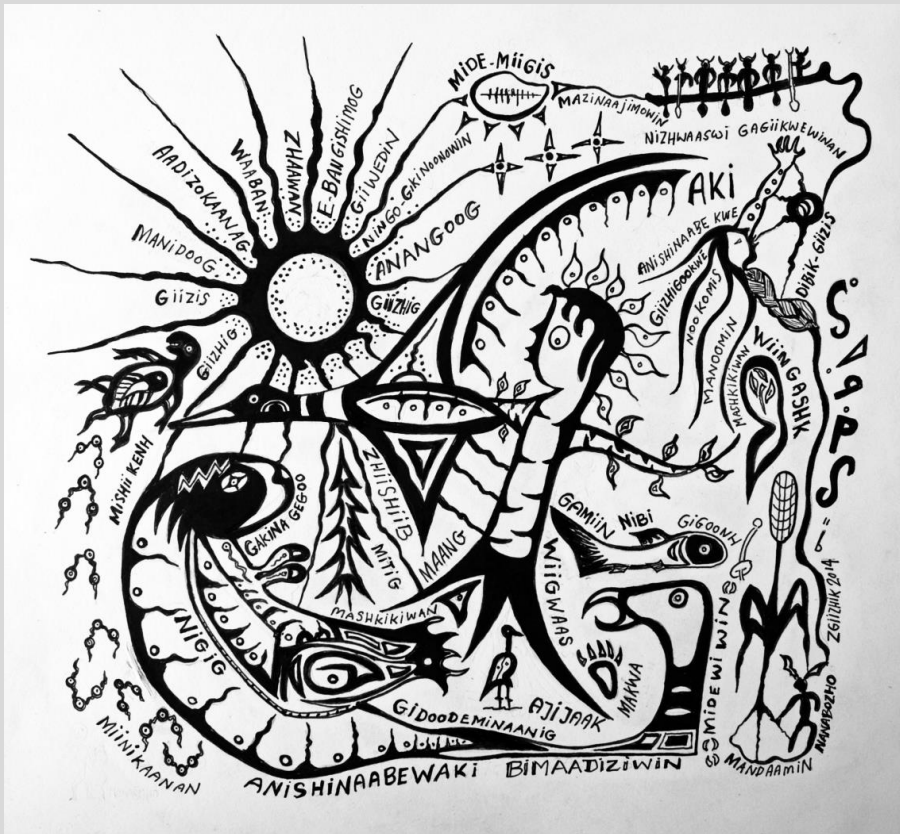
- a** = as in **about**, or sometimes as in **luck**
- aa** = as in **author** but long in duration, pronounced with a certain emphasis.
- ay** = as in **bye**.
- e** = as in **café**, sometimes (but rarely) as in **bed**.
- i** = as in **pin**
- ii** = as in **eel**
- o** = as in **obey**, and sometimes as in **book**
- oo** = as in **boat**, and sometimes as in **boot**
- ch** = as in **chin**
- j** = as in **judge**
- ñ** = a (French) nasal sound, sometimes written as 'nh' (occurring at the end of some words)  
These nasal sound are not always indicated in the below text.
- zh** = as in **pleasure**
- '** = glottal stop; represents a throaty release of air similar to the pause in "oh-oh". A global stop is sometimes omitted in pronunciation.

**N.B.:** All other consonants are (more or less) the same as in English.

### List of keywords (in alphabetical order):

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2. AJIJAAK (The Crane) (p. 14 )
3. AKI (The Earth; the Land; the Cosmos) (p. 16 )
4. ANANGOOG (The Stars) (p.21)
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8. DIBIK-GIIZIS (The Night Sun) (p. 43)
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11. GAKINA GEGOO (All Living Things) (p. 46)
12. GAMIIN (The Lakes) (p. 47)
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15. GIIWEDIN (The North) (p. 65)
16. GIIZHIG (The Sky) (p. 65)
17. GIIZHIGOOKWE (Sky Woman) (p. 65)
18. GIIZIS (The Sun) (p. 65)
19. MAANG (The Loon) (p. 67)
20. MAKWA MANIDOO (Spirit Of The Bear) (p. 68)
21. MANDAAMIN (Maize) (p. 74)
22. MANIDOOG (Mysteries) (p. 75)
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24. MASHKIKIWAN (Medicines) (p. 81)
25. MAZINAAJINOWIN (Pictorial Spirit Writings) (p. 87)
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27. MIDEWIWIN (The Way Of The Heartbeat) (p. 96)
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29. MIINIKAANAN (Seeds) (p. 116)
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32. NANABOZHO (Trembling Tail; the Great Rabbit, or Hare) (p. 127)

33. NIBI (Spirit of the Water) (p. 131)
34. NIGIG (The Otter) (p. 134)
35. NINGO-GIKINOONOWIN (The Seasonal Cycle) (p. 136)
36. NIZHWAASWI GAGIIKWEWINAN (Seven Sacred Teachings) (p. 137)
37. NOOKOMIS (Grandmother) (p. 139)
38. WAABAN (The East) (p. 141)
39. WIIGWAAS (The Birch) (p. 141)
40. WIINGASHK (Sweetgrass) (p. 141)
41. ZHAAWAN (The South) (p.143)
42. ZHIISHIIB (The Duck) (p.144)





*Wiinabozho Miinawaa Ayaadizooked Waabandizowin* ("Wiinabozho and the Storytellers Mirror") by Zhaawano Giizhik, 2012. Click [here](#) to read the story behind the painting.

**AADIZOOKAAN:** A traditional, sacred story (plural: *aadizookaanan*); a Spirit Grandfather or muse, often playing the role of the antagonist in a sacred story (plural: *aadizookaanag*).

Ever since Sky Spirit Woman placed the Ojibwe Anishinaabe ancestors on the Great Turtle shell called North-America and from the moment they started to communicate, they have gathered to share their stories. From then on they - particularly the Elders - used to pass on traditional tales to the young generation. The content of these dramatic, often humoristic, narratives (*myth* is a European concept!) usually referred to animals, trees, plants, celestial bodies, and *manidoog* (spirits). The stories were not just a form of entertainment, but also powerful learning tools, valuable lessons containing a vast wealth of knowledge and wisdom. The stories not only contained lessons but were also mirrors reflecting the beliefs, fears, and hopes of both storyteller and audience. Many stories were sacred and considered to be *manidoog* in themselves, filled with mystery and healing powers. Storytelling usually took place at family and community gatherings and the stories were told in a strict ritual context, and only during winter evenings so as to avoid offending the animals and the spirits.

In the old days the community storytellers used to narrate stories practically every winter night; nowadays the act of telling stories in public takes place only on special occasions, such as during communal celebrations like Christmas. This is also true for the more remote Ojibwe communities in the Canadian northwoods.

The Ojibweg, or Anishinaabeg - particularly those who were members of the **Midewiwin** or **Way Of The Heartbeat Society**, and **Waabanowin** or **Dawn Society** - have always enjoyed a big reputation - and inspired awe, even fear - among other Native Nations of Turtle Island for how they were able to manipulate the spirit world and the plant world for personal power or, sometimes, to cause evil to others. Be that as it may, it is true that members page 96of these medicinal societies had great knowledge of the relationships that exist in nature, both ecologically as cosmologically. Their wide and varied knowledge and use of plants, indicating the large extent to which they understood the mysterious properties all things in nature and utilized the natural sources of their environment, made them legendary among the neighboring Nations, who sometimes referred to them as "Sorcerers of the Woods". To the Ojibweg, the directions of the winds and the position of the sun, the moon, and the planets were directly related to the rhythm of the seasons and the cycle of hunting, fishing, and food gathering. It was a widely understood truth that, of all Native peoples that inhabited the northwoods, it was the **Ojibweg** whom GICHI-MANIDOO (The Great Mystery) gave the most profound knowledge of plants.

The age-old ceremonies and traditional knowledge and stories and songs that to this day have been kept and guarded (and selectively handed over) by the Midewiwin still bear witness of this old and honorable worldview. (See also: **MIDEWIWIN**, page 96.)



**AADIZOOKEWIN**, or traditional storytelling, has always had a strong educative, even didactic, purpose and function in Anishinaabe society. Children learned history, culture, and values from their elders through respectful observation, encouragement, and

example. This is called GIKINAWAABI, literally: to learn by and from observation. So dynamic was its cultural and social dimension, so skillfully the narratives were being crafted and retold, that today we would definitely consider the act of telling stories an art form.

The passing on of tales and wise lessons wrapped in metaphors and symbolism serves to teach the younger generation not only about Anishinaabe history and culture; they are also TEACHING MIRRORS, familiarizing the young with something that is called ANISHINAABE BIMAADIZIWIN: an extensive set of moral values, humor, and common, day-to-day community values. Stories instill in the young learner's mind a living sense of human potentials, as well as human vices and shortcomings. Sometimes the tales are satiric allegories in which human vice or folly is attacked through irony, or typical 'Shinnob wit'. There were many stories; for every event, belief, value, animal, *manidoo* or *aadizookaan*, there is a story.

**AANIKE-GIKINOO'AMAADIWINAN** (teachings) and **GIKENDAASOWIN** (knowledge) were essential instruments to achieve ANISHINAABE BIMAADIZIWIN.



A painting by Ojibwe Medicine Painter Lawrence Beaulieu depicting a storyteller and children.

The formal education of the younger generation was basically formed by the oral tradition of:

- DIBAAJIMOWINAN – ‘true stories’ or chronicles, based on personal experiences;
- AAWECHIGANAN – parables, often with a moral undertone;
- AADIZOOKAANAN – sacred, often supernatural stories –; and sometimes
- MAZINAAJIM – literally picture stories, so called ‘spirit drawings’, often painted on, or inscribed in, rocks and birch bark scrolls and other sacred items. Much Anishinaabe history and philosophy has been related through mazinaajimowin; conveying information from the content of these drawings was (and still is) strictly the role of certain members of the Medicinal society of the MIDEWIWIN. It is said that many traditional narratives, such as creation stories, even stemmed from WAABANAKI (Land of Dawn), the original country of the Anishinaabe People situated along the North Atlantic coast.

The art of telling stories, without which the history and the identity of the Anishinaabeg as a people would never have survived until today, has always been the task of grandparents and other elderly relatives; particularly of NOOKOMISAG (grandmothers). The *debaajimoojig* and *ayaadizookedjig* (respectively true-storytellers and traditional-storytellers), who usually shared these narratives in a somewhat ritualized fashion and never casually, strictly reserved them for the long winter moons, in the evening after dinner around the campfire.

The reason why storytelling only found place on winter evenings probably lies in the fact that these traditional narratives usually refer to animals, tree and plant beings, and celestial bodies. Some say that, in order not to offend the protagonists of the story and to preserve their transformative powers, it was deemed wise not to talk about them as long they were still awake.



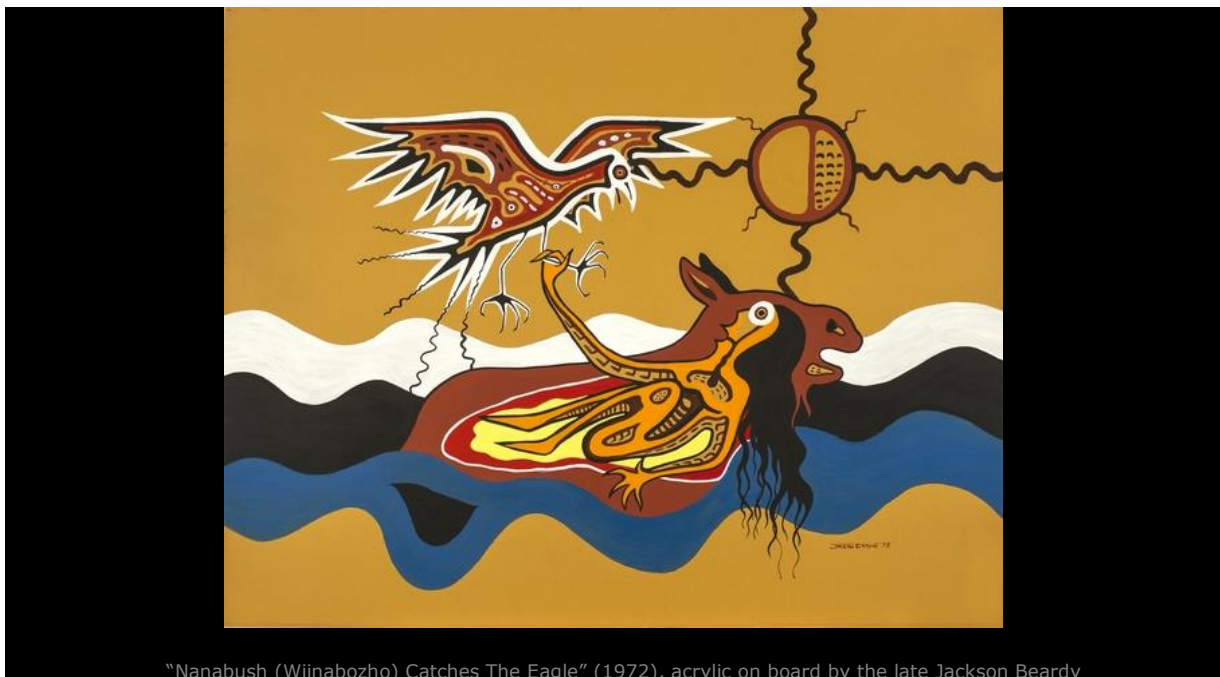


Others believe that the *manidoog* ('spirits' or 'mysteries') and the *aadizookaanag* (supernatural beings, or muses, who dwell at the Earth's four cardinal points) are really fond of these stories and like to listen, together with the children, to the fantastic *aadizookaanag*. It is believed that not only do these *aadizookaanag* play the protagonist role, they even assist the storytellers in the creation of these stories! (See illustration on previous page, a black and white pen drawing done by the author).

Since the word *aadizookaan* has two different meanings that are basically the same – *aadizookaanag* are sacred stories and *aadizookaanag* are the stories' protagonists –, it is not difficult to understand that to the old Anishinaabeg, an *aadizookaan*, a sacred story, was not just a story but a conscious and sentient being empowered with thought and action. The act of telling a story was therefore essentially a RITUAL INVOCATION of the benevolent beings of the metaphysical world. On the long, cold winter nights in the North Country, when the supernatural beings were nearby, a narrator of *dibaajimowan* or stories based on personal experiences, would introduce a tale with 'Ahow, n'ga dibaajim', meaning "Now, I will tell a true story". But when a storyteller planned to tell a story about the *aadizookaanag*, he or she would utter the ritual words "Ahaaw, 'ngad-aadzooke", meaning, "Now, I will tell a traditional story".\*

With these ritual words, the *aadizookwe* or *aadizoowinini* (female or male sacred-storyteller) stated that she or he, in the here and now, acted as a spokeswoman or spokesman for the *manidoog* and *aadizookaanag* and, at the same time, was inspired by them to create a story. The ritual words provided these narrators with spiritual guidance in telling a story – or, in some instances, in making a prophecy. As soon as the supernatural beings were called upon and entered the human stage, the sacred story in which they played the protagonist role became an *aawechigan*, a parable that could be shared whenever it was considered appropriate.

\**'ngad-aa(d)zooke*: this is how the Ojibweg of Michigan and Southeastern Ontario would say "Now, I will tell a traditional story". Depending on the dialect, the phrase can also be realized as, for example, *ningad-aadizooke* (Ojibweg from Wisconsin) or *ingad-aadizooke* (Ojibweg from Minnesota).



"Nanabush (Wiinabozho) Catches The Eagle" (1972), acrylic on board by the late Jackson Beardy

**B**asically, all traditional stories contained the same elements revolving around a conception of time, space, or narrative that was almost dreamlike and therefore never quite chronological or linear. Like a dream, a traditional story, although always cast in a formal ritual setting, possessed a fantastically surreal and (seemingly) stream-of-consciousness quality that was in keeping with the way of thinking of the *aadizookaanag*, and the language they spoke. This approach gave the storyteller the chance to tune into the unpredictable dreamscapes of the supernatural world; after all, the inhabitants of this world were capable of shape shifting and always inclined to unexpectedly draw near the storyteller and his or her audience and eavesdrop on the narrative any time and in any outward shape they liked.

**A** traditional- storyteller was always aware of the presence of the beings of the incorporeal world and therefore made sure that his or her narrative - and the words that made up the narrative - contained the same transformative powers as the *aadizookaanag* that played the protagonist in it.

**I**n the sacred Ojibwe Anishinaabe stories or parables, metamorphosis occurs with noticeably frequency where *manidoog* change their form. *Wiinabozho*, undoubtedly the most beloved of all *aadizookaanag* ("grandfathers of the nonhuman or semi human class"), whose primary characteristic is "shape shifting" - the ability to resume form and personality of a human, or a hare, or a wild goose, or a tree stump - is basically a *manidoo* in nature and essence before anything else; outward appearance is only an incidental attribute of his incorporeal being.

**U**sually, *Wiinabozho* stories are told during long winter nights by the old ones to the young. *Wiinabozho*, son of *Wiininwaa*, a mortal woman, and the Spirit of the West and grandson of *Nookomis* (his grandmother on earth), is called *Wiisagejaak* by the *Nakawēk* (Northwestern Ojibweg), the *Anishiniwak* (Oji-Cree), and their neighbours to the north, the Cree. *Wiinabozho* is associated with rabbits or hare and is sometimes referred to as the Great Hare (*Misabooz*), although he is rarely depicted as taking the physical form of a rabbit. He is the benefactor of the Anishinaabeg who helps little children, the poor, and the weak. But he is also the mighty creator of plants, animals, and the geography of the landscape as the Anishinaabeg know it. And he is many other things: a shape shifter who can change from various animal forms to various human forms; a trickster that by his foolish and humorous actions holds a mirror up to humankind, constantly showing them that things aren't always what they seem; a very skillful hunter with supernatural powers, and a great adventurer, always looking for equally powerful adversaries in order to test his own strength. Building the first *Midewigan* (lodge of the *Midewiwin*) is an act accredited to him - although not all traditionalist sources agree that he was actually the founder of the Anishinaabe Medicine Society.



Likewise, the origins of the WAABANOWIN (the Dawn Society) are traced to the original teachings of Wiinabozho: Wiinabozho stories are often used in the ceremonies and teachings of the Society. The reason the members of the Waabanowin only recount certain traditions in winter, is because *Mizhibizhiw*, the horned underwater *manidoo* with the body of a lynx hibernated at that time (see the illustration on the previous page). Because of this the *aadizookaan* about Wenabozhoo and about the Creation of the Waabanowin Lodge were narrated as a part of the winter ceremonies. The Ceremony in Petition For Life and Health was first and foremost a teaching time and a time for prayer for healing of individuals and for the healing of *aki*, the earth. (See also: **MIDEWIWIN**, p. 96.)

The principal lesson that Wiinabozho, through his many adventures and his sometimes foolish, sometimes heroic, and sometimes wise actions, teaches mankind is that one can outgrow or overcome childish behavior and learn to act wisely and with maturity – and to live according the guiding principles of *Anishinaabe bimaadiziwin*: how to live a good and honest life. His original name (*Nanabozho*) is possibly derived from an Ojibwe word that is a corruption of *Naning*, which means “trembling”, combined with *Oozho* (*Ozo*), shortened from *Oozhoowaa* (*Ozowaa*), which means “tail”. If this is true, it is not unthinkable that the name *Nanabozho* fits Wiinabozho’s capacity of a *contrary* and thus holds up a mirror to people who are timid and unwilling to take risks or responsibility. (See also: **NANABOZHO**, page 127.)

Ancient tradition, however, traces the great Anishinaabe art of storytelling back to **DIBAAJIMOOD**, the first person in history who, a long time ago, raised the spoken word to an art form. Dibaajimood is said to have been a frequent winter evening visitor at the lodge of NOOKOMIS, who was man’s first mother and the grandmother of NANABOZHO/WIINABOZHO, the beloved spirit-friend of the Anishinaabe people.

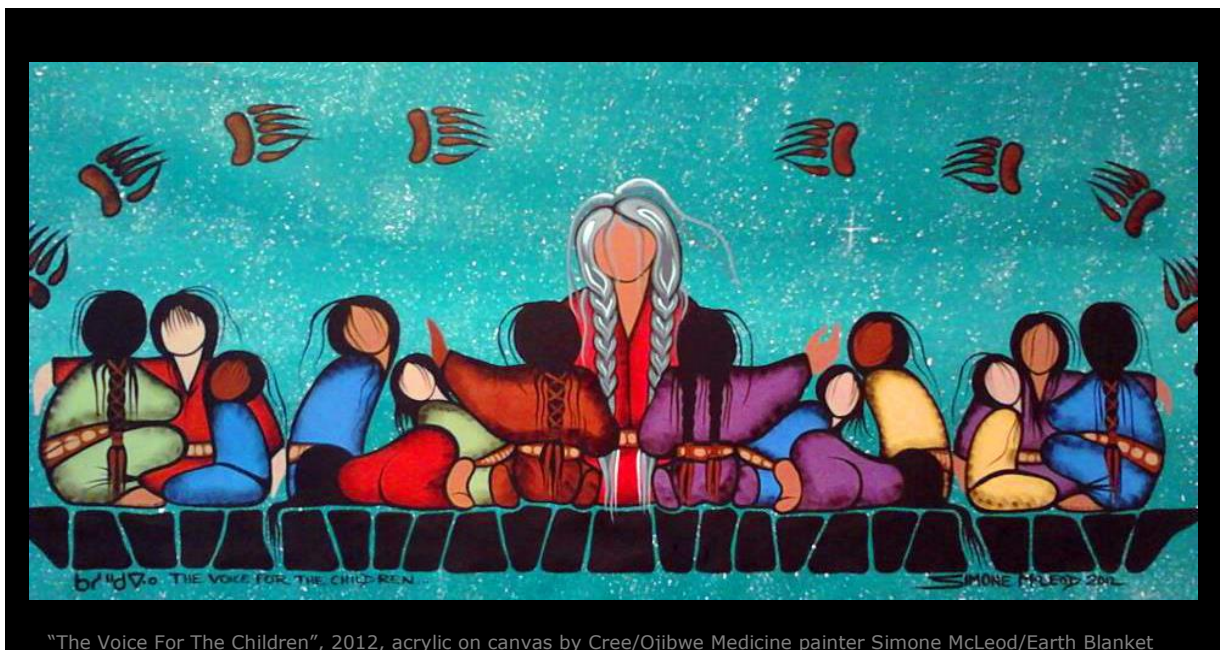


Nanabush (Wiinabozho) by Ojibwe painter Francis Kagige.

The reason for NOOKOMIS' hospitality was undoubtedly DIBAAJIMOOD's unequalled skills in telling stories. DIBAAJIMOOD, because of his incredible storytelling techniques, could not only hold an audience hang on his lips for an evening, two evenings – yes, even for the entire *biboon*, or winter season; he actually made up *new* stories that had never been told before. He became a popular guest at each festival or wedding where Anishinaabeg gathered to wed, sing and dance; his storytelling became so popular that it even exceeded the singing and dancing. However, as he pretended to know everything about life and the nature of things and about what was lying ahead in the future – which, in fact, he did –, his stories sounded more and more fantastic, so that in the end no one believed him anymore. Even when he tried to warn his people that men with pale skins and hair on their faces would one day cross the big salty sea and arrive in Waabanakiing, the land in the East, and eventually bring the Anishinaabeg adversity and death, he was met with unbelief and sneers. This was DIBAAJIMOOD's tragedy: he knew too much. His omniscience and wisdom became the root of the envy and hatred that other famous Anishinaabeg – and even certain *aadizookanaag*, NOOKOMIS' grandsons who approached to listen in at the storyteller sessions – started to feel for him.

Increasingly blackened and slandered by jealous humans and *aadizookaanag* alike, DIBAAJIMOOD became extremely disappointed and decided to advise the young not to make the same mistake he had made. He told them: "In order to gain credibility – and, more importantly, *keep* your credibility – you'd better make sure never to talk too much, or exaggerate, or brag, or – the worst sin of all: to show you know everything. *Do not give others a reason to envy or hate you.* It's better to hold your cards against your chest!"

Despite the bad treatment DIBAAJIMOOD received from his fellow Anishinaabeg, he is remembered as a masterful storyteller who taught his People the wonderful virtues of imagination, allurement, and poetry. So, in order to honor their first artist-storyteller, the Anishinaabeg from the North Country still call a true story DIBAAJIMOWIN and a true-story teller DIBAAJIMOOD.



"The Voice For The Children", 2012, acrylic on canvas by Cree/Ojibwe Medicine painter Simone McLeod/Earth Blanket

Well into the 20th century, Ojibwe children were sent away from their families on the reservation to live at strict government or church-run boarding schools. Here, in these strange and hostile surroundings, their own language and culture were totally wiped out. When the children, if they were lucky, finally returned to their families, they no longer knew the old language and could not communicate with or learn from the elders.

Needless to say that in the visually oriented, modern-day society we live in today, children's imagination gets far less exercise than in the old days when children's minds were still well-tuned to imagining characters and actions in the story world. Not being able to speak or understand the old language with its highly expressive nature doesn't help either.

Many *weshkiig* (youngsters), however, are today showing renewed interest and pride in ANISHINAABE BIMAADIZIWIN, the road that leads them back to the customs and values of their ancestors – and at the same time forward into, hopefully, a brighter future. But also an increasing number of folks who aren't so young anymore ask the elders who are still around – or consult books, or blogs like this one – to teach them how to derive meaning from the stories and from *Anishinaabemowin*, their native language.

Although it is certainly true that most of the formal storytelling traditions have gone with



the skilled storytellers who have passed on to the spirit world, what is promising and encouraging is that nowadays more and more Ojibwe folks, who want to use the art of storytelling to revive community tradition, return to the ancient practices of sharing human and spiritual experience. Thus, new practices of storytelling, adapted to modern living, are taking place within Anishinaabe families, even with those who live in urban areas;

like their ancestors of long ago they share stories around the kitchen table, or even revive the old communal fireside ritual by gathering around the fireplace with family and friends.

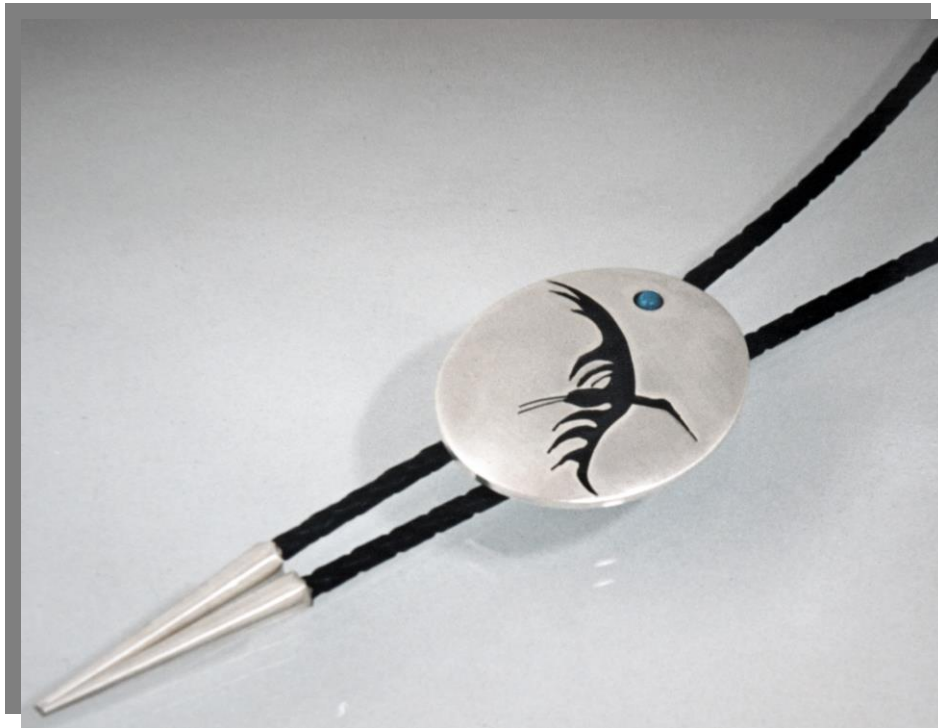
Furthermore, the fact that more and more 'tribal' schools and colleges combine academics with Anishinaabe language and culture might also prove helpful in creating a new generation of storytellers – who, in their turn, by building new practices of storytelling, can motivate, inspire, empower and heal those who come after...

The above image shows a painting by the late Anishinini Anishinaabe artist Carl Ray depicting an *Aadizokaanaa Giigoonh* (a legendary Spirit Fish) called "Snake Sturgeon"

**AJIJAAK:** Ajijaak, the Sandhill Crane, also called *Baswenaazhi*, the Echo Maker, is responsible for leadership and external communication because of his loud and clear voice. Members of the AJIJAAK (Crane clan) are traditionally noted for giving direction and for their oratory skills. The WAABAJIJAAK or White Crane clan provided for the traditional hereditary chiefs, and some of the more powerful chiefs of the *Waabitigowiniwag* - the ancestors of the author who lived at the falls and rapids of [Waabiting](#) (nowadays Sault Ste. Marie) -, met the first French explorers of Lake Superior.

Ajijaak, the spirit bird that showed the People the way during their thousands of years lasting migration from the Land of Dawn (near the Atlantic shores) to the Great Lakes area and beyond, is forever linked with the history of the author's forefathers. He holds a special place in the hearts and the stories of the *Gichigamiwininiwag* (the Ojibweg of the Great Lakes) in recognition of one of the defining moments in their history: the founding of Baawiting on Michigan's Upper Peninsula, and after that the establishing of two more settlements much farther to the west. Baawiting, the fifth stopping place in the migration of the Anishinaabe Peoples, was to be the political and economical center of *Anishinaabe Aki*, their new land in the west, and from its rapids the diaspora spread out to the borders and islands of *Gichi-gami* (Lake Superior), as far as Manidoo-miinis and Mooningwane-kaaning-minis, two islands located respectively at the far end of Gichi-gami and in a bay in the southwestern part of the lake. Here, in *gaa-zaaga'eganikag*, the "land of many lakes", wild rice grew in the lakes and streams, fish and fur was plentiful and the soil was fit to grow large patches of corn and squash; here, in the promised land, the People found life better than it had been in the east.

Thus the crane played a central role in the creation of the fifth, sixth, and seventh stopping place. As the *miigis* shell had done before the People reached Baawiting, Crane served as a beacon for the Southern Ojibweg in their quest for *gaa-zaaga'eganikag*, the "land of many lakes" and he became the symbol of the fulfillment of a Prophecy that had been delivered to them when they still lived in the Dawn Land.



**AJIJAAK BIMISEWIN (Flight of the Crane)** overlay bolo tie by Zhaawano Giizhik: oval 14K white gold slide backed by a sterling silver plate; sterling silver bolo clasp; turquoise stone in shadowbox setting, braided black leather bolo cord with 14k. white gold tips. The bolo slide measures 55 x 45 mm (2.17 x 1.77 inches). Click on image to read more about the topic.

"Many moons ago, [GICHI-MANIDOO](#) sent Ajjaak (a sandhill crane) to earth on a mission. While the spirit-bird was descending, he uttered loud and far sounding cries, which were heard by *ininiwag* (humans) and *manidioog* (spirits) alike. Some say the cries must even have startled [Makadeshigan](#), the spirit of the Underworld! Slowly circling down above *Gichigamiin*, the Great Fresh Water Lakes, sending forth his echoing cry, pleased with the numerous whitefish that glanced and swam in the clear waters and sparkling foam of the rapids, crane finally chose a resting place (known as the fifth stopping place)



**WIINDAMAAGEWIN / MIKINAAK IDASH AJIJAAK:** "Communication /Turtle and Crane" - 14K white gold & sterling silver post-back ear jewelry by Zhaawano Giizhik. It is an abstract image of Crane resting on a turtle's back. Turtle symbolizes a hill overlooking beautiful Baawiting, which Crane chose as his resting place after leading the People all the way from the Atlantic coast to the promised land in the heart of the Great Lakes area. Viewed in a larger context, Mikinaak (turtle) represents Turtle Island, the American continent where GICHI-MANIDOO placed the Original inhabitants of the Land. Click on image to read more.

on a hill overlooking beautiful Baawiting. Again the crane sent forth his solitary cry and the clans of Makwa (bear), Awaasii (catfish), A'aawaa (loon), and Moozonii/Waabizheshi (combined clans of little moose and marten) gathered at his call. They soon congregated a large town near the Rapids and a Ceremonial Lodge of the Midewiwin (Way Of The Heartbeat Society) was erected there, and for the second time since the People had left the Dawn Land the sound of the Midewiwin Grandfather Drum reverberated across the land and the waters. Since then the Sandhill Crane, who is sometimes called Baswenaazhi (the Echo Maker) and regarded as a symbol of eloquence and leadership, presides over all councils.

**AKI:** the land, or mother earth. Also alternately called **OMAAMAMA, NIMAAMAA-AKI, OMIZAKAMIGOKWE, MOOSHOKAMIKWE, ASHKAAMIGOKWE, GOOKOMISINAN,** and **OGASHINAN.** In a broader context, Aki means world, or cosmos. **MANIDOOKWE** (Spirit Woman) is an ancient term denoting a maternal, spiritual ancestor, referred to as **the Mother Spirit, or the land.**

In the old days, the Anishinaabeg, in particular the men and women belonging to the **Midewiwin** (Way Of The Heartbeat Lodge), listened to the world and the *manidoo*g and *aadizookaanag* (guardian spirits) and the animals that live in it. They sought their images and voices in ritual stories and songs and dreams and visions and depicted them on rocks and on medicine bags, in birch bark scrolls, and on a myriad of other items and utensils. In return the world and all the animals and spirit beings that dwell there disclosed to these individuals - and their communities as a whole - essential norms and principles for *bimaadiziwn*: how to live long and healthy lives (see also: **ANISHINAABE BIMAADIZIWIN** and **MIDEWIWIN**).



"Communication". This outline painting by the late Ojibwe Medicine Painter Carl Ray depicts the Anishinaabe worldview, stressing the communication, reciprocal responsibilities and mutual obligations that exist between all life-giving and life-sustaining forces and beings of Aki, the universe.



**AN AADIZOKAAN (SACRED OR TRADITIONAL STORY) ABOUT THE CREATION OF AKI (THE UNIVERSE):**

"Many moons ago, when the World was not yet born, GICHI-MANIDOO (The Great Mystery, sum of all Mysteries) beheld a vision.

It saw in its dream a vast sky filled with many stars and the day-sun and the night-sun, and it saw the earth in the form of a giant sea turtle.

In order to make its dream come true GICHI-MANIDOO first decided to make rock, water, fire, and wind.

These substances were born spontaneously, seemingly out of nothing, and GICHI-MANIDOO breathed into each one its sacred life breath.

From these four sacred substances, each gifted with a different soul and spirit and nature and shadow, GICHI-MANIDOO created the world it had seen in its vision, filled with the sun, the stars, the night-sun, and the earth.

To the day-sun GICHI-MANIDOO gave the powers of light and heat and rays to warm the earth.

To the night-sun GICHI-MANIDOO gave the powers of light and the power to watch over the earth and all her children at night.

To the earth GICHI-MANIDOO gave the power of growth and healing, and on and beneath her surface it formed hills, mountains, plains, valleys, lakes, rivers, streams, bays, wells, ponds, and even underwater streams. To these waters he gave the twin powers of purity and renewal. To the wind GICHI-MANIDOO gave music-making qualities and it infused in it its own power of breath of life.

Then GICHI-MANIDOO made plants and animals (and birds, insects, and fish) and, finally, its breath created man..."

-Excerpted from the story "[Teachings Of The Eagle Feather, Part 7](#)" by Zhaawano Giizhik.



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Image: SPIRITS OF THE MOUNTAINS, acrylic on canvas by Simone McLeod/Aki-egwaniizid. Click on image to view details.

I will never forget the first time I saw this magnificent painting done by my friend Simone McLeod, called "Spirits Of The Mountains". As I was pondering the painting it suddenly dawned on me that to us, the mountains are not just a place of beauty and a place to dream, a place to seek and fulfill personal visions; they are *gekinoo'amaagedjig*, teachers as well. It is very imaginable that it was through the mountains or the vicinity of the mountains, through their often savage, inhospitable, and mysterious character but also the breathtaking, panoramic beauty they hold and display, that Simone's ancestors discovered and acknowledged – and learned to appreciate and cherish - the existence of GICHI-MANIDOO, the sum of all Mystery, the original source of all Life. No other place, no landform, no physical feature of Mother Earth could do that better than the mountains. There were no other places on AKI (Earth) that filled the Anishinaabe people with more humbleness and gratitude than the mountains, or the proximity of the mountains. No other place moved them to such awe or so led their minds to thoughts of GICH-MANIDOO and GAAGIGEKAMIG (infinity) as did the mountains. And no force on AKI allowed the Anishinaabe people to understand more profoundly their unique place in relation to all other living beings, yes to their unique place in the whole of cosmos, as did *asiniiwajiw mishoomishag*, the mountain grandfathers in the West..

This knowledge, this understanding, is something we owe to the creator of this magnificent painting. It is a gift to be grateful for, because through her work, this gift to us, it was she who has brought the grandfathers back to life, for all of us to see.

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Click on image to view details of this collar necklace designed and handcrafted by Zhaawano Giizhik.



**A traditional story about [how Sky Woman recreated the earth](#)**

"The first mother of the Anishinaabeg was once an AADIZOKAAN, a supernatural being residing alone in the sky. Her name was GIIZHIGOOKWE, or Sky Woman. GICHI-MANIDOO, the Creator of Earth and Skies, pitying her loneliness, sent a male aadizookaan to Sky Woman to keep her company. ANIMIKII (Thunder), for that was his name, traveled to the sky lodge of GIIZHIGOOKWE and from the union that took place (rumor has it that Sky Woman showed her lover every hole and corner of the universe) were born the ANISH-I-NAAB-EG (a twin brother and sister), whom she planned to place on the back of a giant MIKINAAK (snapping turtle).

But first GIIZHIGOOKWE had to convince MIKINAAK to lend his back to the re-creation of the world, because at that time the world was inundated with water below her and most animals had been drowned in the Great Flood that had hit the First

World. As Sky Woman noticed that a few animals had survived the flood she called to her aid the giant turtle. He came to the surface so that she could sit on his back and call others to her side. Maang (the loon), Amik (the beaver), Nigig (the otter), and Wajashk (the little muskrat) were among her helpers.

That day, long ago, after she had descended from her sky lodge to the newly-created world in the shape of a turtle's shell, dancing all the way down in a sacred manner, GIIZHIGOOKWE spoke to the water animals as follows:

'I don't have all the powers of creation that GICHI-MANIDOO has. But I am a female spirit and I have a special gift. I have the power to recreate. I can recreate the world GICHI-MANIDOO created, but I can't do it by myself. I need your help. I need you to dive deep. I need you to bring me a handful of the original soil made by GICHI-MANIDOO. The soil will be the seed I use to recreate the Earth.'

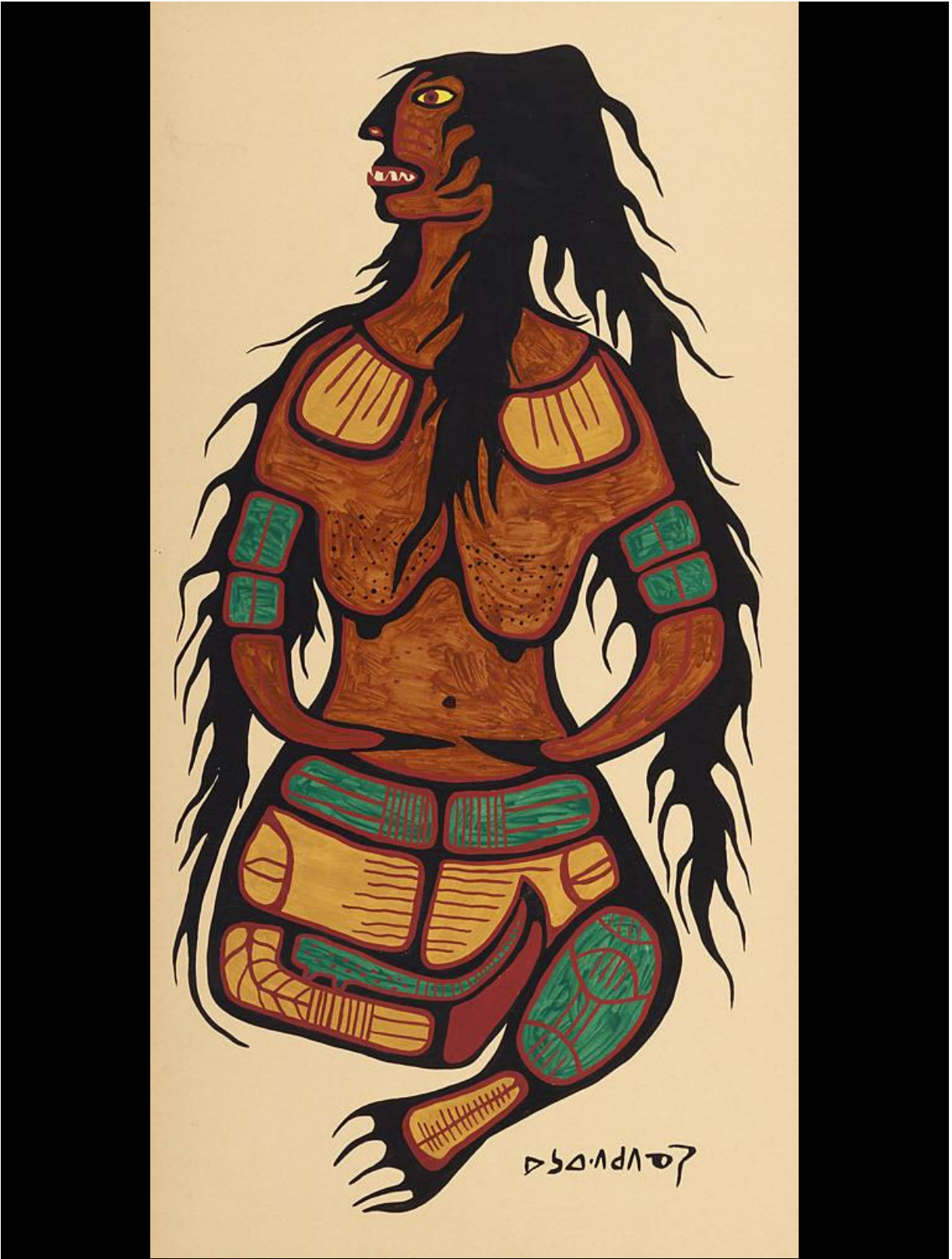
[Click on image to view details of this collar necklace designed and handcrafted by Zhaawano Giizhik.](#)

All day long the water animals took turns trying to reach the soil covered by the great depth of water but to no avail. At the end of the day it was only Wajashk the little muskrat, not used to swimming in deep water, who had not given it a try. The brave little animal decided that with no one else available to help it was up to him to do the job. He took many deep breaths and dived down and down."



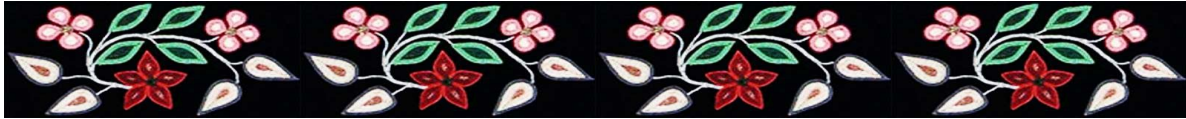
As he finally came back to the surface Wajashk had clutched in his paw the soil from the bottom of the sea. Gratefully GIIZHIGOOKWE took the soil, dried it and breathed life into it, then rubbed it on the turtle's back. She rubbed the soil round and round and as she did so an island took shape above the water. GIIZHIGOOKWE continued to move over the new soil. She walked in wider and wider circles; some say it took her 14 summers to complete the job. And so the Earth was recreated. Forever after the Anishinaabeg called the world MIKINAAK-OO-MINIS, or Turtle Island.

Once the new island was complete, GIIZHIGOOKWE nurtured the twins to manhood and womanhood, and then, as her purpose and nature were finally fulfilled, she danced her sacred dance upward into the fading light of the sky. Here, after she had reached the moon, she changed her name in WEZAAWI-GIIZHIGOOKWE, Yellow Sky Woman, and she became known as NOOKOMIS DIBIK-GIIZIS, Grandmother Moon. From here on, Nookomis Moon watched over her children by night; by day MISHOOMIS GIIZIS (the Sunfather) and OMIZAKAMIGOOKWE (the Earthmother) took care of them. And Nookomis' existence, her gift of life, and the primacy of women are still remembered by the Anishinaabeg each time Dibik-giizis, the Night Sun shines on their precious island-home."



"Earth Mother" by Norval Morrisseau/Miskwaabik Animikii (Acrylic on kraft board)

Above illustration: In this beautiful and powerful painting, depicting Manidookwe or Mother Earth, the Earth has the qualities of a woman who is giving and nurturing, her breasts heavy with milk, her pelvis and fertile vagina opening stylistically echoing the (possible) contours of a Miigis cowry shell. Since cowry shells are thought to possess life-giving and healing powers and held responsible for the origin of the Midewiwin, the artist possibly suggests that Aki (Earth) and Miigis (Shell) are passageways through which life emerges. See also: [MIDE-MIIGIS](#).

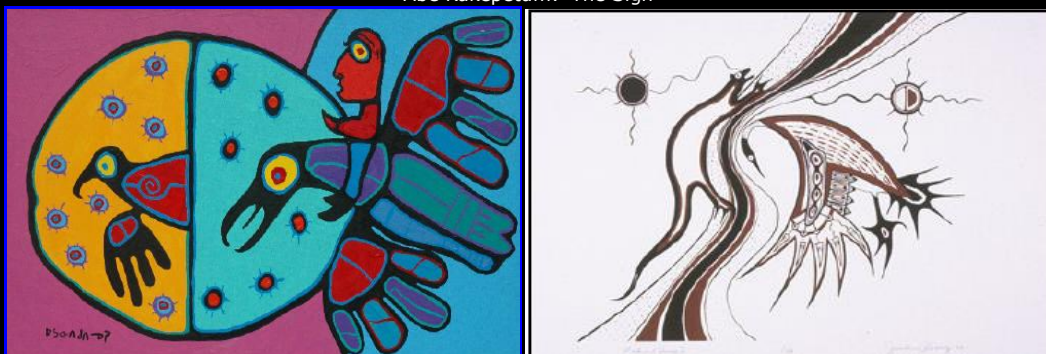


**ANANGOOG:** the stars. From of old, the constellations and star knowledge of the Anishinaabe Peoples relate to *aandakiiwinan* (seasonal changes), *nandawenjige* (hunting and fishing) and gathering activities such as: *bakibajige* or picking fruit, *bawa'am* or harvesting wild rice, *onjigawibii* or tapping tree sap, *manidookewinan* (ceremonies), and *aadizookewin* (storytelling).

In Anishinaabe cosmology, the celestial bodies of the upper sky are sometimes regarded as the thoughts of GICHI-MANIDOO, the Great Mystery of the Universe. Stars are associated with physical and symbolic light, and with enlightenment and wisdom. It is in the upper sky vault, too, that the Land of Peace is situated. It is a land of happiness reached within four days by the spirits of the deceased that travel *jiibay-miikana*, the trail of souls, the Milky Way. A dazzling blue light in the northern skies the *Anishinaabeg* sometimes see at night illuminates this trail: the *waasnode*, or northern lights. Also known as: *naanaate*, and *niimidiwag*. Since they are the spirits of the ancestors gone by, one is supposed never to whistle at them.



Abe Kakepetum: 'The Sign'



**Left:** "Ancestral Shaman In The Portals Of Time" by the late Ojibwe Medicine Art Painter Norval Morrisseau.

**Right:** Print by the late Oji-Cree Medicine Art painter Jackson Beardy, of Ojig the Fisher storming the Sky.

The three principal stars are *Ningaabii-anang* (the Evening Star in the west), *Waaban-anang* (the Morning Star of the east), and *Ojiig-anang* (the Fisher Star, or the constellation of the Big and Little Dipper). These and many other stars, their position and movement governed by The Great Laws of Nature, have each their own portion of the mystery of creation; each fulfills his unique role in the sacred stories that are told by the *aadizoogewiniwag* and *aadizoogekweg* (male and female story tellers) during the long winter nights.



Zhaawano Giizhik: "Ojiiiganang Aadizookaan" (Amazing Story Of The Fisher Star)

*Ningaabi-anang*, also called "Star Sinking in Waters" or "Women's Star", is a powerful medicine man residing in the realm of *E-bangishimog* (the West). He is the patron of all women and the former tutor of the younger *Waaban* (Dawn). Representing old age and *nibwaakaawin*, or wisdom, he teaches healing and patience and the need for self-restraint.

*Waaban-anang*, the Morning Star, is an equally powerful medicine man of the eastern skies, embodying youth and *gikendaasowin* (knowledge), which makes him the eternal rival of his former teacher, the Evening Star of the west. Although neither one has more power or medicine than the other, Dawn and Evening to this day continue their duel – thus symbolizing the eternal conflicts and dualisms within the human soul, and human society.

*Ojiig-anang* is a constellation of several bright stars resembling an *ojiig* (fisher) with an arrow sticking in its tail; called Big and Little Dipper, or Bear by the Euro-Americans. *Ojiig* is a weasel, or marten-like animal, small and fierce with a long body, an expert and lively hunter of the northwoods, who represents the *doodem* of hunters among several bands of *Anishinaabeg* from the Great Lakes area. He stands particularly for singleness of purpose, and good sense.



Multicolor gold and silver wedding rings by Zhaawano Giizhik: "Love Story Of Fisher Woman". [Click here to view details.](#)

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**ANISHNAABE-BIMAADIZIWIN**, the Native Way of Life, also called *mino-bimaadiziwin*: a good, wholesome, and balanced life as each individual should live in relation to his or her community and all of Creation in order to receive good fortune, good health, and peace of heart in this world; and to gain admission into the Land of Peace in the next world. Traditionally, material wealth does not enhance the status of a person in *Anishinaabe* society. Only courage, skill, and respect for the children and the elders and the sacred web of life leads to *bimaadiziwin*.

To the Anishinaabeg, *bimaadiziwin* or life has always been characterized and driven by factors of a material as well as spiritual nature. *Anishinaabe ishinaamowin*, their worldview, as well as the social structure of their communities and their cultural traditions, are based on the lessons taught by *bigwaji-bimaadiziwin*, the cycle of nature, and on their understanding that existence is a dynamic and continuous interplay between all of creation. This mutual interaction between life forces is continuously changing, but also affects - and is affected by - everyone and everything in the here and now, the past, and the future. Yet, although everything and everyone - natural objects and phenomena, human beings, man-made objects, animals, plant beings, spirit beings- is interconnected and exists beyond linear time and space, what distinguishes some beings from others is how they exist in the world *in relation to others*. The philosophical notion of *bimaadiziwin* (life), in particularly the concepts of *bimaadizi* (one category of life) and *bimaadad* (another category of life), is perhaps best described in the language itself.

*Anishinaabemowin*, the language spoken by Anishinaabe peoples, is made up of relationships and interactions with and between two fluid and interconnected types of existence, called [bimaadizi/bimaadad](#). Anishinaabe nouns and verbs belong to either of

both grammatical classes, which are based on an animistic concept rooted in thousands of years of observation and interaction with different life forms, called *bimaadiziwin* (Life). To view bimaadiziwin and follow grammatical categories in terms of bimaadizi and bimaadad reflect the cognitive orientation of the ancestors, who understood that *gakina gegoo bimaadad idash gakina awiyya bimaadiziwag*: "everything and everyone is alive".

**Bimaadizi** and bimaadad (bimaadis and bimaadan, or pimaatis and pimaatan in the language of Northwestern Ojibweg from Canada) are often wrongly translated by language scholars as "animate" and "inanimate", a Western-oriented concept expressed through formal grammar rules that (misleadingly) structure Anishinaabe languages by describing things as alive (possessing spirit) and dead (not possessing spirit).

This animate/inanimate dichotomy, imposed upon Anishinaabemowin by the Europeans that took over their lands, do not at all reflect Anishinaabe ishinamowin (the worldview of Anishinaabe Peoples). The distinction between bimaadizi and bimaadad is never fixed, nor does it imply a contradistinction - but rather complementariness. The lines between both categories could blur at any given time, depending on the nature of the object spoken of - which was always, sooner or later, liable to change.

It is important to understand that bimaadizi and bimaadad existences do not reflect western worldviews; the key to understanding these relationships can be found in the traditional stories, ceremonies, and philosophical teachings of the MIDEWIWIN and



WAABANOWIN, two age-old animistic-medicinal institutions of the Anishinaabe Peoples conserving the ancient teachings on human conduct and a spiritual way for living. As the understanding of what is bimaadizi or what is bimaadad reflects the traditional cyclical view of reality of the Anishinaabe Peoples, it depends on the context - and sometimes on the dialect spoken of a region or an area if a being or

object is considered bimaadizi or bimaadad. All bimaadizi beings will eventually become bimaadad, and at the same time bimaadad beings will always influence the bimaadizi world. For example, *mitig*, a tree, which is understood to belong to the bimaadizi class, may be cut down or its twigs cut off to be made into a man-made object such as a chair or table or a cradle board hoop, which belong to the bimaadad class; or the tree or its twigs will eventually decompose and return to *aki* (earth), which, like most natural features, is looked upon as a living being of the bimaadad class. Also, an *opwaagan*, a pipe, which belongs to the bimaadad class, will eventually turn bimaadizi because with frequent ceremonial use, all *bemaadizijig* (humans) touching the pipe rub part of their *ojichaag* (soul, spirit) onto the stem, enough for the object to eventually become a bimaadizi being.

In Anishinaabe grammar, all beings and objects of the bimaadizi class are permeated with a certain life quality based on the way they exist in the world, where bimaadad "beings" and "things" and "objects" have a particular life quality based on how they *presently* exist in the world. To the bimaadizi class belong nouns for people, animals, some plants and some objects which can house *manidoo* (spirit) and items like flour, kettles and spoons, the sun, the moon, stars, some nature objects, and ceremonial and/or cultural items. All other nouns belong to the bimaadad class. The verbs and demonstrative pronouns existing in Anishinaabemowin are also categorized along the same bimaadizi-bimaadad lines. All verbs making reference to beings of the bimaadizi category, like people, spirits and *aadizookanag* (supernatural beings playing a role in dreams and sacred stories), animals, birds, fish, insects, some plants, and trees are all -



but not always - grammatically *bimaadizi*; man-made and acquired items such as tables, meat, *wiigwaas* (birch bark), and *wiigiwaaman* (houses), some minerals and plant species and natural features like earth, water, lakes, mountains, and for instance rainbows and clouds and thunderstorms are usually – but not always – *bimaadad*.

Usually, *bimaadizi* nouns in plural take the ending */-g/*, and *bimaadad* nouns - */-n/*, while some verbs are used with a *bimaadizi* object, and others with a *bimaadad* object. For instance, the verb “live” is *bimaadizi* when its object belongs to the *bimaadizi* category, and *bimaadad* when the object of the verb belongs to the *bimaadad* category. Thus, it is *mitig miskonaagozi*, the tree appears red (the used verb is rendered in the *bimaadizi* form since trees belong to the *bimaadizi* class), and *wajiw miskonaagwad*, the mountain appears red (the used verb is rendered in the *bimaadad* form since mountains belong to the *bimaadad* class). However, when a mountain that appears red becomes a “person” in an *aadizookaan* (sacred story told at winter nights), it might “change” into a being of the *bimaadizi* class, and it is not improbable that the used verb that determines its alleged color will change from *miskonaagwad* to *miskonaagozi*.



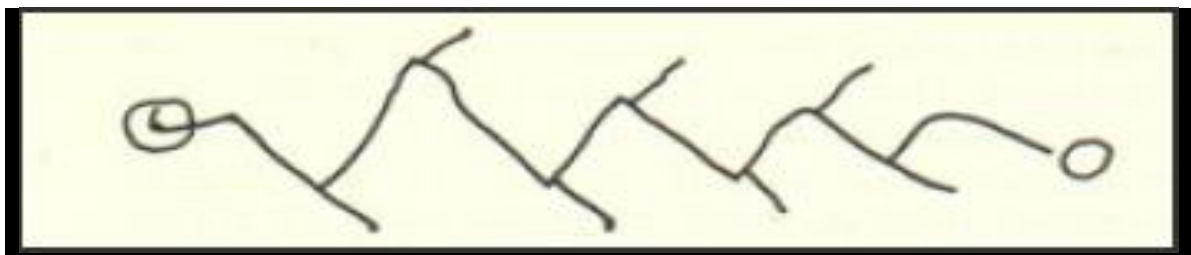
Ojibwe Medicine painter Leland Bemaminojmat Bell: “Oath For Peace (Around the tree Of Life)”, acrylic on canvas, 1983. Members of the Mide lodge assemble around Midewaaticg, the tree of life. Click on image.

To live a good way of life is the central goal for the traditional *Anishinaabeg*. This goal cannot be achieved without one’s own personal efforts or the aid of specialists (medicine persons); nor can it be obtained without the effective help and cooperation of certain nonhuman persons called *aadizoogaanag* (“our grandfathers” or spirit-helpers), who inhabit all layers of the universe. Reciprocal responsibilities and mutual obligations, not only between humans, but also in connection with *all* life forces and beings of the world are simply taken for granted. *Inaabandamowinan* (dreaming) or seeking *wasayaa-bindamiwin* (a vision) are the primary means by which one can enter into direct social interaction with persons of the nonhuman category. Maintaining a high moral standard within *Anishinaabe* society, honoring the principle of mutual obligations between all life forms, and obtaining power from both *aadizoogaanag* and *bawaaganag* (grandfathers and ancestors appearing in dreams) are equally essential conditions for obtaining *bimaadiziwin*.



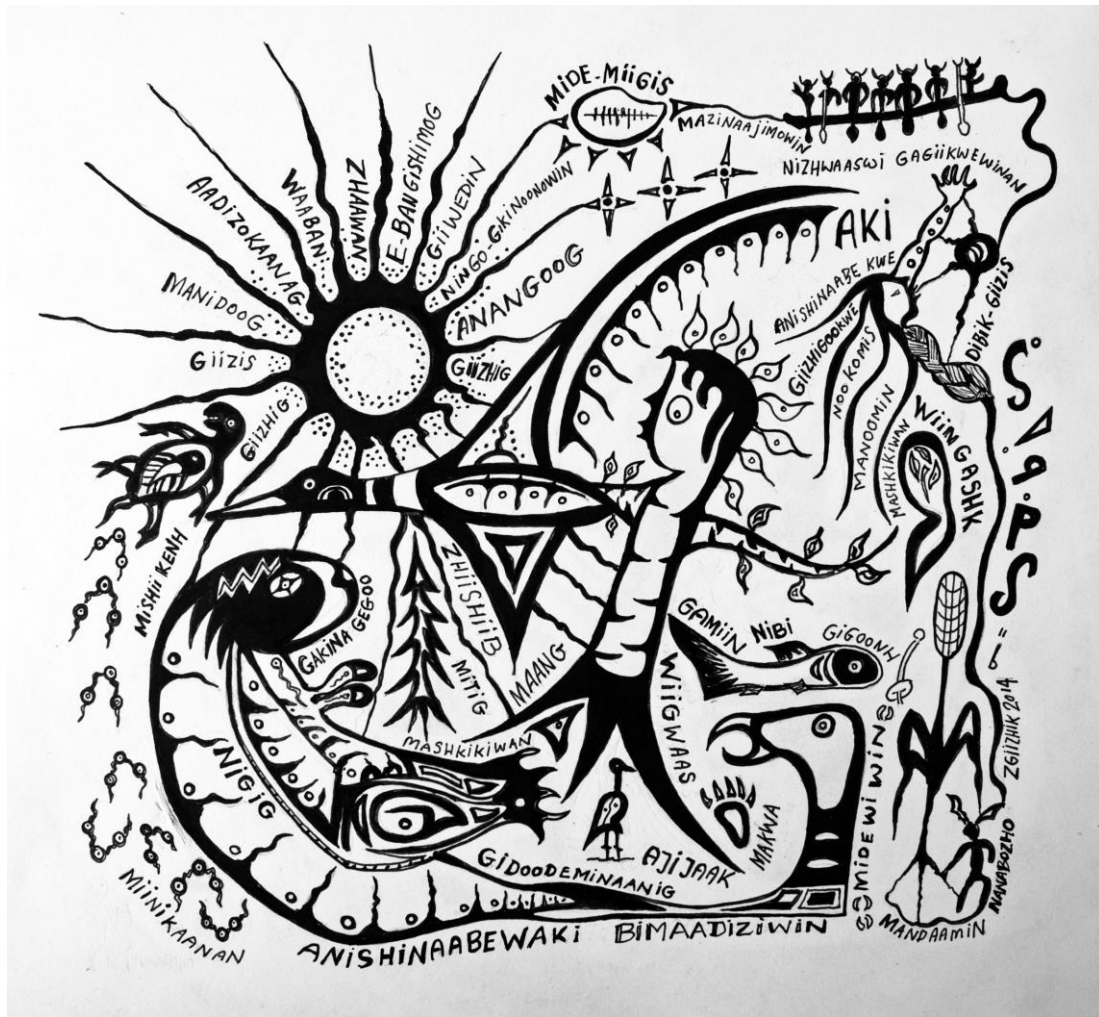
Pictorial Legend painting by the late Norval Morrisseau depicting several realms of cosmos, with a continuous interaction and a reciprocal exchange between several life forms, corporeal as well as incorporeal.

The teachings of *Midewiwin*, the Society of Medicine and Ethics, dictate that each person has a path to follow, called The True Path of Life, a capricious trail with many digressions (dangers and temptations) traveling over four "hills": infancy, youth, adulthood, old age. This trail of life was originally depicted by the ancestors on ancient, sacred birch bark scrolls, as a stylized path with seven or nine digressions or lines leading from life's main trail. Kept safely within the caches of the *Mide* spiritual practices, the teachings of the True Path of Life have been passed down for many centuries.



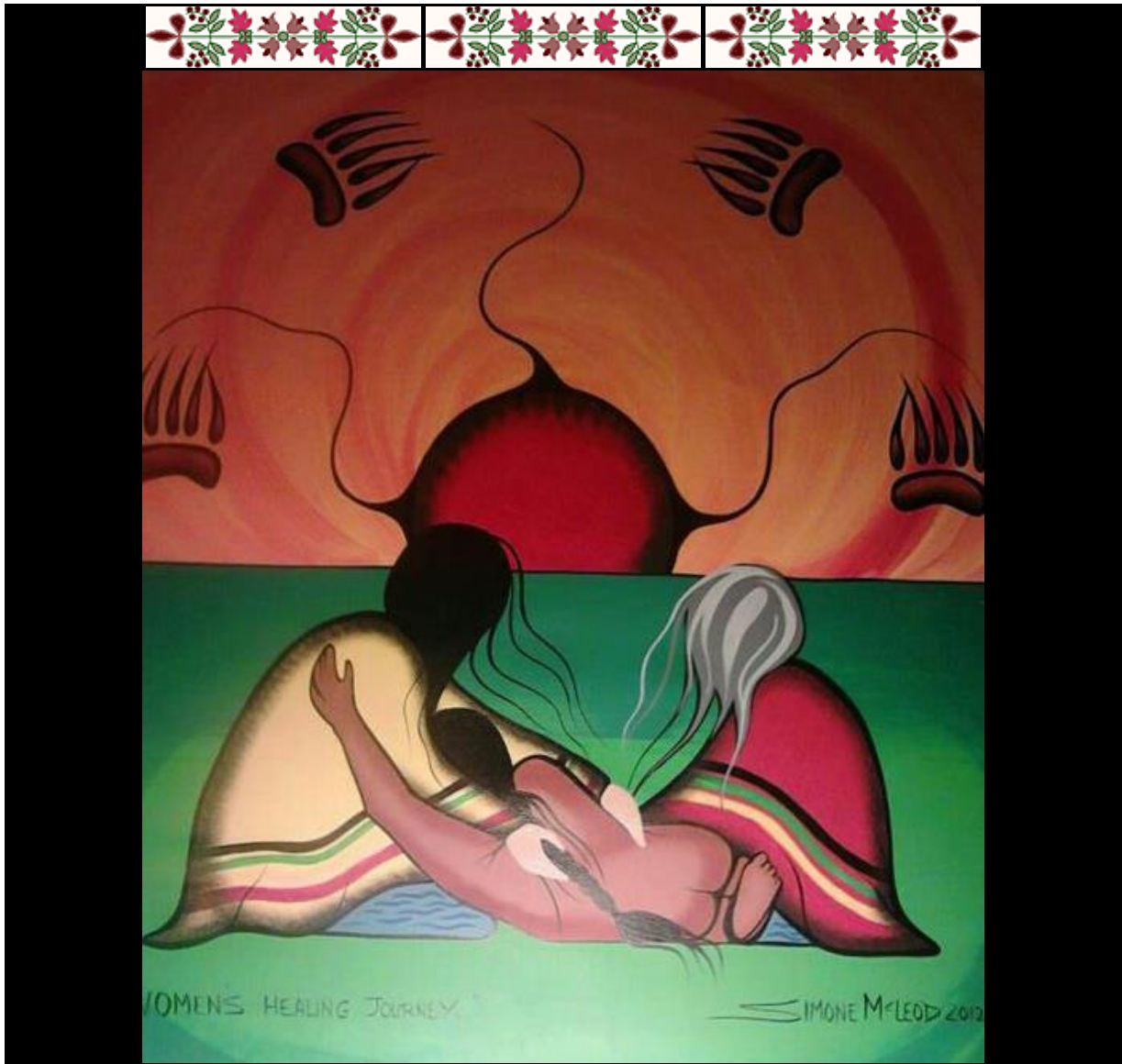
Midewiwin diagram of Anishinaabe Life Road

For a *Midewiwinini* or *Midewikwe*, to depart from *mino-miikana bimaadziwin*, the true path of life, and not return is equivalent to death. But since digression has rarely a permanent character, he or she is expected to withdraw annually in vigil and prayer, to ask the *aadizoogaanag* for guidance, and to review his or her life to determine whether he or she is still on the true path. See also: **NIZHWAASWI GAGIJKWEWINAN** (page 137).



**ANISHINAABEKWE:** a daughter of the *Anishinaabeg*. As every *Anishinaabekwe* deserves honor and love for her gift of life, so does the earth deserve veneration. In honoring Mother Earth through prayer, dance, and ritual songs, the People display their veneration for the preeminence of womanhood. In honoring women, men honor the gift of life and love. The praying woman in the image drawn with her left arm covered with *miigis* shells outstretched and her long hair touching the ground represents the connectedness of women with *Dibik-giizis* (the moon, first of mothers) and *Ogashinan* (the earth, source of all life). Her body is connected with the rays of the moon, while the earth is represented by both her loose hair (which symbolizes the long grains of *manomin*, or wild rice) and her right arm (which is depicted as a braid of *wiingashk* or sweetgrass).

In *Anishinaabewaki*, especially in the northern regions, the struggle for life was laborious and unrelenting and its grim necessities demanded a material culture that was simple, functional, and suited to a (semi) nomadic existence. An *inini* (man) would not readily measure an *ikwe* (woman) by the beauty of her body, or her sensuality, at least not when it came to finding a *wiijiwaagan*, a companion-for-life. How well she cooked, sewed, and perhaps her personality, were the things that counted. In her turn, a woman would judge a man primarily by his hunting-qualities: how many (and how often) deer or fish he brought home to her were the standards for a man.



"Women's Healing Journey" by Aki-egwaniizid (Simone McLeod) (Nehiya-Nakawe Ojibwe). Click on image.

**ANISHINAABEWAKI:** also called *Anishinaabe Aki*. Anishinaabe land, where once was no pollution and springs flowed still clearly through the heart of mother earth; where flocks of eagle soared in the sky, whitefish abounded in the lakes and countless deer roamed the woods in herds. Traditionally, the Anishinaabeg and the land are one. They are one complete entity.

**Aki**, besides being a geographical and political/economical concept, also has a spiritual/philosophical meaning. Anishinaabe metaphysics interprets the countless phenomena, forms, and forces of the natural world specific to man's immediate environment purely in a *cosmological* context. Yet an equally great respect is manifested for *all* entities within the cosmos, even those that are more remote to mankind. *All* life forms are considered (more or less) animated and inter-related "persons" or "relatives" possessing a consciousness, rationale, and a will of their own.

Thus, taken in the widest sense, *Aki* not only means "earth" or "country" but also "cosmos" – a diversified and complex social circle of overpoweringly immense and timeless proportions, completely devoid of emptiness and (linear) time, and permeated with and unified through certain values and properties such as kinship, mutuality, and reciprocity. In conclusion, the earth herself, a star, a sand dune, a river, a rain cloud, the winds, a human being, a fish, and so on – all these myriads of "next of kin persons" composing the sacred web of life can be traced back to one cosmic source. Some call it *JIBAMAAMA*, or *Source of Powers*; others call it *GICHI-MANIDOO*, or *Great Mystery*.

In the traditional *Anishinaabe* conception, the earth, which Sky Woman - with the aid of a muskrat - created on the shell of a huge turtle, is flat. *MIKINAAKOMINIS*, or *TURTLE ISLAND* as it is called, is filled with the usual beings (plants, animals, humans, and features of the land) as well as the supernatural. Since the Great Mystery divided the creation into four inter-reliant orders– physical world, plant world, animal world, and human world – and four powers that compose the physical world – wind, water, fire, and rock – and subsequently sent four supernatural beings to the earth to teach mankind wisdom and medicine - *Majiigawiz*, *Papiigawiz*, *Jibayaaboos*, and *Wiinaboosho* -, it is only logical that the *Anishinaabeg* tend to group everything in fours.



**A**nishinaabeg recognize four divisions of time: the day, the night, the moon, and the year; four directions in the universe: east, south, west, north; four kinds of plant beings: flowers, grasses, trees, and vegetables; four plant beings connected with the four directions and considered exceptionally sacred: tobacco, cedar, sage, and sweetgrass (see image to the left); four parts in everything that grows from the earth: the roots, the stem, the leaves, and the fruit; four kinds of animal beings: those who fly, those who swim, those who crawl, and those who walk; and four hills that mark the stages of human life: babyhood, childhood, adulthood, and old age.

Likewise, in spite of the general Native American belief that a person – be it a man, an animal, a plant, or a stone - consists of *three* parts, being: body (the physical part), spirit/soul (the consciousness associated with the person), and a mind (which resides in the brain), traditional *Anishinaabeg* sometimes distinguish at least *four* different component parts in each life form that are, to varying degrees, interchangeable. These are called: *wiiyaw*, which is the outward manifestation of self (the body, which may de-materialize into *jibay*, or a ghost, after death); *jichaag* or *ojichaagoma*, which is a person's true life force (spirit and soul, the core of self); *jiiban*, or a perceptual essence called "shadow" (a sixth sense); and *jiibaaman* (aura), which is an entity that emanates from a person's spirit/soul/shadow. By the same token, a lake, or a rock, or a tree, or a blade of grass possesses (at least some parts of) these substances as much as human beings or fish or tiny insects do. The possibility of interchanging body/ghost, spirit/soul, shadow, and aura within one and the same person, along with the occasional appearance of the *jichaag* of one life form in the *wiiyaw* of another, makes the world of the *Anishinaabeg* an evocative dream world filled with mystery, a sometimes adventurous or even terrifying place to live in: things are often not at all what they seem...

Besides *Aki*, the earth's surface, there are many other realms of cosmos, of which the four quarters of the world, the air above the earth, the sky dome, and the underworld are the most important. These and many other realms are unified in the changeless and

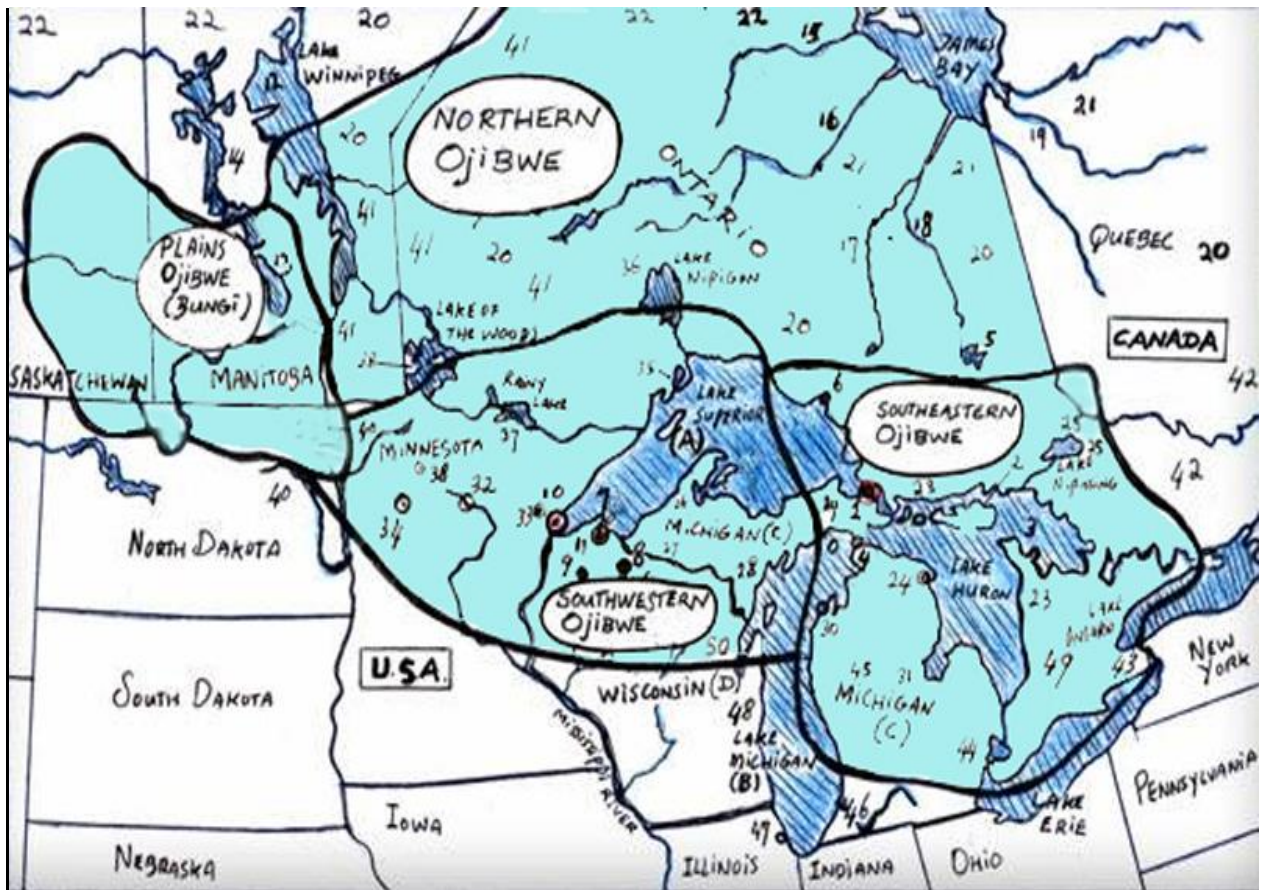
timeless universe surrounding the *Anishinaabeg* from time immemorial. There is a constant split or war between beings that dwell in the underworlds of earth and waters, and those that inhabit the earth's surface, the waters, and the regions of the sky. Both categories of supernatural beings – of underworld and upper world - are generally referred to as *aadizooagaanag* ("our grandfathers", or "makers of stories": persons of the other-than-human-category).



**Waawiyekamig, the cosmos** as the Anishinaabe ancestors perceived it, is made up of three spheres of layers. The first layer is Anaamakamig, the **underworld**. The underworld of the rivers, lakes, and seas house a myriad of *manidoog* (spirits) and *aadizookaanag* (spirit grandfathers and shape shifters). Both categories, *manidoo* and *aadizookaan*, are represented by fish and the fish spirits (*gigoonhyag*), including Makadeshigan, the Spirit of the Underworld. The silent, tranquil spirit of *giigoonh* the fish is from of old a totemic symbol of learning and transmission of science and medicine. The depiction of Mishiikenh, the mud turtle, refers to turtle as a grandfather and spirit messenger, an important intermediary between the lakes and rivers and their underworlds. Although physically the slowest of all creatures, Turtle symbolizes swiftness of the mind and is regarded as a master of communication of thought. The *jaasakiidjig*, the Mide-specialists often referred to as Shaking Tent Seers who are said to draw their spiritual healing power from the Thunder Beings, elected the turtle as their patron.

The second layer of cosmos is **Agidakamig, the middle world**, the earth's surface called MIKINAAKOMINIS (Turtle Island) that houses countless corporeal and incorporeal beings; represented in the image by *Anishinaabeg* (humans), *mitigoog* (trees), *waabigwaniin* (flowers) and *makwag* (bears). Makwa Manidoo, the Bear Spirit who guards the third door of the Midewiwin lodge, is a wise teacher and an *aadizookaan* (spirit grandfather) who opens doors to the spirits that live in the middle world. It is with the aid of the Bear Dance Ceremony that the *jaasakiidjig* sometimes pass on their spiritual medicine power to their patients or apprentices.

The third layer of cosmos is **Giizhigoong, the Sky World** and all of its beings, corporeal as well as incorporeal. These beings are symbolized in the image by *giizis* the sun and *dibik-giizis* the moon, rain and thunderclouds (representing the physical orders of the universe) as well as by *bineshiwag* (taloned birds of prey). The first of the bird species that comes into mind is Migizi (the bald eagle), who, with his sharp vision and ability to soar high in the sky world, represents all big predatory birds, and he is known as an intermediary between the humans of the middle world and the *manidoog* of the sky regions. Gekek the Hawk, who is often regarded as the natural counterpart of the supernatural *Animikii Binesi* (Thunderbird), also plays an important metaphoric role in the world of the Bird Nation. Finally, the image suggests a natural linkage between the birds of the sky world and plants of the middle world, as well as a *spiritual* connectedness of the birds with the physical orders of the cosmos like sun, moon, earth, stars, thunders, lightning, rain, wind, fires, et cetera. This special union with all of nature enables birds to sense the changes of the world, the changing of seasons, and the future events or conditions of things.



The Great Lakes basin, whose abundant freshwaters, ebbing and flowing with the seasons, feed into Turtle Island (the North American continent) and the Great Salt Sea (the Atlantic Ocean), has been for a thousand years the home of the Ojibwe Anishinaabeg, who for generations have lived close to the water's edge to survive. Since the day they came from the Dawn Land in the east to this vast region of bountiful freshwater lakes and islands and rivers and forests, its waters have nourished many generations of the People, physically as well as spiritually. Above is a drawing by the author of [ANISHINAABEWAKI](#), Ojibwe territory as it is today (since 1800); including [GAA-ZAAGA'EGANIKAG](#), the Land of Many Lakes, homeland of the Southern Ojibweg, and (since 1873) [NISHNAWBE ASKI](#) (Anishinaabe-aski Ishkoniganan Ogimaawin), land - or rather, a political organization) of 49 northern Ojibwe Anishinaabe, Anishinini Anishinaabe (Oji-Cree) and Cree bands. Nishnawbe Aski is roughly situated in the area between Lake Nipigon and the southern shores of James Bay in Ontario. To the left of Nishnawbe Aski, around Lake Winnipeg and Lake of the Woods in the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Manitoba, live the Nakawē Ojibweg (Winnipeg Saulteaux), and further left, in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Montana and North Dakota, live other groups of Nakawēk, often called *Bungee*, *Saulteaux*, or *Plains Ojibwa*. To read more about this topic, see the author's [article in the Dutch Wikipedia](#).

Along with *aadizoogaanag*, the Anishinaabe cosmos is also populated by countless *manidoog*, or mysteries (spirits), mystical forces that are sources of holy power suffusing and animating *all* things on earth that were created naturally. However dangerous some of these *manidoog* may be to human beings, they aren't necessarily considered *evil* beings. In *Anishinaabe* thought there is no sense of good and evil but only a natural balance of deeds: nature, however symbolized, qualified, or ritualized, simply *exists*.

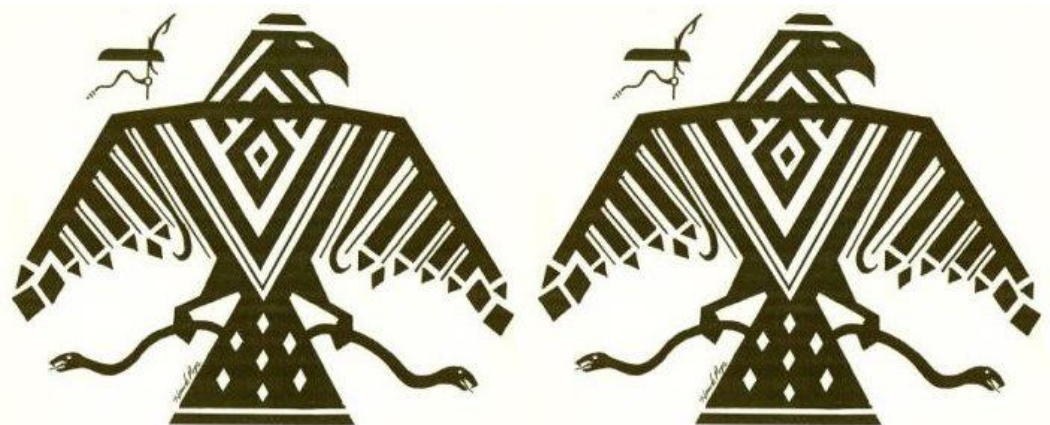
A *supreme manidoo*, the sum total of all mystery, is recognized in the form of **GICHI-MANIDOO** or Great Mystery, which is envisioned as the prime mover of creation, yet never attributed human form like (sometimes) the Christian God. It is the supreme spirit

that has divided itself and “enspirited” all things in the universe with a *jichaag* (consciousness) that is essentially the same. **Giizis**, the sun who supersedes all beings of the natural world, is the ultimate symbol of fatherhood and the spiritual relationship between the *Anishinaabeg* and the Great Mystery.

Like *aadizoogaanag*, the myriads of *manidoog* as perceived by the *Anishinaabeg* are natural forces, and manifestations of the “other” world. They too may resume human, animal, or plant-like characteristics (or of any given matter) without being conceived as such. It is in dreams and “spirit flight” (trance) that the human individual, that is, his *ojichaag* (spirit/soul, the essential self) comes in direct communication with the *ojichaagomaag* of these supernatural personalities. Some *manidoog* on or beneath the earth’s surface are remote and, in the capacity of *aadizoogaanag*, related to creation; others occasionally appear in natural guise with distinct human or animal personalities; **Wiinabozho**, **Wiisakejaak**, the **animikii-binesiwag** (thunderbirds), and the horned **misi-ginebigooog** (giant underworld-snakes) belong to this class.

Thunderbirds, which come in different sizes, are considered the most powerful *manidoog*. They migrate with the birds that appear in spring and disappear in the fall. They are in charge of the Second Degree of the Midewiwin Lodge, as well as the Shaking Tent ceremony of the Midewiwin. They assist the people by driving away the ominous earth and water *manidoog*. Thunderbirds and the *misi-ginebigooog* or Sea Serpents of the lake (see the below image) are adversaries. In fact, Thunderbirds feed upon the great horned Sea Serpent of the lakes. Visually, connecting lines from Thunderbird feathers sometimes run from the wings, illustrating the knowledge and power given from above, to those below. Thus Thunderbird symbolizes the connection between sky and earth.

Other *manidoog*, some of which are pure spirit, or inner essence of being, reside in certain extremely sacred places, such as glades in mysterious forests, or huge rocks along shorelines, or caves, or small lakes.







"Thunder dancer, Metamorphosis, and Thunderbird" by Jackson Beardy (Oji-Cree Medicine Painter)

Another class of *manidoog*, which inhabits the several regions above the earth, is associated with the four corners of the earth such as **giwedín** (the north), **waaban** (the east), **zhaawan** (the south), **E-bangishimog** (ruler of the west, father of the semi spirits *Madjiigawiz*, *Papiigawiz*, *Jiibayaaboos*, and *Wiinaboosho*), **Ningaabi-anang** (the Evening Star in the west) and **Waabananang** (the Morning Star in the east); or, like **Biboon** (winter), **Ziigwan** (spring), **Niibin** (summer) or the sun, the moon, the stars and the earth, they control the cycle of the seasons and the annual regeneration and termination of life.

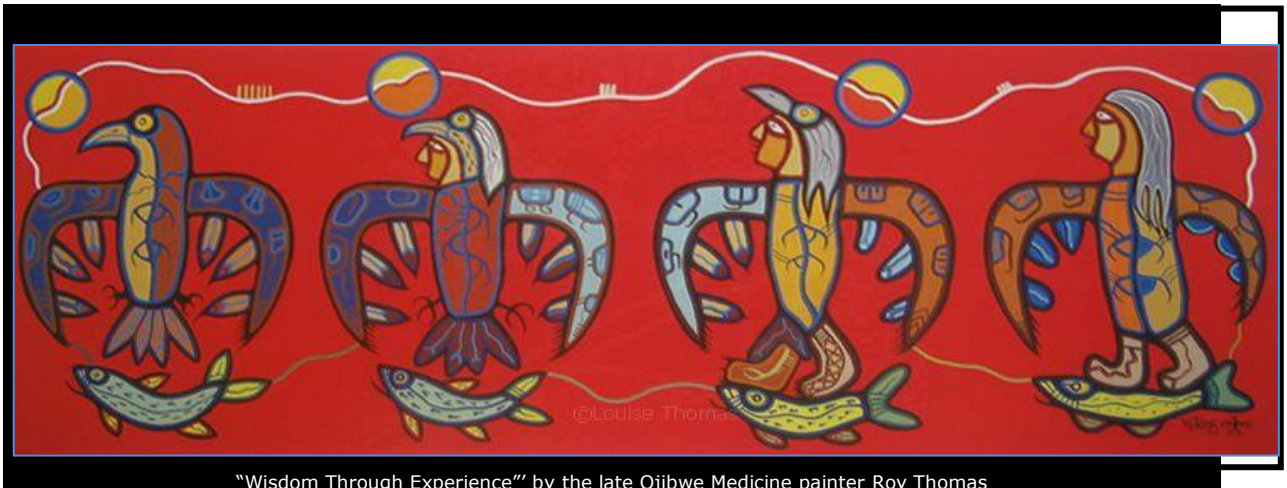
The different layers of the universe, although strictly separate, are vertically united by the great Tree of Life, which is **Giizhik**, the northern white cedar. Snakes, toads, and frogs are emissaries between the earth and underworld; likewise otters and turtles are intermediates between the lakes and rivers and their underworlds.



Above illustration: "Turtle, Symbol Of Spirit Flight: Traveling Through Space and Time" digipainting by Zhaawano Giizhik

Although the creatures of extraordinary dimension that inhabit the universe are usually referred to as *aadizoogaanag* and *manidoog*, they are called *bawaaganag* (dream visitors) when seen or heard in dreams.

Sometimes a grandfather or a spirit resumes the form of a human being - male or female - or that of an animal, or a bird, or a rain cloud, or a boulder, or a shell, or a kettle, or a pipe - or any given object of the physical world or material culture - which is essentially a temporary *wiiyaw*, or *outward* form the *aadizoogaan* or *manidoo* has chosen to animate with his *jichaag*, or *inner* essence of being.



"Wisdom Through Experience" by the late Ojibwe Medicine painter Roy Thomas

In traditional *Anishinaabe* life, the *aadizogaanag* and *manidoog* are presented in seasonally restricted, rather ritualized sacred stories. These parables and allegories depict the vital roles of "our grandfathers" in interaction with other beings (persons) as integral forces in the functioning of a unified cosmos – which the *Anishinaabeg* basically regard as one gigantic web of social relations, where the relationship between humans and the nonhuman and spirit world is one of continuous interfusion and reciprocal exchange.



"Baagitchigawag-Manitou-honouring-my-spirit-helpers" by Métis artist Christi Belcourt. [Click on image.](#)

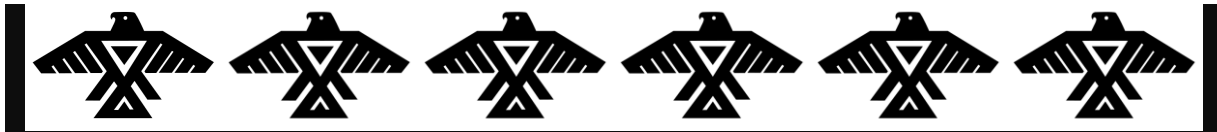


"Cycles" by Norval Morrisseau

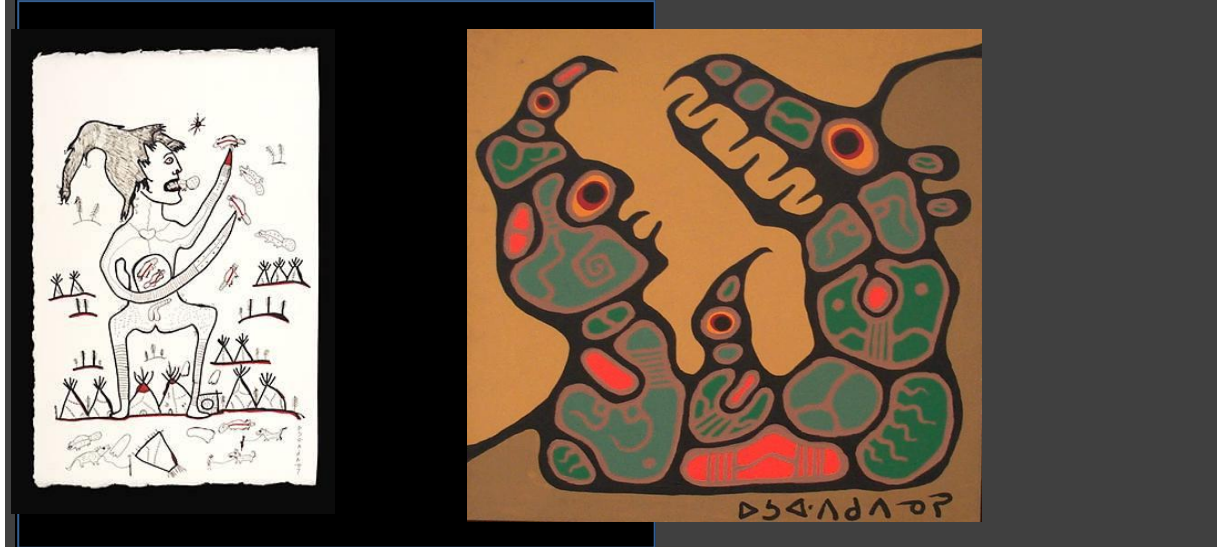
Some of the more prominent nonhuman - or sometimes semi human - persons who populate the sacred stories of both the northern and southern Ojibweg include: **Wiinabozho** (the Giant Rabbit, a popular trickster and hunter and a grandfather possessing great wisdom in the prolonging of life); **Wiisakejaag** (the Crane Spirit who after GICHI-MANIDOO created the world, destroyed the earth with a flood and created his own with supernatural powers); **Animikii** (the Thunder Grandfather; first of fathers; occasionally appearing in the lower sky regions, in the capacity of thunderbirds, inveterate enemies of the underworld creatures); **Nookomis** (Grandmother Moon; the first of mothers); **Giizis** (Father Sun, the supreme life giver, who is often portrayed in northern Ojibwe allegories as a young man walking on the winds); **Ogashinan** or **Omizakamigokwe** or **Gookomisinaan** (Mother Earth, source of all life, symbol of motherhood); **Nibi** (the Spirit of Water: the life giver, a sacred source, the nourishing and purifying blood of the earth); **wendaanimag noodinoon** (the four winds, whose dwelling places define the four directions); **Zhaawandazii** (the old Spirit of the warm south whose sighing and moaning in autumn release the gentle southern breezes that spread warmth and enchantment over the northwoods, and cause the *Indian Summer*); **Biboonikwe**, the manidoo who resides in the North and puts an end to growth and life until Ziigwan (Spring) arrives; **Gaa-biboonikaan** (*Ga-ba-boon-ga* or the Winter Bringer, a group of stars in the sky (Orion) that herald the winter); **Mishiikenh** the Mud Turtle (or *Makinaak*, the Great Snapping Turtle), an important intermediary between the human world and the incorporeal world); **Mashkasaswaabig** (Flint, quintuplet brother of the Four Winds, who at birth tore his mother to pieces and was penalized by the Great Hare who chipped pieces off his stony body); **Wiiqwaas** (the White Birch, child of the Thunder Spirit, sacred benefactor of the People); **Makwa** (the Bear, a grandfather who chose to take the earth walk as a spiritual teacher of mankind); **Ojiig** (the Fisher, a *manidoo* who assumed the shape of a weasel and ascended to the skies to steal the Summer but instead was changed into the Dipper constellation); **Wiindigoo** (winter spirit of excess: a human being from the north shores of Lake Nipissing who turned into a supernatural cannibal giant and was slain by a human hero called *Miigis*, or Shell); and **Gookookoo** (the Owl; powerful mediator between life and death, guiding travellers on the trail to the Land of Souls by loaning his eyes to them, a benevolent as well as malevolent *manidoo/aadizookaan* integrating light and dark; see page 99).

Other grandfathers and spirits, some more remote than others, are: **Makadeshigan** (the Black Bass, ruler of the underworld, patron of night and bad dreams); **Asabikeshi** (Spider Woman) who helped Wiinabozho bring Giizis (the Sun) back to the people and weaves the dream catchers to protect the children in their dreams; **Wiininwaa**, "Nourishment from the Breast", a woman who became immortal through

*manidoowiziwin* (the process of taking on qualities of a manidoo; daughter of *Nookomis* and mother of *Wiinabozhoo*); **Bagwajikwe** the Wilderness woman, a potentially dangerous female spirit; encountered by men on their dream quests; **Mishi-bizhiw** (the



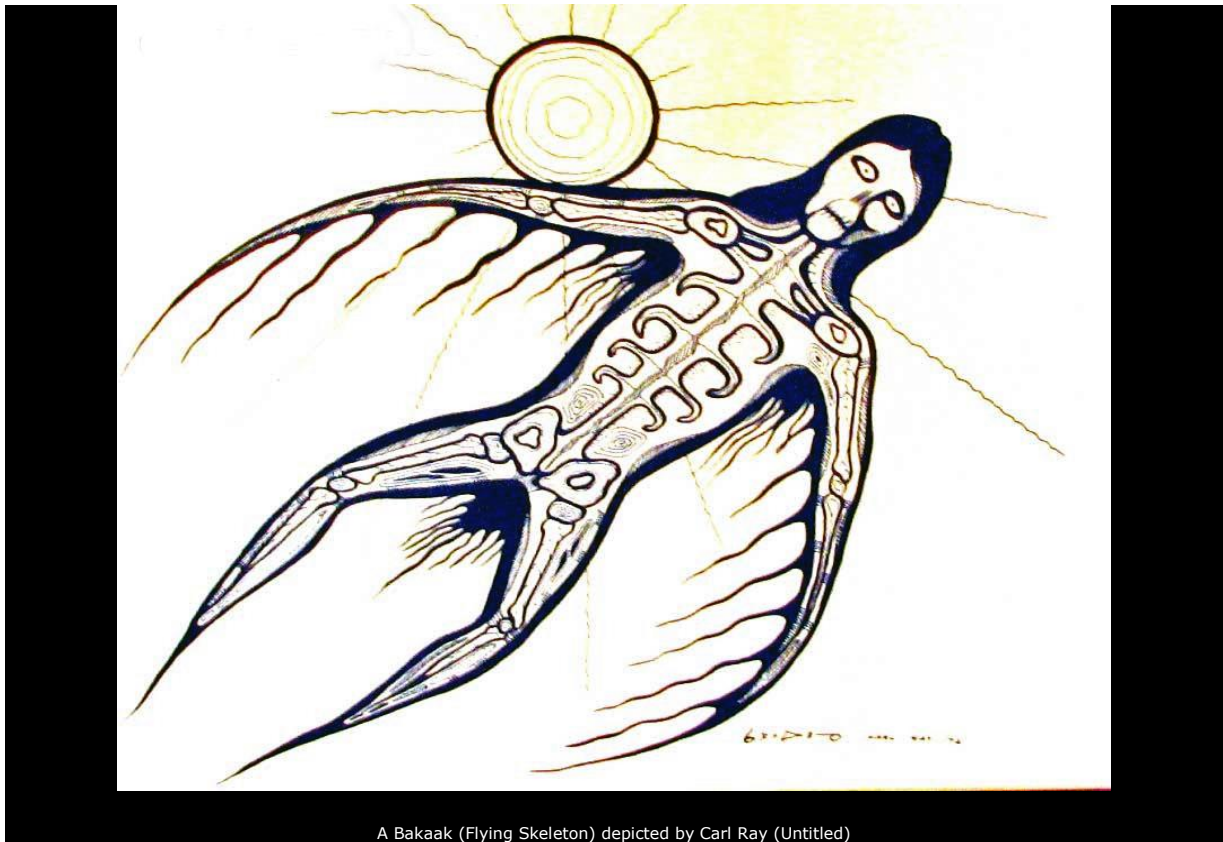
Stylized Anishinaabe thunderbird figures



**Left:** "Windigo" (Spirit of Excess), ink drawing. **Right: painting** "Thunderbird with Grandfather", both by the late Norval Morrisseau/Miskwaabik Animikii.

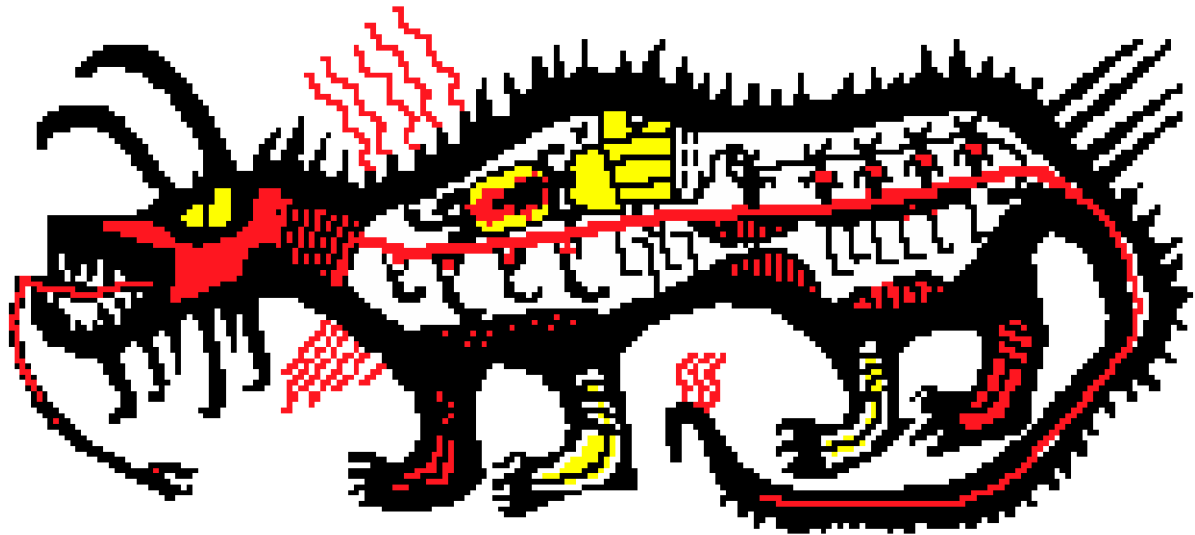
Magic Underwater Panther/Lynx associated with the sacred *miskwaabik* (copper) who provides food for the thunderbirds and is always on the watch and on the prowl in the waves of the Great Lakes); **Majiigawiz** (also known as **Gabeyang**, the west wind, eldest brother of *Wiinabozho*, who stole the wampum from the grizzly bears in the Land of the Setting Sun and gave it to the Anishinaabeg); **Papiigawiz** (also known as *Yenaadizi*, brother of *Wiinabozhoo*, patron of winds and dances, creator of breezes, whirlwinds, and hurricanes); **Jiibayaaboos** (Ghost Rabbit, youngest brother of *Wiinabozho* and the patron of music and the underworlds of earth and waters); **Gayanwe** (a legendary manidoo who seeks to destroy *Wiindigoowag*, or cannibalistic creatures); **Gitchi-misaabe** (also called Kitch-sabe or Bigfoot, a giant who teaches mankind the virtue of Honesty); **Mizabigam** (Little Man of Iron, a mysterious figure who inhabits picturesque caves and unique rock formations, deep arroyos and other places suitable for the seeking of visions); **memengwaag** (butterfly-spirits, which *Wiinabozho* created to please the children by throwing beautifully painted pebbles to the winds); **memegwesiwag** (noseless, hairy-faced anthropomorphic, dwarf-like friendly creatures that live on river banks and steep slopes in rocky areas around the Great Lakes who sometimes are seen paddling a stone canoe as they emerge from their rock home and who are famous for their medicine. They usually travel in small groups and appear only to pure-minded people – which are often children; **Nibiinaabekwe** (Sleep Being Woman or the sweet-voiced but treacherous Mermaid who lures people into the lakes); **Nibiinaabe** (Sleep Being; the Merman, a manidoo that dwells at the bottom of the sea, lakes, and rivers luring women in his hideaway, where they are changed into mermaids); **bagwajiniwag** (friendly little spirits who inhabit the sandy shores of lakes, warning passers-by of the fearful

Mermaid. They are sometimes called *apa'iins* or *pai'iins* instead, which literally means "little person"); **mishiinimakinakoog** (turtle spirits, mysterious island creatures dancing on high moonlit cliffs or "rowing" through forests, and who are occasionally heard shooting, but seldom seen); **Aniwyē** or **Mishi-zhigaag** a giant man-eating skunk



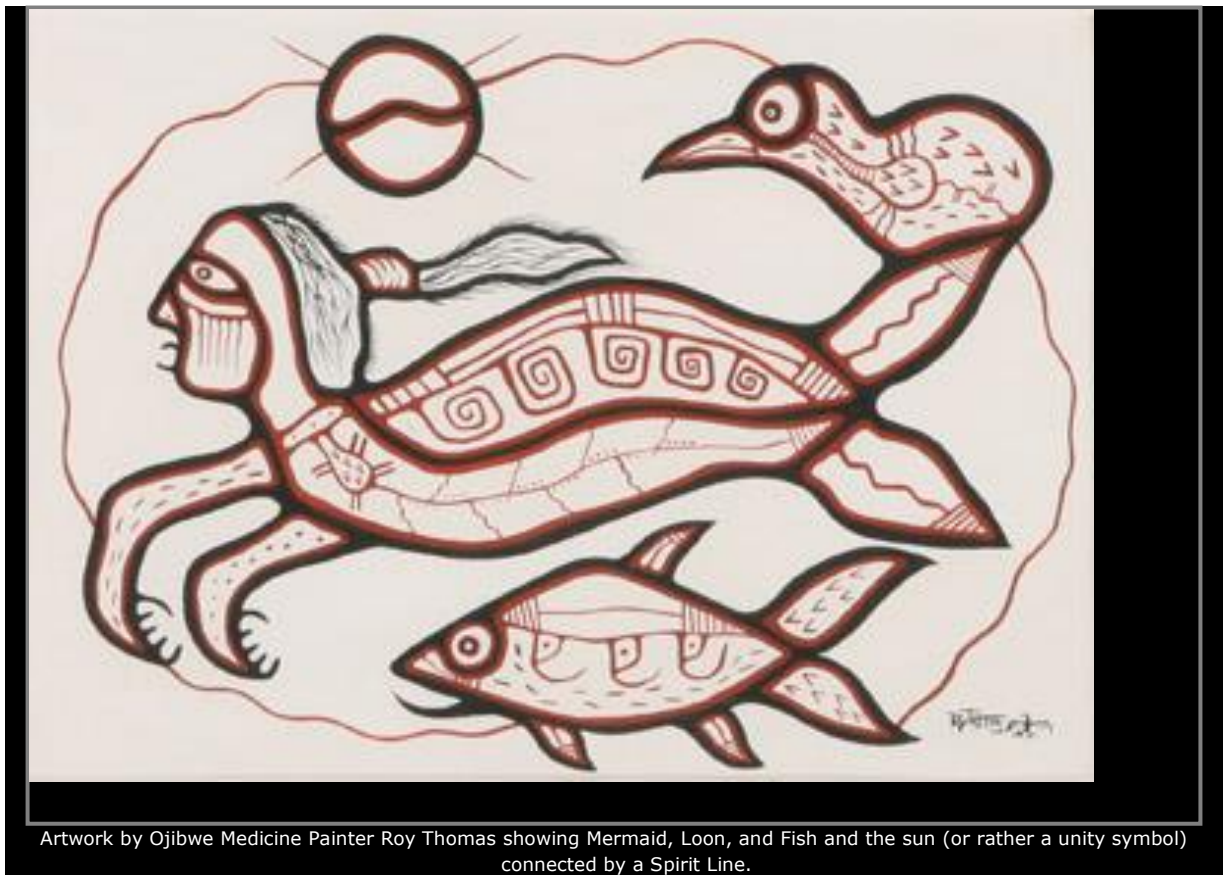
A Bakaak (Flying Skeleton) depicted by Carl Ray (Untitled)

monster who killed people by breaking wind at them, causing them to become sickened and die (Aniwyē was defeated by **Ojiiganang** (Fisher Star) and is according to tradition turned into an ordinary skunk by either Ojiiganang or the culture hero Wiinabozho, thus explaining why skunks spray; **Bakaak**, a flying skeleton, a person who was given this spirit form for committing an act of murder; **Chakenapok** or **Chakekenapok**, is in some aadizookaanan (sacred stories) the youngest son of E-bangishimog, the Spirit of the West; **Ayaase**, also "Aayaash" or "Iyash", "Filcher-of-Meat" (a Cree/Ojibwe character who has all kinds of adventures in which he kills or defeats strange monsters, then returns them to life as good people or animals); **Mizaawaabikamoo /Ozaawaa-bikamoo**, a Rock Manidoo (Spirit); **Mishi-naabe**, a giant; **Gawesind**, the Feared One, a figure who was assassinated by the little manidoo (spirits) after he had systematically bullied and harassed them; **Baa-iinsiwag**, little manidoo (spirits) that dwell on shores and beaches and warn humans at night of mermen and mermaids; **Mandaamin**, the spirit of Maize who was killed in battle by Wiinabozho and who by his death gave life to the hungry Anishinaabeg; **Ojiiganag**, the Fisher Star (see: **ANANGOOG**, page 21); **Zhezhoobii'iged**, the Spirit Painter who, with the aid of his companion **Ningwiigagi** the Frost, paints brilliant colors onto the plants when every year at Binaakwe Giizis, Leaves Falling Down Moon, Mother Earth is getting ready for the final dance; **Ma'iĩngan**, the wolf, adopted by Wiinabozho as his brother, and together they had many adventures as they walked the newly created earth naming all of the other creatures on the planet;



**Mishiibizhiw** according to Norval Morriseau

**Zhagaabewish** (or **Zhagabishin**, a recklessly daring figure who overcame Mishi-naabe, the Huge Being and once set a snare in the trail of the sun and caught it); and many, many more. Finally, a very prominent *aadizoogaan* of the nonhuman category is **Giizhigookwe** or Sky Woman, who gave the trickster hero *Wiinabocho* what he needed to live on earth and created for him the *Anishinaabeg*, or human beings to look after.



Artwork by Ojibwe Medicine Painter Roy Thomas showing Mermaid, Loon, and Fish and the sun (or rather a unity symbol) connected by a Spirit Line.



Simone McLeod: Niizhoodenhyag-Niigiwin (2013), depicting Sky Woman giving birth to the first Anishinaabeg. Click on image.

It is in the upper regions of the sky, too, that the traditional *Anishinaabeg* envision the Land of Souls, a mirror of *Anishinaabewaki* where the departed live in a pleasant village in peace and without scarcity, a land reached by the *djiibayag* (soul-spirits of the deceased) traveling a trail leading from the east to the west. This Path of Souls, or Goes-Down-Behind-the-Sky, can be seen in the Milky Way at clear night. **Waasnode**, or **Waawaate** (or, depending on the context, **Naanaate**), or **Nimidiwag** (the northern lights), are said to be the glow of torches that the grandfathers use to illuminate the *Jiibay-Miikana*, or Path of Souls (the Milky Way) with.



"Astral Figures Make Universe" by the late Miskwaabik Animikii (Norval Morrisseau)

Anishinaabe tradition dictates that life, including everyday actions, rituals, and taboos, is always enacted around and directed towards preserving the sacredness and balance of creation. The natural world provides the means for sustenance, clothing, and shelter in exchange for man's admittance that the fulfilment of his primary needs and his cultural intervention in the physical as well as spiritual world often disrupt the sacred web of life and the natural order imposed by GICHI-MANIDOO. Therefore, rituals to appease the spirits of slain animals are common practice. To this day, Anishinaabe tradition also dictates leaving sacrificial offerings - such as the sacred *asemaa*, or tobacco - when a person collects plants; similarly, offerings are left in particular known places - mostly distinct features of the land such as massive rock formations along shorelines or grottoes or small inland lakes - where potentially dangerous *manidoog* might become offended by the presence of humans.



A

An image of an Agawa rock painting of Mishibizhiw, the Great Horned Underwater Lynx. Mishibizhiw is associated with the water realm, and revered by the Anishinaabeg and Cree as one who controls the moods of the Lake and a sometimes dangerous guard of rapids and swift or troubled waters. Like other *manidoog*, Mishibizhiw has the power to shapeshift into various animal forms. Mishibizhiw is said to aid those who seek to cross dangerous water, provided that a suitable offer is made.







Norval Morrisseau: "Storyteller Of The Ages" (1970)

Native spirituality, contrary to the great world religions, has a strict *individual* character. The same can be said of *Anishinaabe izhinawomin*, the traditional worldview of the Anishinaabe peoples. An Anishinaabe person will find protection in the course of his life by following the *Anishinaabe mino-miikana*, the Good Native Road, through the sacred songs and medicinal formulas of the Midewiwin or personal objects such as amulets and medicine bundles - and through dreams and seeking visions that evoke special spiritual powers.

These powers, which may be collected in varying degrees, often appear in the form of *bawaaganag* or dream visitors. A *bawaagan* presents himself as a spiritual helper, often in animal form, who personally provides the dreamer with special blessings enabling him to exercise exceptional powers of various kinds, and bestows upon him (or her) control over some area of human experience that is of assistance to him/her in the daily round of life: such as the healing of ailments, or predicting the future, or encouraging the young to develop individuality and self-growth, or exercising good leadership, or being a good mother, or keeping family and community amply supplied with food and materials, or making beautiful or powerful works of art or whatever special social skill is needed to help keeping intact the framework and well-being of *Anishinaabe* society.

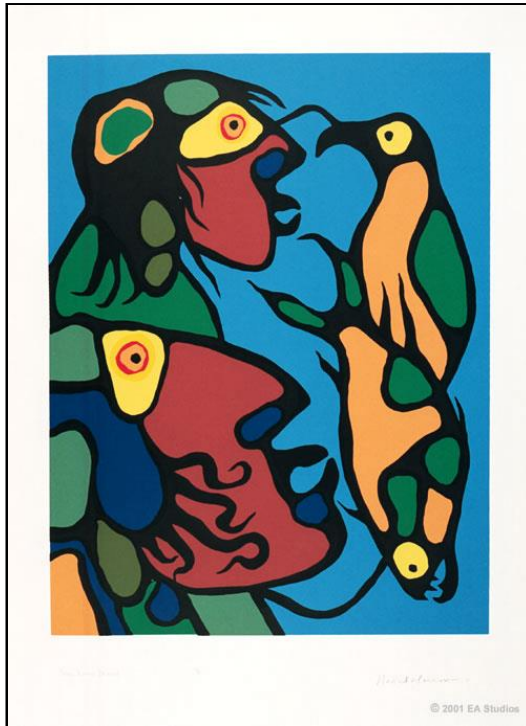




The buckle design by Zhaawano Giizhik, which is reminiscent of the graphic tradition of the New Woodland School of Art, symbolizes an invocation of the Spirit of Ma'iiñgan (Wolf). It's an appeal for guidance and skills and strength to make the right decisions. The buckle depicts the story of Ma'iiñgan, an Anishinaabe hunter. He belongs to the wolf *doodem*, and the jeweler depicted him with outstretched arms, praying to his *bawaagan* or personal "guardian spirit" asking him for strength and spiritual guidance; he even becomes one with it. Click on image to find out more about this belt buckle.



"Dreams Of Bear" by Ojibwe artist Gelineau Fisher, depicting a bear *bawaagan* visiting an eagle woman in her dream.



"Soul Looks Beyond" by Norval Morrisseau



"The Gift" by Norval Morrisseau

**DIBIK-GIIZIS:** also called *Niibe-Giizis*, the Night Sun (moon), who shines in the night-sky to guide the paths of her grandchildren, the *Anishinaabeg*. She is also known as WEZAAWIGIIZHIGOOKWE, Yellow Sky Woman. The People honor her because she is their *nookomis* (grandmother), symbolizing the primacy of womanhood. (The literal meaning of *nookomis* is "my grandmother".)



"Nocturnal Reflections" by the late Norval Morrisseau

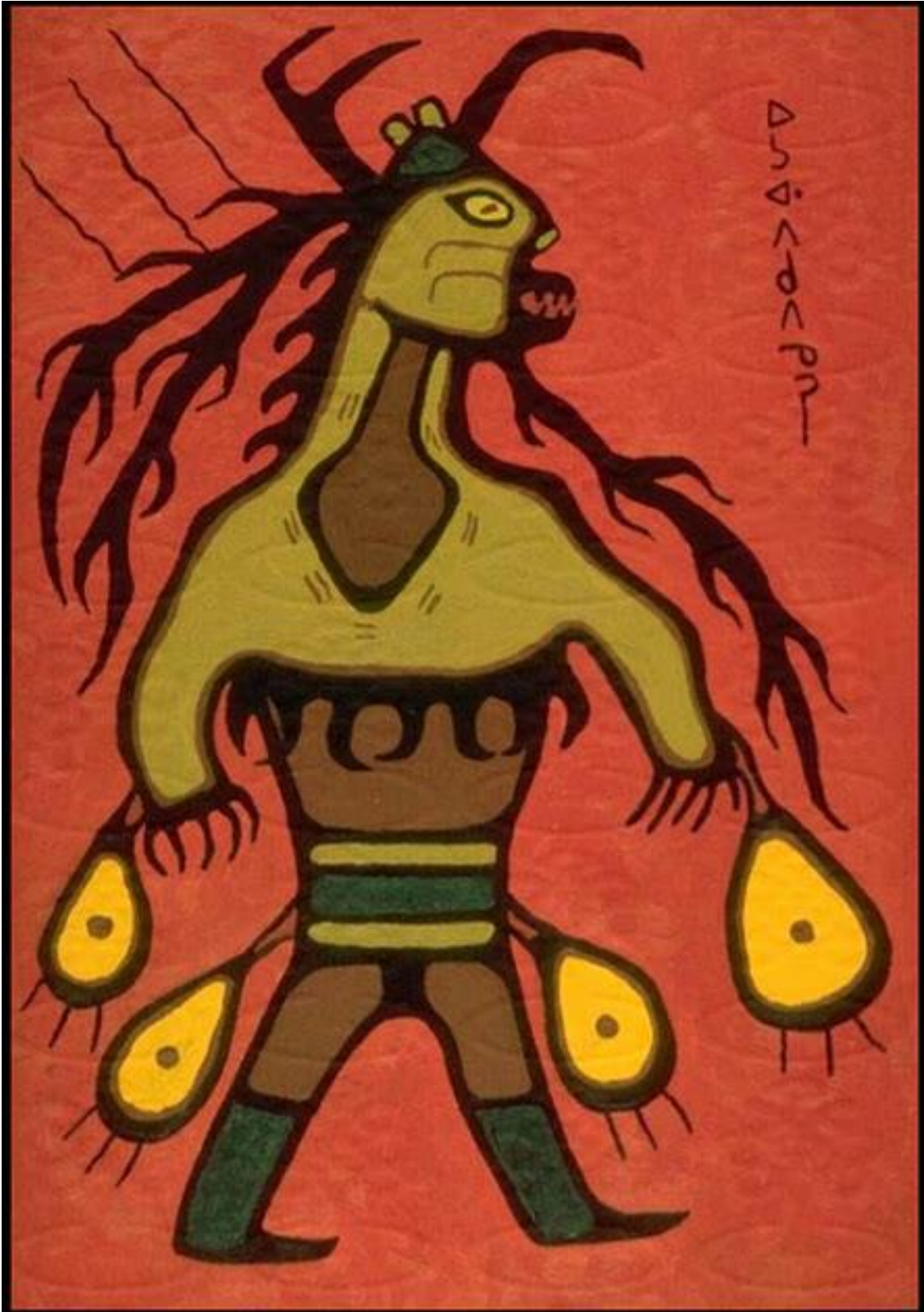
**E-BANGISHIMOG**, also named *Ningaabii`anong* or *Ningaabii`ani-noodin*, is the Spirit Of the West. **Bangishimog**, the land in the west where at the end of the day Grandfather Sun sinks behind the horizon, is ruled by E-bangishimog, or *Ningaabii`ani-noodin*, the mighty West wind and the Father of all Winds; it is also the abode of E-bangishimog's eldest son *Majiikiwis* who is chief of the Grizzly bear nation, and *Ningaabii-anang*, the star that sinks in the waters (the Evening Star). Bangishimog reminds the Anishinaabeg by the swiftness of the day how short life really is, as the red sky of sundown reminds them of human destiny. To see the sunrise and behold the sunset is a joy, and to know life from youth to old age is considered a sacred gift. According to tradition it was also here, on an island in the west, that two of E-bangishimog's illegitimate sons, half *anishinaabe* (human)-half *manidoo*(spirit) WIINABOZHO and his brother MA'IINGAN (wolf), found their last resting place, and a giant *giizhikaatig* (northern white cedar tree) is said to still grow from Wiinabozho's head...



Click on image

The above image shows a detail of "Women's Healing Journey" acrylic on canvas by Anishinaabe artist Simone McLeod (Aki-egwaniizid). Simone McLeod uses her art for healing purposes, addressing the topic of cultural and social oppression on - and the ongoing sexual and mental abuse of women and children within - Native (First Nation) communities. The painting depicts three generations of women against the background of Bangishimog, the land in the west, the abode of the Grizzly Bear Nation and the deceased who arrive there via *jiibay-miikana*, the Path of Souls. Here, at the end of each day, *Mishoomis Giizis* (Grandfather Sun) sinks behind the horizon, as does, at the end of each night, the Evening Star. *Ningaabii-anang*, the Evening Star, also called "Star Sinking In Waters" or "Women's Star", is a powerful *aadizokaan* (grandfather), a wise medicine man and patron of all women, teaching healing and the need for moderation and patience. It is to him and Grandfather Sun sinking behind the western hills and to the spirits of the ancestors and the spirit of the Bear that the women turn to in search for healing and wisdom and strength.

**EDITEGIN** (berries and fruits): see **MASHKIKIWAN** (page 81).



Norval Morrisseau/Miskaabik Animikii – the Bear Medicine Man (1969)

**GAKINA GEGOO:** All Living Things.

The Anishinaabe word for dream or vision, depending on the context, is IZHINAAMOWIN; literally: the act of seeing the world in a certain manner. The concept of izhinamowin does not so much refer to vision with the eyes, but rather to ideas associated with mental perception; of course, the eyes may be the gateway for that mental perception.

From of old, ANISHINAABE IZHINAAMOWIN interprets the countless phenomena, forms, and forces of the natural world specific to man's immediate environment purely in a cosmological context. An equally great respect is manifested for all entities within the cosmos, even those that are more remote to mankind. All life forms are considered animated and inter-related "persons" or "relatives" (called *indinawemaaganag*) possessing a consciousness, rationale, and a will of their own.



This means that the world is seen as one gigantic web of social relations, an extended family where the relationship between humans and the nonhuman and spirit world is one of continuous interfusion and reciprocal exchange. All these *indinawemaaganag* or "next of kin persons" are often described as *gakina gegoo*, "everyone and everything" or "all living things" (pronounced *gu-ki-nu gay-goo*). The Anishinaabeg believe that *gakina gegoo bimaadad idash gakina awiinya*

*bimaadiziwag*: "everything and everyone is alive", and *gakina gegoo gii ozhigigaade ge inaabadag*: "everything is created for a purpose".

The beings that are part of the concept of *gakina gegoo* could be classified as follows:

- *oniizhoogaadeg* = the two-legged ones (humans);
- *oniyoogaadeg* = the four-legged ones (quadruped animals);
- *oningwiiganiig* = the winged ones (birds);
- *bemaadagaajig* = the swimmers (fishes);
- *memichaakamigaaig* = the creatures on the ground (plants, rocks, the insects and worms);
- *manidoog* = the spirits of the incorporeal worlds that exist in all layers of the Universe;
- *aadizookaanag* = the supernatural grandfathers of the nonhuman category, shapeshifters and spirit helpers, often protagonists of the *aadizookaan* (sacred stories).

See also: **ANISHINAABE-BIMAADIZIWIN** (page 23).

Above illustration: "Anishinaabe Miinigozwin" ("Gift to the Anishinaabeg") silkscreen by Ahmoo Angeconeb, 1973. Giizhik, the northern white cedar, connects the underworlds with the middle world (earth) and the sky worlds. The figures in the image represent the *indinawemaaganag* that inhabit Aki, the cosmos.



**GAMIIN (ZAAGA'GANIIN):** the lakes; **GAA-ZAAGA'EGANIKAG**, the Land of Many Lakes. Like the north woods and marshlands, *gichigamiin* (large freshwater lakes) and *zaaga'igaansan* (small inland lakes) create the primary environment of the Anishinaabeg. From the depths of the lakes their fishermen obtain *gaawisaanganag*, or game for sustenance (traditionally, the Anishinaabe fishermen of the northern Great Lakes region think of themselves, in a symbolic way, as *hunters*, despite the fact that they primarily gain a living from fishing). See also: **NIBI**.



Painting by Ojibwe Medicine Painter Norval Morrisseau (Miskwaabik Animikii), of Misi-ginebig the Great Horned Water Serpent appearing at the surface of the lake.

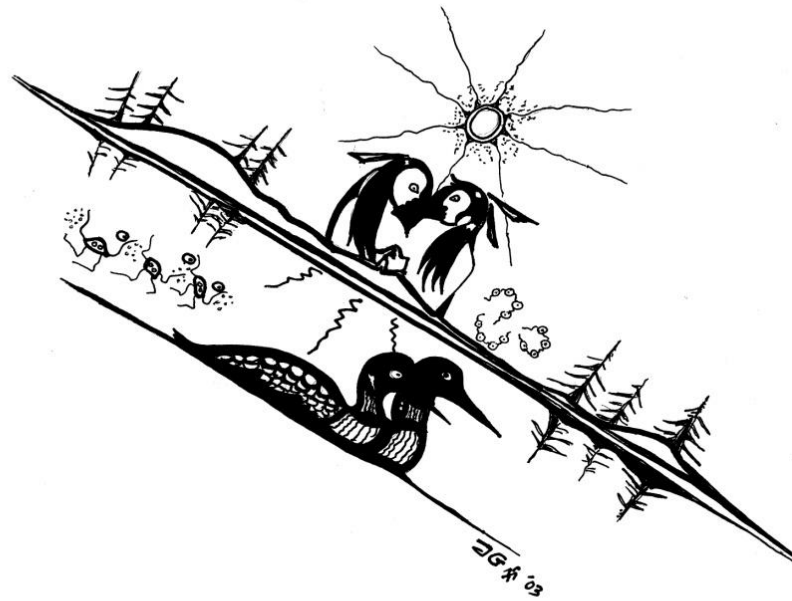


Above image: Noodjimowin Idash Nibwaakaawin: "Healing And Wisdom". Overlay-wedding rings of palladium white gold, red gold and yellow gold by Zhaawano Giizhik, showing a stylized design of *Misi-ginebig*, the great underwater serpent of the Great Lakes and rivers. *Misi-ginebig* is often regarded as a metaphorical interpretation of a fish being, and a prominent patron of healing and knowledge of medicinal herbs (Click on image).

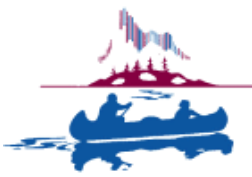


Norval Morrisseau: Untitled (A depiction of Mish-Ginebig)





Zhaawano Giizhik: Wiidigemaaganag (Niizhomaangwag) ("Life Partners/ Two Loons") pen and ink drawing (2003)



The quiet splashing of paddles slicing the tranquil, transparent waters of a deep lake. The distant and melancholic call of a loon at nightfall. These sounds sooth the Anishinaabe ear like no other sound does. The lakes, however, are sometimes home of various hazards in the form of the treacherous *Nibiinaabekwe* (Mermaid) who with her sweet voice lures people into the waves, or families of *Mishiibizhiwag*, or Great Horned Lynxes – sacred underwater spirits associated with copper (a sacred metal) and whose occasional hissings and roaring caused by the violent slashing of their copper tails disturb wind and water of lakes and rivers. These dreaded creatures, capable of travel by means of underground rivers to appear in certain inland lakes, not only emerge on the surface of these lakes, but also through dangerous and remote spots between the surface and the underworld such as caves, crevices, or whirlpools.



Luckily, there are also less dangerous beings that live in or around the lakes: these include the mischievous water dwarfs called *memegwesiwag* and the friendly *bagwajiniwag*, the little wild forest people, creators of mystic glades in the woods, who are known to sometimes inhabit the sandy beaches, emerging from their sanctuaries on moonlit nights to dance in the shadows, warning passers-by of the fearful Mermaid. And the shining lodges of the *mishiinimakinagoog*, the turtle spirits, can be seen in the summer evenings when the moon shines on their island habitat; Ojibwe and Odaawaa fishermen, who steer their canoes near certain steep cliffs and jagged pinnacles at night, occasionally hear their happy voices echo across the dark lake...

Inserted image: "Mishipashoo" (Mishibizhiw) by the late Norval Morrisseau (Copper Thunderbird) (ca. 1959)



**NORVAL MORRISSEAU: ANCESTORS OF THE GREAT LAKE**



**BANGISHIMO-GICHIGAMIING: SUNSET LAKE**

"Graphic overlay" Ojibwe-style wedding bands designed and handcrafted by Zhaawano Giizhik. The rings consist of 14K white gold and red gold, with sterling silver interiors. The design of the rings is inspired on the pictographic outline drawing style of the Woodland School Of Art. [Click on image to view more details.](#)

**GIDOODEMINAANIG (Our Clans):** since time immemorial, the Ojibwe Anishinaabeg have a system of government called GIDOODEMINAANIG, meaning 'Our blood relations', or 'clans'.



"Growth Within", acrylic on canvas by Cree/Anishinaabe medicine painter Simone McLeod (Aki-egwaniizid), depicting her family and, at the bottom of the painting, her own Ojibwe dodemic clan sign: NAME, the sturgeon. Simone descends from a long line of Manitoba-based Midewiwin seers and healers and artists and as an artist, she is very aware of her background. To view more of Simone's artwork displaying elements of her cultural and spiritual background, see [ZhaawanArt Blogspot.](#)



According to Midewiwin tradition, there once was a time when the Waabanaki People, who inhabited the Dawn Land on the northern shores of the Atlantic Ocean, were seemingly living a life undisturbed by strife, turmoil, or disagreement. One day six *Omishoomis-imaag* (Grandfathers) – sometimes called *Midemiigis-gaa-niigaani-gikendangig*, or Cowry Shell Prophets) – emerged from the ocean, and they established a system of kinship

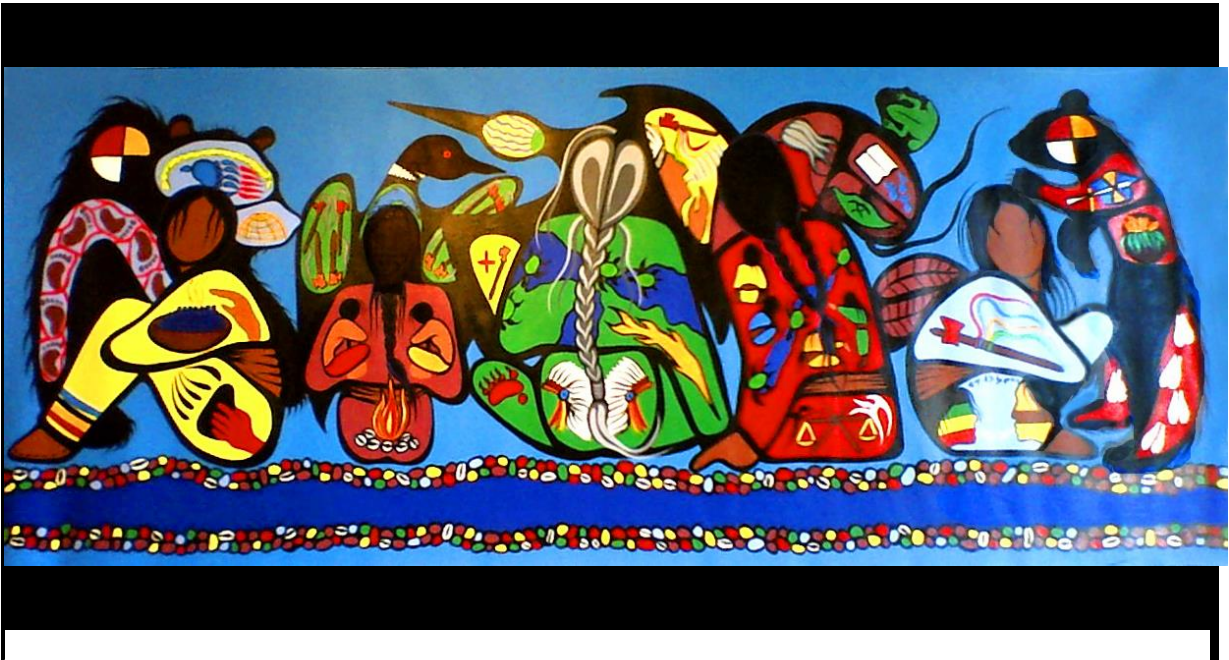
based on *odoodeman* (clans or totems). After sharing their message to eight *gaa-niigaani-gikendangig* (prophets), seven of these prophets asked their *mizhinawe* (messenger) to see if he could find ways to improve the condition and wellbeing of the People. The messenger began a quest that would lead him to an *abinoojiinh* (child), and after receiving approval from the Seven Grandfathers, the *mizhinawe* tutored the child in *mino-bimaadiziwin* (how to live a full and healthy life). Each of the Grandfathers then instructed the child with a principle, a guideline that honored one of the basic virtues intrinsic to *mino-bimaadiziwin*. These *Nizhwaaswi Gagiikewin* (Seven Sacred Teachings, or laws) became the foundation of Midewiwin spiritual practice.

Along with a set of moral values and a new form of kinship, the Grandfathers left the Waabanaki People with seven *niigaanaajimowinan* or *gozaa-bandamowinan* (predictions) of what the future would bring, warning them of a time when a light-skinned race would arrive at the shores and bring death and destruction. If the People would not leave, the shadow of illness would befall on them, their once happy world befouled, and the waters would forever turn bitter by disrespect.

According to Abenaki tradition, about two to three millennia ago many people of the Waabanaki Nation decided to heed the warnings of the Prophets and they embarked on a journey marked by the *niizhwaaso-ishkoden* (seven fires); they were told that a *miigis* (a radiant cowry shell appearing in the western sky) and an *ajjaak* (sandhill crane) would show them the way. One of the seven *ishkoden* was associated with an *Animikii-binesi* (Thunderbird), which told the People about a powerful vision of several *mikinaakominisensing* (turtle-shaped islands) that would be encountered during the westward migration.

Along the migration route, several lodges of the Midewiwin were erected (see image) and new *doodem* frameworks were created. An old legacy of the Anishinaabeg of Upper Michigan tells of a prodigious tale of the legendary emergence, 700 summers ago, of five Mystery Beings from the waves of Mishigami, or Lake Michigan, resulting in a new clan framework shaping southern Anishinaabe society.

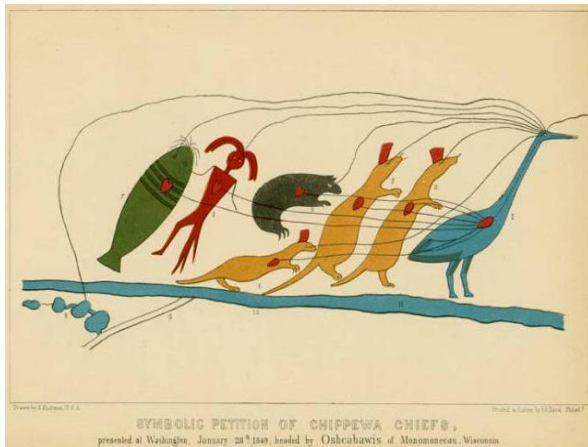
The teachings of these enigmatic newcomers that lead to this new clan organization were ultimately (probably in 796 AD) followed by the historical alliance called ***Niswi-mishkodewin*** (Council of Three Fires), formed by three large southeastern bands that had emerged from the nation of the Anishinaabeg: the Ojibweg, the Odaawaag (Odawa), and the Bodéwadmik (Potawatomi).



MANIDOO-MINJIMEMENDAMOWIN ("Spirit Memory: remembering the Mide ways and the doodem relations of the Anishinaabe Peoples"), 26x66" acrylic by Simone McLeod, 2013. Gathering of the five major clans of the Ojibwe People at the falls of Baawiting: Crane, Bear, Little Moose/Marten, Catfish, and Loon. Click on image for further reading about this topic.

The Ojibwe Anishinaabe legacy of the Five Mystery Beings was handed over as follows: a long time ago, after the five mysterious creatures had waded ashore, they taught the People of Michigan how they could formalize and extend a vast net of kinship.

Hereupon the Ojibweg began to form five groups of patrilineal kin whose members thought of themselves as descendants of an ancient animal ancestor. Although these members were scattered throughout the entire Great Lakes area and many would remain unknown to each other personally, they were all part of the same odoodem, or totemic clan. All five totems were represented by *Awesiiyag* (Animal Beings) ever since, because animals appeared to live in harmony with the laws of the world, and thus proved themselves the older, wiser brothers of the human beings.



Eventually, these original *gidoodeminaanig*, or our animal totems (Ajijaak the Crane; Makwa the Bear; Moozonii the Little Moose/Waabizheshi the Marten; Maanameg the Catfish; and Maang the Loon) gave rise to twenty or more totems; each associated with these original five.

The five original clans of the *Baawitigowiniwag* - my Anishinaabe ancestors who gathered at the call of the Crane at the rapids and waterfalls of

Michigan's Upper Peninsula -, hold a set of traditional responsibilities for the People. Each member regards himself or herself as member of a clan first, then a community.

Traditionally, clan membership includes certain colors, songs, and ceremonies, along with responsibilities that belong to the clan in question.

This clan system represents five basic needs and duties, on an individual as well as social level. Below are listed five animals that represent these basic elementary functions:

- **Ajijaak**, the Crane, also called *Baswenaazhi*, the Echo Maker, is responsible for leadership and external communication because of his loud and clear voice. Members of the Crane clan are traditionally noted for giving direction and for their oratory skills. The *Waabajjaak* or White Crane clan provided for the traditional hereditary chiefs, and some of the more powerful chiefs of the Waabigitowiniwag met the first French explorers of Lake Superior.
- **Maang**, or *A' aawaa*, the Loon, is a skillful fisher known for his loud, wild cry, and his habit of assuming his role of subchief, sometimes executive-chief-of-birds, with pomp and authority, definitely didn't make him very popular with the rest of the birds. Loon believes that, since nature placed a collar around his neck resembling the sacred *miigis* shells and also provided him with an eye-dazzling *miigisiyesimiigan* (wampum breastplate), he is entitled to a leading place in council. However, this badge of honor is being openly denied by the Crane. Nevertheless, the forefathers of the present-day Anishinaabeg became very fond of him! Members of the Loon Clan are usually responsible for leadership and internal communications; in the past, loon clan members often acted as subchiefs, in conjunction with the *ogimaag* (chiefs) of the Crane clan. Loon clan members are often charged with the community's council fires and help facilitate dialogue on all internal and/or domestic issues. By working together and regularly checking on each other, Maang doodem and Ajijaak doodem gave the Ojibweg a balanced government.
- **Maanameg**, or *Awaasii*, the Catfish, represents science and its members represent the duty of teaching and the virtues of patience and generosity. Catfish clan members are the intellectuals of the People and noted for their ability to combine two forms of training: imparting skills and knowledge, and passing on wisdom to the young. It was especially the Elders' task to teach about life through storytelling, chants, and dances, and to prepare the young for a vision quest. Fish clan members are also known to draw on their knowledge to solve disputes between the leaders of the Crane and Loon Clans. Traditionally fish clan people are known for long life and baldness in old age.
- **Waabizheshi**, the Marten, was the progenitor of my own ancestors, who belonged to the marten clan. Marten clan members are in charge of labor and sustenance and they have always been the hunters and food gatherers of the People. Marten clan members are also looked upon as OGICHIDAAG: warrior clan people inclined to be great strategic logistic thinkers and defenders of MINO BIMAADIZIWIN, the Good Way of the Heart (Midewiwin) and of ANISHINAABEMOWIN, the language of the Ojibwe people. Their colors are yellow, light brown and gold. In the old days, members of the Marten clan were master strategists in planning the defense of their people and they often served as pipe bearers and message carriers for the *ogimaag* (leaders). Waabizheshi fights for change and today he defends those who commit themselves to the cultural and educative values and the survival of the language, science and art of the Anishinaabe People. On a personal level, a Marten helps others to reach their potential.
- **Makwa**, the Bear was selected for his fierceness and bravery and is therefore in charge of defense. They are the police force and the medics of their Nation. Bear clan members have always served and protected their communities and since they traditionally spend much time outdoors they have great knowledge of medicinal plants and herbs used for treating minor diseases and infections. Traditionally, bear clan members are known for their thick black hair that never whitens even in old age.



*Mikinaak, Noojimowin Doodem* ("Turtle, doodem of Healing") - sterling silver, turquoise & red coral buckle hair buckle with decorated pin stick designed and handcrafted by Zhaawano Giizhik. The hair buckle depicts Mikinaak (the Great Snapping Turtle), or Mishikenh (the Mud Turtle), two beloved *aadizookaanag* (spirit grandfathers having a special place in the traditional worldview and storytelling of many Native Peoples of *Mikimaakominis*, or Turtle Island (North America)).

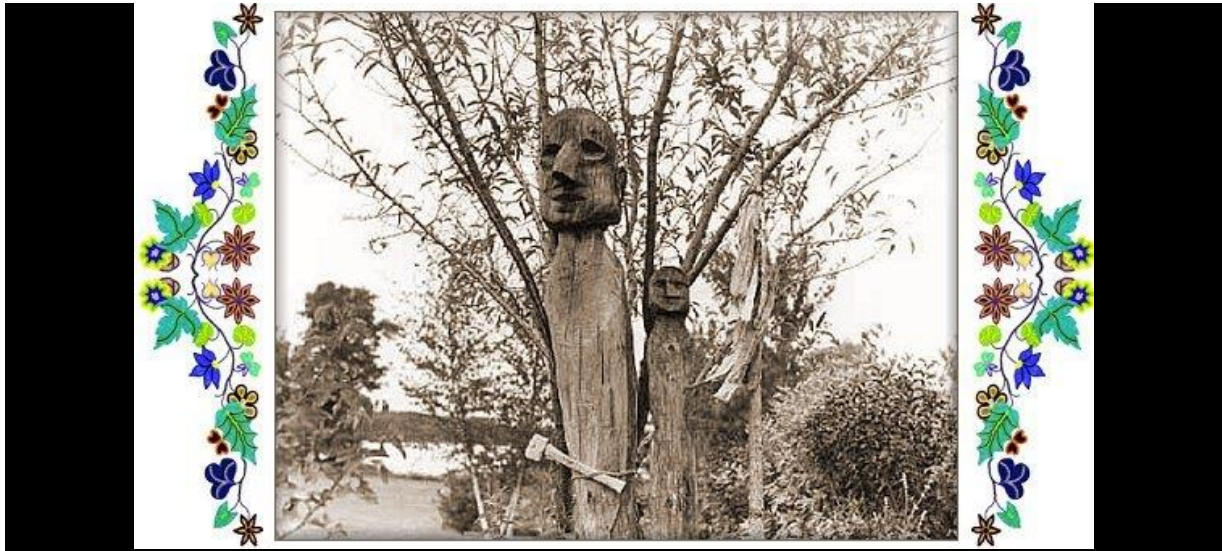
The buckle is adorned with five turquoise, and six red coral cabochons. The turquoises, three mounted on the silver turtleback and two on the head of the pin stick representing the turtle's eyes, are emblematic of the five main odoodemag (animal totems) of the Anishinaabe Peoples: Ajiijaak (Crane), Makwa (bear), Waabizhesh (Marten), Maanameg (Catfish), and Mikinaak (Snapping Turtle). These (archaic) totems denote the five needs of the People and the five elementary functions of society. MEDICINE, represented by turtle and symbolized by the oval turquoise stone in the center, is flanked by LEARNING (catfish; top) and WARRIORSHIP/SUSTENANCE (marten; bottom); the turquoise eyes signify LEADERSHIP (crane) and DEFENSE (bear). The red coral cabochons symbolize the six animals that make up the MEDICINE DOODEM: Mikinaak (or Mishikenh, the turtle) Nigig (otter), Omakakii (frog), Midewewe (rattle snake), Omisandamoo (water snake), and Niibiinaabe (kwe) (mermain or mermaid).

Finally, the stamped designs on the domed turtle's back symbolize the re-creation by Sky Woman - of respectively flora and fauna, fishes included. The rim of braided silver wire that I soldered around the oval turtle shield represents the strong clanship ties (odoodeman) and the unity and survival strenght of the Anishinaabeg as a people.

For further reading, go to: <http://zhaawanart.blogspot.com/2012/04/teaching-stories-part-7.html>

Although it is believed that farther back in history the Ojibwe Anishinaabeg were matrilineal – which means that *doodem* identity was passed through the mother –, nowadays the children usually become automatically members of the father's clan. Members of the same matrilineal or patrilineal clan, no matter how many miles apart, are kin and forbidden to marry, and are expected always to extend hospitality,

food and lodging to each other. That tradition is carried on today. Tradition dictates that when members are buried, their *doodem* symbols appear on their graves to mark their lineage. Also, clan symbols appear in *Mide-wiigwaasag* (birch bark teaching scrolls; see image at the bottom of this page) of the Midewiwin and in the old treaty documents.



Wooden lineage (doodem) effigies at Baawiting, present-day Sault Ste. Marie

**Below** is a list of the *odoodemag* (clans) of the Ojibwe Anishinaabe Peoples:

Grouse Clan	Aagask (nom)
Crow Clan	Aandeg (nom)
Caribou Clan	Adik (nom)
Whitefish Clan	Adikameg (nom)
Crane Clan	Ajjaak (nom)
Beaver Clan	Amik (nom)
Beaver Clan	amikwaa (nom)
Bullhead Clan	Awaasii+g (nom)
Echo-maker Clan	Baswenaazhi (nom)
Kestrel Clan	bibiigiwezens (nom)
Bird Clan	Bineshiinh (nom)
Thunderbird Clan	Binesi (nom)

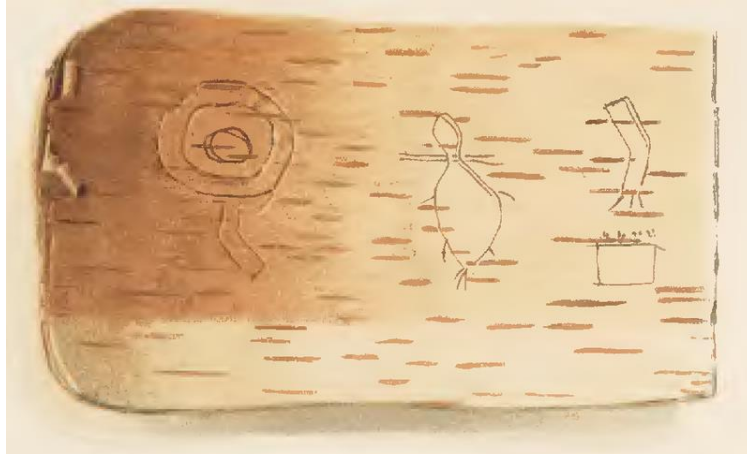


<b>Lynx Clan</b>	<b>Bizhiw (nom)</b>
<b>Raccoon Clan</b>	<b>Esiban (nom)</b>
<b>Porcupine Clan</b>	<b>Gaag (nom)</b>
<b>Gull Clan</b>	<b>Gayaashk (nom)</b>
<b>Hawk Clan</b>	<b>Gekek (nom)</b>
<b>Fish Clan</b>	<b>Giigoonh (nom)</b>
<b>Snake Clan</b>	<b>Ginebig (nom)</b>
<b>Golden Eagle Clan</b>	<b>Giniw (nom)</b>
<b>Pike Clan</b>	<b>Ginoozhe (nom)</b>
<b>Snipe Clan</b>	<b>Jiwiiskwiiskiwe+yag (nom)</b>
<b>Wolf Clan</b>	<b>Ma`iingan (nom)</b>
<b>Fisher Clan of Odagaamiig</b>	<b>Maanadwe (nom)</b>
<b>Catfish Clan</b>	<b>Maanameg (nom)</b>
<b>Loon Clan</b>	<b>Maang (nom)</b>
<b>Rattlesnake Clan</b>	<b>Midewewe (nom)</b>
<b>Bald Eagle Clan</b>	<b>Migizi (nom)</b>
<b>Turtle Clan</b>	<b>Mikinaak+wag (nom)</b>
<b>Bittern Clan</b>	<b>Mooshka`osi (nom)</b>
<b>Moose Clan</b>	<b>Mooz (nom)</b>
<b>Moose: Little ~ Clan</b>	<b>Moozoonii+yag (nom)</b>
<b>Sturgeon Clan</b>	<b>Name (nom)</b>
<b>Sucker Clan</b>	<b>Namebin (nom)</b>
<b>Merman Clan</b>	<b>Nibiinaabe (nom)</b>
<b>Otter Clan</b>	<b>Nigig (nom)</b>

Goose Clan	Nika (nom)
Bear Clan	Nooke (nom)
Kingfisher Clan	Ogiishkimanisii (nom)
Frog Clan	Omakakii (nom)
Snake Clan	omazaandamoo+g (nom)(SE/NE)
Goose: Snow ~ Clan	Owewe (nom)
Marten Clan	Waabizheshi (nom)
Deer Clan	Waawaashkeshi (nom)
Muskrat Clan	Wazhashk (nom)
Mink Clan	Zhaangweshi (nom)
Pelican Clan	Zhedeg (nom)
Duck Clan	Zhiishiib (nom)
Rattlesnake Clan	Zhiishiigwe (nom)
Clan: Grouse ~	Aagask (nom)
Clan: Crow ~	Aandeg (nom)
Clan: Caribou ~	Adik (nom)
Clan: Whitefish ~	Adikameg (nom)
Clan: Crane ~	Ajjaak (nom)
Clan: Beaver ~	Amik (nom)
Clan: Beaver ~	amikwaa (nom)
Clan: Bullhead ~	Awaasii+g (nom)
Clan: Echo-maker ~	Baswenaazhi (nom)
Clan: Kestrel ~	bibiigiwezens (nom)
Clan: Bird ~	Bineshiinh (nom)

Clan: Thunderbird ~	Binesi (nom)
Clan: Lynx ~	Bizhiw (nom)
Clan: Raccoon ~	Esiban (nom)
Clan: Porcupine ~	Gaag (nom)
Clan: Gull ~	Gayaashk (nom)
Clan: Hawk ~	Gekek (nom)
Clan: Fish ~	Giigoonh (nom)
Clan: Snake ~	Ginebig (nom)
Clan: Golden Eagle ~	Giniw (nom)
Clan: Pike ~	Ginoozhe (nom)
clan: my ~	indoodem+ag (n3D)
Clan: Snipe ~	Jiwiiskwiiskiwe+yag (nom)
Clan: Wolf ~	Ma`iingan (nom)
Clan: Catfish ~	Maanameg (nom)
Clan: Loon ~	Maang (nom)
Clan: Black-Duck ~	Makadezhiishiib (nom)
Duck Clan: Black--	Makadezhiishiib (nom)
Clan: Rattlesnake ~	Midewewe (nom)
Clan: Bald Eagle ~	Migizi (nom)
Clan: Turtle ~	Mikinaak+wag (nom)
Turtle Clan: Mud ~	Mishiikenh (nom)
Clan: Mud Turtle ~	Mishiikenh (nom)
Turtle Clan: Painted ~	Miskwaadesi (nom)
Clan: Painted Turtle ~	Miskwaadesi (nom)

Clan: Bittern ~	Mooshka`osi (nom)
Clan: Moose ~	Mooz (nom)
Clan: Little Moose ~	Moozoonii+yag (nom)
Clan: Sturgeon ~	Name (nom)
Clan: Sucker ~	Namebin (nom)
Clan: Merman ~	Nibiinaabe (nom)
Clan: Otter ~	Nigig (nom)
Clan: Goose ~	Nika (nom)
clan: my ~	nindoodem+ag (n3D)
Clan: Bear ~	Nooke (nom)
clan: belong to a ~	odoodemi (vai+o)
Clan: Kingfisher ~	Ogiishkimanisii (nom)
Clan: Frog ~	Omakakii (nom)
Clan: Snake ~	omazaandamoo+g (nom)(SE/NE)
Clan: Snow Goose ~	Owewe (nom)
Clan: Marten ~	Waabizheshi (nom)
Clan: Deer ~	Waawaashkeshi (nom)
Clan: Muskrat ~	Wazhashk (nom)
Clan: Mink ~	Zhaangweshi (nom)
Clan: Pelican ~	Zhedeg (nom)
Clan: Duck ~	Zhiishiib (nom)
Clan: Rattlesnake ~	Zhiishiigwe (nom)



Detail of a sacred OMide scroll from *Gaa-waabaabiganikaag* (White Eath) depicting portion of a mnemonic song. Click on image.

**GIIGOONH:** The sight of the flashing of silvered tails in shiny lakes and rushing streams pleased the eyes of the Anishinaabeg so, that they chose the silent spirit of *giigoonh*, the fish, to be emblematic of teaching. To this day AWAASIINH the catfish, AGWADAASHIINS the sunfish, GINOOZHE the pike, NAMEBIN the sucker, NAME the sturgeon, and ADIKAMEG the whitefish represent the Ojibwe doodem (totem) of Learning, or Science. *Giigoonh doodemag* (Fish Clan) people are mediators between the Crane and Loon clans and traditionally responsible for passing on knowledge and healing stories. Fish Clan are the teachers, scholars, and the intellectuals of the People. Their members, known for long life and baldness in old age, claim that in the distant past, when the Anishinaabeg still lived in the Land of Dawn, their clan had been the first of the original *doodemag* to appear out of the Atlantic ocean.



Norval Morrisseau: Untitled (Trout), 1990's

There exist a variety of fish spirits of two types, the first being **Mishiibizhiwag**, the Underwater Panthers, and the other being **Misi-ginebig**, the Sea Serpent who provides Knowledge of Medicinal herbs. Underwater Manidoog were not considered evil, and not always dangerous. They were supposed to possess powers that assist other water beings

as well. Other metaphorical interpretations of fish include **Nibiinaabe** and **Nibiinaabe-kwe** (the Merman/Mermaid), symbolizing temptation.



Untitled (Merman) by Norval Morrisseau



"Spirit Fish" by Carl Ray (1975)



Norval Morrisseau: "Mishipizhiw" (Mishibizhiw the Horned Underwater Panther)



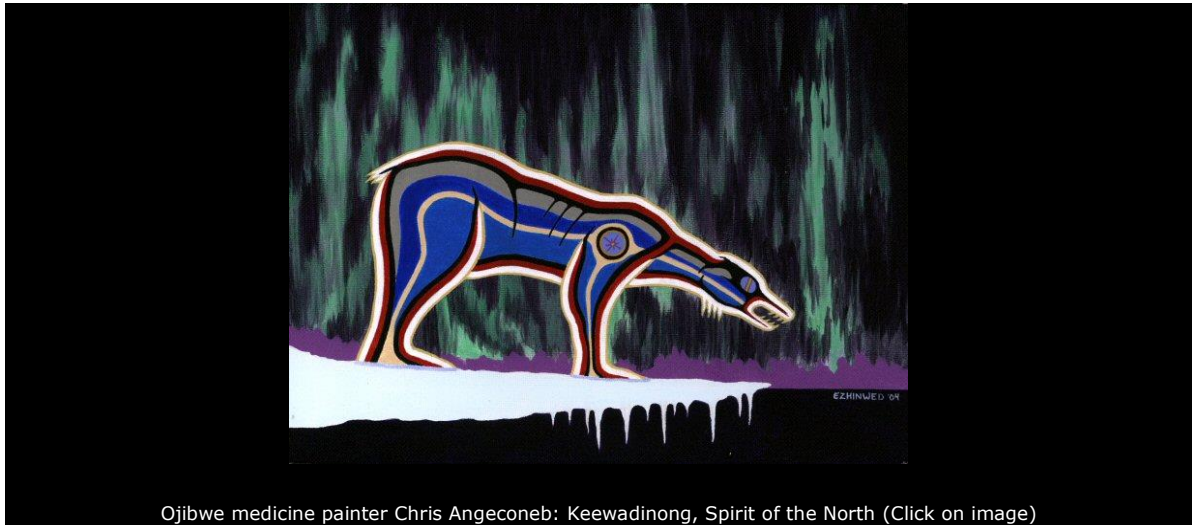
Agawa Rock, Lake Superior pictograph depicting an Ojibwe war canoe and Mishi-bizhiw, or Great Panther (Lynx) who controls the waters of Gichigami (Lake Superior), and, below, two Mishi-ginebigooog (Great Underwater snakes). Estimated to be 150-400 years old. Click on image.



Underwater Serpent, birch bark painting by Norval Morrisseau. Click on image.



**GIIWEDIN:** the north, the Spirit of the North Wind. Land of *Biboon* the winter and *Gababoongaa*, the Spirit of Ice. Giiwedín is the place where Ogashinan, Mother Earth, purifies herself each year. The annual struggle between *Biboon* and *Ziigwan* (the summer), who respectively symbolize decay/death and youth/renewal, lasts to this day.



Ojibwe medicine painter Chris Angecone: Keewadinong, Spirit of the North (Click on image)

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**GIIZHIG:** the sky. Noosa Giizhig, or Father Sky. Sky and earth are both revered since they are mutually crucial and inter-reliant in the generation of life. Giizhig also means “day”.

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**GIIZHIGOOKWE:** Sky Woman: see **AKI** (page 16).

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**GIIZIS:** Giizis, the sun, is *mishoomis* (our grandfather). The northern *Anishinaabeg* and *Cree* sometimes visualize Giizis as a young man who walks on the wind. He gives light, life, and warmth to the tree leaves in the Flowering Moon (May); he travels his own path, and when he gives and withdraws his light, the flowers, trees, grasses, vegetables, and fruits reply in accordance. Thus the sacred circle of birth, growth, rot, and re-birth remains unbroken.



Above image: a traditional Ojibwe Anishinaabe *mazinashkwemaganjigan* (bitten birch bark pattern) of the sun.



Dibewagendamowin ("Reflection"): Silver-and-red coral-cuff bracelet by Zhaawano Giizhik (Click on image).

The Anishinaabeg have always regarded *gichigamiin*, the Great Lakes, as a part of the MUCH GREATER WEB OF LIFE. They knew that the celestial bodies, the mountains and the lakes and the rivers, the fires, the thunders and the lightnings, the rains and the winds and a myriad of other living things that make up the physical world, were – as if all part of a Great Council - presided by a powerful *ogimaa* (chief) superseding all things alive. The name of this chief was GIMISHOOMISINAAN GIIZIS, our grandfather the sun.

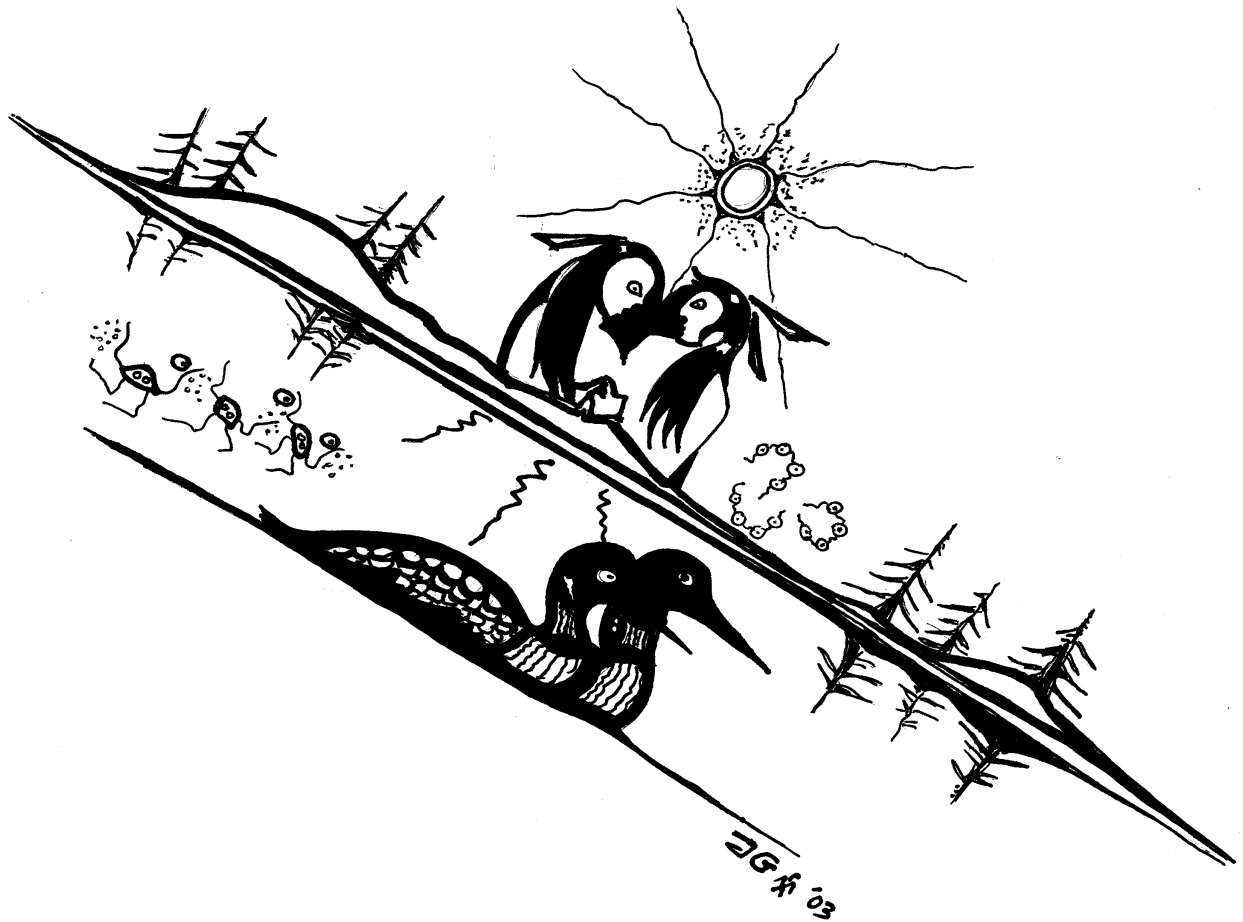
Besides being a 'giver of life' who on his daily path from East to West infuses his powers of light, heat, guidance, and growth into all things, GRANDFATHER GIIZIS has a *symbolic* meaning that goes even beyond the physical. To the Anishinaabeg the sun has always been a metaphor for something less tangible, an impersonal, genderless manifestation of mere metaphysical dimensions. This *manidoo* (spirit or mystery) was considered the driving force behind the entire Universe. Unseen by many but, if one watched and listened carefully and used one's sense of smell, recognizable in all things in nature. GICHI-MANIDOO, the collected sum of all mysteries, was the name by which it was known.

The Great Mystery could be known only through its creations and the order and harmony it had designed throughout the Universe. So, to the Anishinaabeg, the sun who is the father of all life, personifies none other than GICHI-MANIDOO, the spirit of spirits, the mystery of mysteries, the one force that created and permeates all life.



Click on images

**MAANG:** the loon. Because they figured the principles of leadership were best represented by *binesiwag* (birds), the *mishoomisinaanig* (Anishinaabe forefathers) selected certain birds to symbolize leadership. Of all echo-makers the peaceful *Ajijaak* (Sandhill Crane) was most outstanding so he became the first to symbolize Leadership and Direction. It was Maang (loon), the skillful fisher with the loud, wild cry, who made a habit of assuming his role of subchief with pomp and authority, and though this didn't make him very popular with the rest of the bird nation, the *mishoomisinaanig* became very fond of him. To them, Maang symbolized (conjugal) fidelity, for it was the close companionship between loons that best reflected *wiidigendiwin*, the union between husband and wife. (See below pen drawing by Zhaawano Giizhik.)



With the aid of a few elegant bare lines the author tried to capture the enchantingly still and cold world of the Great Lakes in this black and white pen drawing, which he named *Wiidigemaaganag* (*Niizhomaangwag*) ("Life Partners/ Two Loons"). The illustration pays tribute to the abstract and economical style of the second generation of Canadian Medicine painters. The black outlined images of the sun, loons, and man and woman in combination with the strange looking creatures and so-called 'spirit balls' in the air and the water identify the culturally based imagery as founded by the artists of the Woodland Painter School.

The stylistic elements used by the Woodland artists are powerful carriers of symbolic meaning, reminiscent of the sacred rock and birch bark art of the Ancients.

It was in respectful imitation of his Ojibwe ancestors that the author chose a male and female loon - as reflecting images of the married couple in the background - as symbols of matrimonial fidelity. After all, it is the close companionship between these water birds with the melancholy cry that best reflects *wiidigendinaaniwan*, the union between husband and wife.



The Bear" (1975) by the late Anishinini Anishinaabe (Oji-Cree) Medicine painter Carl Ray. The bear is wearing three medicine pouches around his neck signifying his legendary magic healing powers.



**MAKWA MANIDOO:** Spirit of the Bear. *Nooke* is the name used for *Makwa doodem*, the Anishinaabe Bear Clan. Makwa the bear is a powerful and respected *bawaagan* (grandfather-appearing-in-dreams), who chose the earth walk as a spiritual leader in order to show the People the way into the dream world and teach their *mashkikiwininiwag* (Medicine People) the medicinal use of herbs. As bears personify their lodge, members of the Midewiwin perform *makomiikana* "(following of) the bear path" rituals in

order to advance from a lower to a higher degree in their society.

Of all the seven Sacred Teachings, the virtue of *aakode'ewin* (bravery) was deemed especially meaningful, for, as the Elders tell us, being brave is not about being audacious or acting the most daring or mighty, but being brave enough to incorporate all other teachings into one's life, even if that means standing alone in the community. Makwa was therefore chosen to represent the law of Bravery and to represent the Warrior doodem, in charge of defense. They are the police force and the medics of their Nation.



"Ninge, Nimanaaji'enim ("Hooring my Mother") , acrylic on canvas 24" x 24" by Simone McLeod/Aki-egwaniizid. Since time immemorial *makwag* (bears) are dreamed of as offering to give medicines for the healing of man. With regard to herb medicine, Makwa is considered by the herb specialists of the Anishinaabeg as *ogimaa* (leader) of all animals, which means that if someone dreams of a bear he or she was chosen by the bear to be expert in the use of medicine made from plants and berries for curing illness. And it is Makwa who guards the eastern door of the *Midewigaan*, the ceremonial lodge of the MIDEWIWIN, as he protects the healing ceremonies and sacred rituals that are being performed inside the lodge. Midewiwin members, in order to advance from a lower to a higher degree in their society, follow the bear path and in doing so, actually temporarily transform into a bear. See also: **MIDEWIWIN**, page 96).

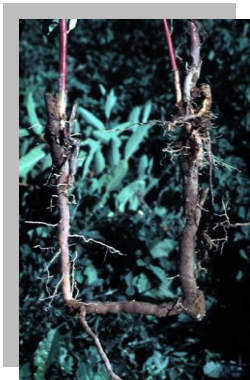
The above painting is a tribute to Simone's late mother who was a fourth grade member Mide. The artist says the following about the painting: "My mother often shared things from her childhood and talked to me about ceremonies from back home. This began when I was very young and I was ignorant as to what she meant, at times thinking that she was not of sound mind. When I was late in my teen years and life was becoming so hard for me to even want to wake in the mornings, she took me to my first ceremony where her people are from. It was there that I found out who the grandfathers knew as Aki-egwaniizid (all that covers the earth). It was there when I realized that I belonged surrounded by learning and understanding and growing in more ways than I could ever imagine. She also used to speak of wanting to gather many miigis shells in which to make a jingle dress. She was a caring woman with many passions and one of those passions was for teaching. While our paths together were at times full of trial and error, she gave me so much of herself and I just did not understand until she passed into the spirit world. The bear skin she wears across her back represents a beautiful story I heard about a bear who rose out of the water with miigis shells clinging to his fur. When I heard this story I thought of her and painted it into the painting. I have learned so much about myself when I took that Journey to Dawn Land, the most important thing was that she gave me life and together we walked side by side. I choose to learn from what she taught me that was done through actions ...I do my best now to walk the path she made for me and will do my best to show my children this path as well." Click on image.

Bear clan members have always served and protected their communities and since they traditionally spend much time outdoors they have great knowledge of medicinal plants and herbs used for treating minor diseases and infections. Traditionally, bear clan members are known for their thick black hair that never whitens even in old age.

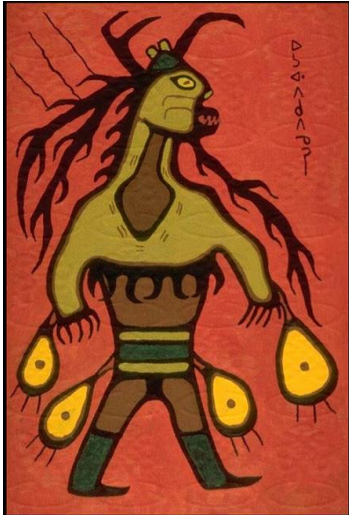


"Dreams Of Bear" by Ojibwe Medicine painter Gelineau Fisher, depicting the bear as a powerful bawaagan ("dream visitor")

According to the Midewiwin, the bear personifies their lodge and is also symbolic of the Anishinaabeg themselves: both bear and humans "walk the bear path" both inside and outside the lodge. Humans have always mirrored themselves in Makwa's yearly pattern of hibernation, isolation, and emerging with new life in the spring. This is why still today certain initiation rituals, puberty rites, and ceremonies of the Midewiwin follow this cyclic pattern and invoke the bear's power of renewal.



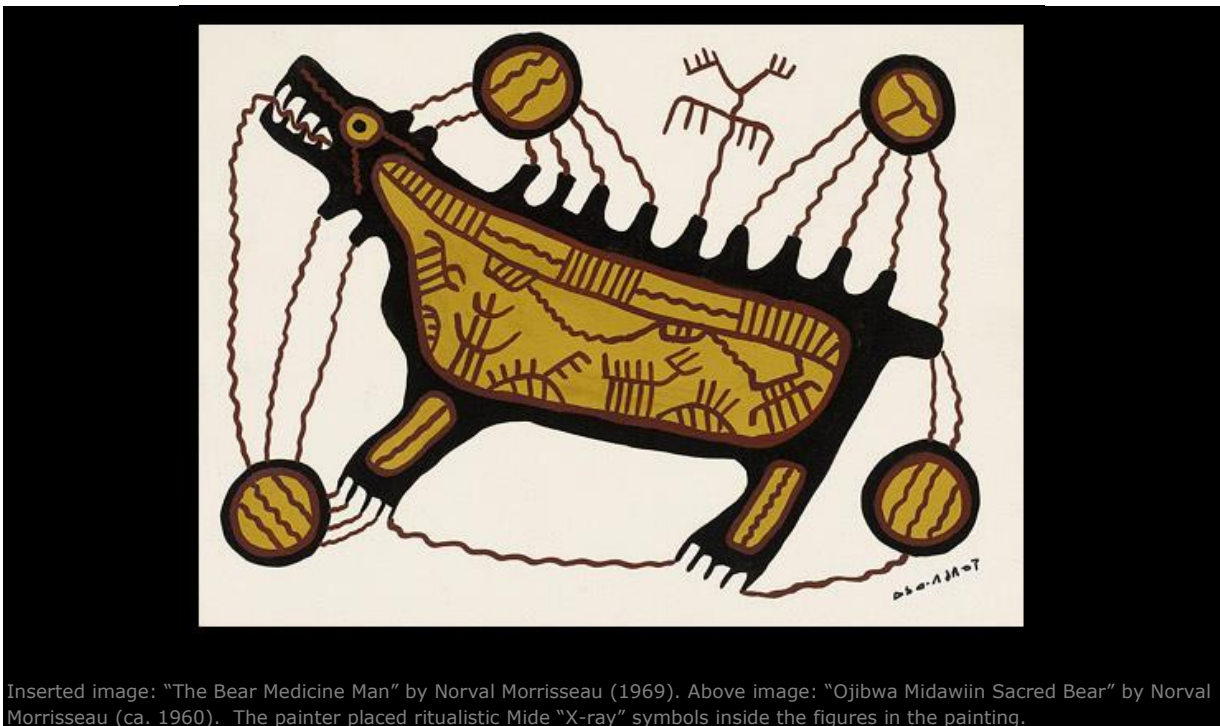
One of the strongest medicines that were handed down for many generations in the Midewiwin is known as *bebamakojiibik* or *makwonagizhojiibik* ("bear root" or "bear entrails root"), or dogbane (*apocynum*). The roots of this bear medicine, which are sometimes chewed to ward off evil charms, are mostly used to make decoctions for the treatment of hemorrhages, headaches, convulsions, heart palpitation, earaches, and a baby's cold. When stored for use, the roots are cut and strung on a cord, which bears a striking resemblance to a necklace of bear claws. So sacred is Makwa, that a bear killed by hunters is traditionally decorated, has smoke blown into his mouth, and is offered prayers of forgiveness so that his *jiichaag* (spirit) will not be offended, and the sanctity and balance of creation is preserved.



From of old, MAKWA MANIDOO or Bear Spirit plays an important role in the ceremonies conducted by the Midewiwin, such as *makomiinaka*, or "following of the Bear Path". (See also: **MIDEWIWIN**, p.96.) To guard the Mide rituals, carved images of the bear are set both at the eastern door (the entrance) of a *Midewigaan* (rectangular lodge) and at the Lodge's exit in the west. Makwa Manidoo is one of a myriad of *Aadizookaanag* (Spirit Frandfathers) to which a Mide candidate who is initiated in the society must pray and make offerings of *asemaa* (tobacco) in order to coerce the *maji-manidoog* (malevolent spirits) into drawing away from the eastern entrance to the Midewigaan. Here, at the eastern doorway, the candidate is met with four *Midewii'owewiniwag* (priests) of the fourth order dressed in bear robes who join in the chants and the rattling of the turtle shells, cheering the initiate as he or she makes his or her symbolic way around the Midewigaan. Then four other

bears, called "contraries" and representing the evils and temptations the initiate will meet in his or her later life and calling, appear growling and blocking the pathway. The presence of these contraries symbolizes the paradoxes in life, and the fact that there are two sides to everything. The benevolent bears, however, by pushing the snarling bears out of the way, remind the novice that he or she must not hesitate, or shrink from the forces of evil....

After having being admitted to the First Degree of the Lodge – which involved performances and teachings about how to use the magical properties of plants in norder to influence animals -, and prepared to advance to the Second - which included an education in the use of magical properties of plants in order to heal human beings -, an initiate would once more petition the spirit of the bear. He or she is supposed to offer three feasts during which three prayers are said to the Makwa Manidoo Guardian, asking him to open the entrance to that degree and chase away the *Misi-ginebi Manidoog* (Malevolent Serpent Spirits) that oppose the candidate's advancement and try to bar a safe passage...



Inserted image: "The Bear Medicine Man" by Norval Morrisseau (1969). Above image: "Ojibwa Midawin Sacred Bear" by Norval Morrisseau (ca. 1960). The painter placed ritualistic Mide "X-ray" symbols inside the figures in the painting.



After having become a Second-degree Midew, the candidate who is now applying for the Third Degree gives feasts to the four Mide instructors of the Fourth Order, during which he or she petitions to the AADIZOOKAANAG (Spirit Grandfathers) of the four directions and GIZHE-MANIDOO (the Merciful Spirit) for good fortune. The Midew, now actually taking on the form of a bear, becomes him/herself a Guardian Spirit Bear, entitled in the future to be present during the initiation rites of the second degree. As the Midew is on his or her way to the third degree he or she is seated before his or her *mitigwakik* (sacred drum) and then, when the proper time arrives, the *Misi-ginebi Manidoo* (Malevolent Serpent Spirit) will (reluctantly) grant the candidate a safe passage into the Third Degree. Here, at the door leading to the Third Degree, however, the candidate will encounter two more mighty opponents in the form of *Mishi-*

*bizhiw Manidoog* (Malevolent Panther Spirits), known as the Guardians of the Third Degree.



Once in the Third Degree of the Midewiwin, a candidate, to be allowed induction into the Fourth Degree, is now supposed to give another round of feasts and offer sufficient petitions to the Four Directions and the benevolent Beings of the Spirit World. As the candidate continues to personate MAKWA MANIDOO, he or she has still a great deal of difficulties to overcome! At the eastern entrance to the Midewigaan the Midew encounters two malevolent Bizhiw Manidoog (Panther or Lynx Spirits); at the same time a great number of other spirits roam about the structure, making a last effort to prevent him or her to reach the Fourth Degree...

The Elders tell us that everything in life is inspired by forces that aren't necessarily good or bad, but are simply there; it is the intent of

a Midew, the direction of his or her heart, which determines if a force is employed for good or evil purposes. Once a Midew is of the second degree, he or she has been endowed with supernatural powers that normally are used for healing purposes. However, there are accounts of *Maji-Mideg*, so-called Bad Medicine Persons, who are requested by ill-willing people to destroy an enemy or rival. On such an occasion a Maji-Mide – sometimes called a *maji-aya`aa*, or evil being - will employ his or her powers and assume the form of an animal, and after having injured or killed the victim – no matter how remote his whereabouts - , he or she will resume his or her human form so as to appear innocent of the crime. This is why in the old times sometimes impressions of the footprints of a bear were found in the vicinity of *wiigiwaaman* (lodges) or homes occupied by victims of a crime...this was, allegedly, the work of a MAKWA-BIMOSE or BEAR WALKER, a MAJI-MIDE using his bear powers for selfish purposes.

Inserted image: "Bear Walker Society" (1992) by the late Norval Morrisseau/Copper Thunderbird.





Besides a mystic dream visitor and respected teacher, the bear is also an *aadizookaan*, or “maker of stories”. One of the best-known [aadizookaanan](#) (traditional stories) about the bear comes from the southeastern Ojibweg and Odaawaag:

*“Many string of life ago a Makade-Noozhek (female black bear) swam across Mishigami (Lake Michigan) from (what is nowadays) Wisconsin to (what is nowadays) Michigan. Her two makwaansag, or cubs, followed her. It was a long journey and the makwaansag became so tired they fell behind. When Noozhek reached the shore, she climbed up on a giishkaadaawanga (steep sand dune) to watch for her children. But the poor makwaansag could not make it to the shore, so GICHI-MANIDOO (the Great mystery) changed each makwaans into a minis, or island. They can be seen today as the North Manitou Island and the South Manitou Island off the shore of Lake Michigan where their mother, Sleeping Bear Dune, is still waiting for them to reach the shore...”*



Noozhekwa Manidoo (“Spirit Of The Female Bear”), multicolor gold overlay wedding rings set designed and handcrafted by Zhaawano Giizhik. Click on image to view details of the rings.



**MANDAAMIN:** of all foods, mandaamin or *mystery seed* (Indian corn) became the most constant for the southern *Anishinaabeg*. Many strings of life ago, it was *Wiinabozho*, their beloved hero who was half human half spirit, a legendary prankster, as well as a wise teacher, a mighty hunter, and an adventurer, who gave the People this amazingly tall and graceful plant, this sacred food of wonder.

Many, many winters ago, *Wiinabozho* or *Wiisagejaak*, who is half human half spirit, a legendary prankster and shape shifter as well as a wise teacher and an adventurer, was told by his grand-mother *Nookomis* to go and find a *gichi-minisiinoo* (great warrior) who would wait for him to give him instructions. *Nanabush*, as he was called by his grandmother, crossed a big lake in a canoe, and there he found the *minisiinoo*, dressed in garments of green and yellow, with on his head a tuft of green plumes. The *gichi-minisiinoo* told *Wiinabozho* that his name was *Manidoo-imin* or *Mystery Seed*, and that *GICHI-MANIDOO*, the Great Mystery, had ordered him to start a wrestling match with *Wiinabozho*. A great magic battle followed that was felt throughout the universe, and when after three rounds *Wiinabozho* proved to be the strongest, the big *minisiinoo* pleaded him to strip his garments, to clean the earth of weeds and roots, and to bury him in the soft soil.

*Wiinabozho* did as he was told, and after some moons of clearing weeds and keeping the soil soft and moist, he saw tufts of green blossoms coming out of the grave. Suns passed, and one day, there in the place where the strange *minisiinoo* had been buried, suddenly stood an amazingly tall and graceful plant that no one had ever seen before. All the *Anishinaabeg* feasted on the ears of Corn, and they thanked *Wiinabozho* and *GICHI-MANIDOO* for bringing them this new Sacred Food of Wonder. By his death *Manidoo-imin* had given life to the hungry *Anishinaabeg*!



"Mandaamin, the Sacred Plant", sterling silver-and-turquoise bolo tie by Zhaawano Giizhik



"The Greati Manitu" by James Mishibinjima. Click on image.

**MANIDOOG** (Manitous): plural form of *manidoo*, mystery or spirit, spiritual being. "Spirit" is an English translation of something mysterious, supernatural, incorporeal, and immortal. *Manidoo* are natural forces and regarded as sacred manifestations of the "other" world. In the traditional Anishinaabe conception, all things in the universe created naturally contain *manidoo*. The sum total of all "*manidoo*" is GICHI-MANIDOO (the Great Mystery); sometimes called *JIBAMAAMA*, Source of All Powers.

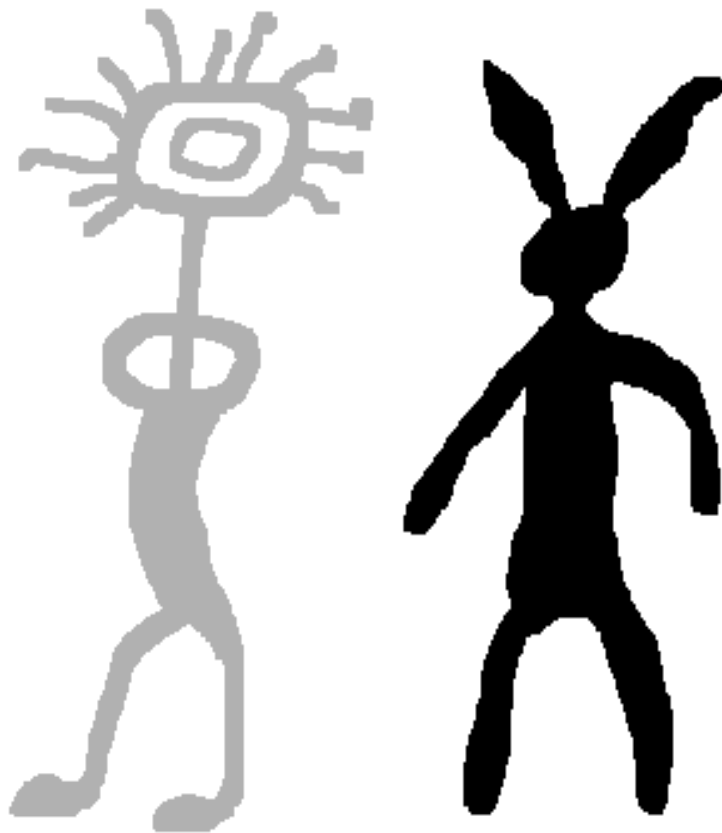
Other Ojibwe names for the concept GICHI-MANIDOO are GIZHE-MANIDOO ("venerable Manidoo"), WENIZHISHID-MANIDOO ("Fair Manidoo") and GICHI-OJICHAAK ("Great Spirit"). While GICHI-MANIDOO means "Sum of Mystery" as well as "Great Spirit", the literal meaning of GICHI-OJICHAAK is "Great Spirit", GICHI-MANIDOO carries the idea of the greater spiritual connectivity while GICHI-OJICHAAK carries the idea of individual soul's connection to the GICHI-MANIDOO.

Always the Anishinaabeg are mindful of the presence of this source called GICHI-MANIDOO; they will never fail to offer *asemaa* (tobacco) in places where the presence of

*manidoo* is the greatest – in a grotto on the edge of a lake, on a small island, in a glade hidden in the forest, in a current, or at the top of a mountain.

**MANIDOOKWE** (Spirit Woman) is an ancient term denoting a maternal, spiritual ancestor acknowledged in Midewiwin ceremonies as **the Mother Spirit**, or **the land**.

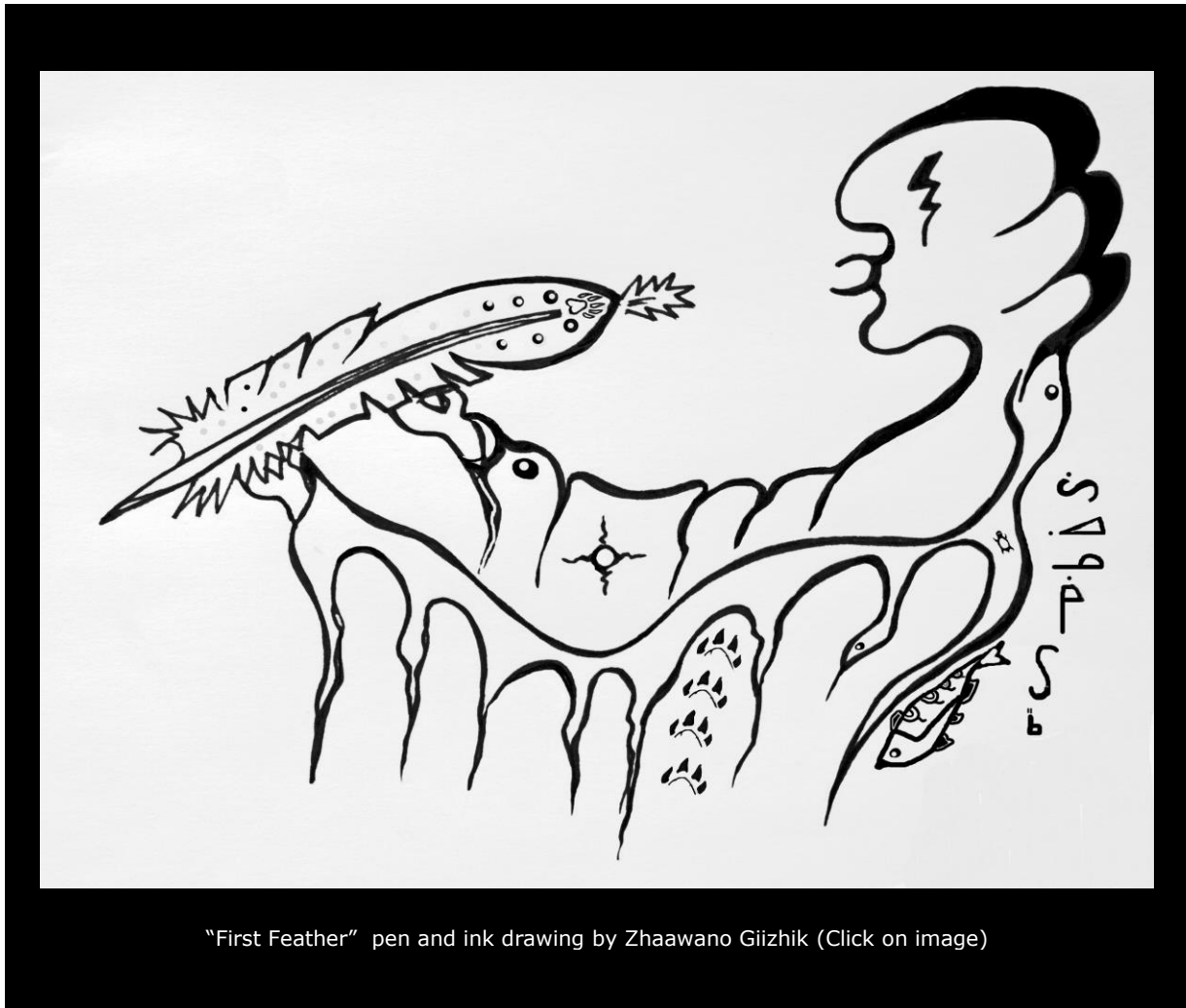
In the sacred Ojibwe stories or parables - *myth* is a European concept! - metamorphosis occurs with noticeably frequency where *manidoog* change their form. **Nanabozho**, or **Wiinabozho** as he is often called, is undoubtedly the most prominent and beloved of all *aadizoogaanag* (grandfathers of the nonhuman or semi human class). As his primary characteristic is "shape shifting" - the ability to resume form and personality of a human, or a hare, or a wild goose, or a tree stump – Wenabozho is basically a *manidoo* in nature and essence before anything else; outward appearance is only an incidental attribute of his incorporeal being.



Images of ancient spirit drawings (rock paintings) of GICHI-MANIDOO and WIINABOZHO

**Wiinabozho** is regarded as the source and embodiment of the lives of all sentient things, such as humans, animals, and plants. Every living thing on, beneath, and above the earth he gifted with a spirit and a soul, and to each he taught – through his magic powers or through his parabolic stories - the necessary tricks needed to outsmart and outwit their enemies. Not only did he impart to the Anishinaabeg the best remedies for treating illnesses, he, being an expert *shape shifter* himself, taught the animals how to disguise themselves so that they could survive.

Thus the Anishinaabeg, although he often presents himself as a trickster and a mischievous fantasist, regard Wiinabozho first and foremost as a *manidoo* possessing great wisdom in the prolonging of life. See also: **NANABOZHO** (page 127).



"Many moons ago, when the World was not yet born, GICHI-MANIDOO (The Great Mystery, sum of all Mysteries) beheld a vision. It saw in its dream a vast sky filled with many stars and the day-sun and the night-sun, and it saw the earth in the form of a giant sea turtle. In order to make its dream come true GICHI-MANIDOO first decided to make rock, water, fire, and wind. These substances were born spontaneously, seemingly out of nothing, and GICHI-MANIDOO breathed into each one its sacred life breath. From these four sacred substances, each gifted with a different soul and spirit and nature and shadow, GICHI-MANIDOO created the world it had seen in its vision, filled with the sun, the stars, the night-sun, and the earth. To the day-sun GICHI-MANIDOO gave the powers of light and heat and rays to warm the earth. To the night sun GICHI-MANIDOO gave the powers of light and the power to watch over the earth and all her children at night. To the earth GICHI-MANIDOO gave the power of growth and healing, and on and beneath her surface it formed hills, mountains, plains, valleys, lakes, rivers, streams, bays, wells, ponds, and even underwater streams. To these waters he gave the twin powers of purity and renewal. To the wind GICHI-MANIDOO gave music-making qualities and it infused in it its own power of breath of life. Then GICHI-MANIDOO made plants and animals (and birds, insects, and fish) and finally its breath created man.



"Wiinabozho and the Storyteller's Mirror", digipainting by Zhaawano Giizhik (Click on image to read the story behind the painting)

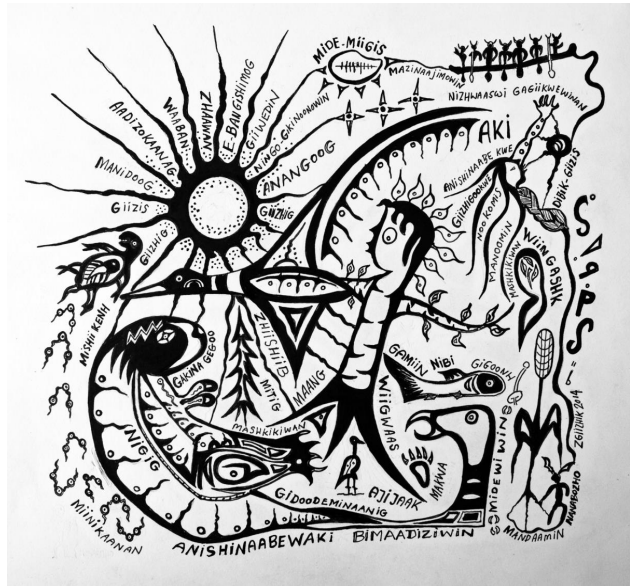
**G**ICHI-MANIDOO placed first man on a land near the borders of a great sea, which soon would be known as WAABANAKIING, the Dawn Land. It was here that many winters later the offspring of first man, the great Anishinaabe Nation, would thrive before Seven Grandfathers came out of the Sea and gave them their Midewiwin belief, established five *odoodemag* (clans), and a set of seven laws to live by. These same grandfathers also warned the Anishinaabe People of a threat arriving from the East that would bring sickness, starvation - *aahaaw*, even extermination - and they convinced many to leave the Dawn Land and follow the waterways to a land far to the West, "a place where grows manoomin (wild rice) upon the waters (The Great Lakes)."

"Once GICHI-MANIDOO had placed mankind on the borders of the Great Salt Sea in the East, it knew that everything was in its place and that everything was infused with its sacred breath that brought about beauty and harmony and order.

Satisfied with what it had created, GICHI-MANIDOO then made the Great Laws of Nature. These laws regulated the seasons and all patterns of existence, governing the position and movement of the physical bodies (sun, moon, earth, stars) and the four sacred substances (rock, water, fire, and wind), controlling and safeguarding the rhythm and continuity of birth, growth, decay, and rebirth, ensuring they all lived and worked together interdependently. GICHI-MANIDOO, in short, created BIMAADIZIWIN, life as we know it."

- Taken from Teachings Of The Eagle Feather part 7, [ZhaawanArt Blogspot](#).

**MANOOMIN:** the rhythmic sound of paddles stirring the calm, transparent waters of a lake is music to the *Anishinaabe* ear; the same goes for rice sticks gently knocking on stalks of *manoomin* (wild rice). Within living memory, *manoomin*, the sacred food-that-grows-on-water, forms the chief cereal food in many a southern *Anishinaabe* community. It abounds in countless lakes, ripening earliest in the shallow lakes fed by streams and later in the lakes fed by springs. While *manoominike* is traditionally an industry essential to sustenance and trade, it has, like the maple sugar camp, a pleasant social phase. To this day, *manoominike* is the activity in the regions around the Great Lakes that most enlivens *Anishinaabe*-sense of identity. So sacred is *manoomin*, that when somebody leaves for the Land of Souls, the People offer a little rice for the spirit/soul of the deceased to travel its journey. In the drawing, the long rice of *manoomin* is represented by the hair of the dancing woman (top right in the drawing).



"Manoomin, Spirit Of The wild Rice", bracelet of silver, gold, turquoise stones, and shell inlay, designed and handcrafted by jewelry designer Zhaawano Giizhik. Click on image to view details of the bracelet.

*Manoominikewin*, the harvesting of the sacred grain called manoomin, has also a spiritual meaning pertaining to the bond between man and woman. When they collect wild rice an *Anishnaabewinini* and a *Anishinaabekwe* go out in their own canoe and they don't take anyone else with them; this will guarantee a good harvest and also that nothing bad will happen when they are out on the lake.

To this day, manoominikewin is the activity that most enlivens Ojibwe Anishinaabe sense of identity. It is simply a way of life, which, however, becomes more and more threatened by changes in the water level and toxic waste and heavy metals from the factories and mines that dot the Gichi-gamiing area and that gradually but dramatically turn sacred Anishinaabe land into one big mining district.

According to Ojibwe Anishinaabe tradition, Wiinaboza, the beloved spirit grandfather known as the first man who walked the earth, was introduced to manoomin by fortune, and by a [duck](#).

"One evening Wiinabozho returned from hunting, but he had no game...As he came toward his fire, there was a duck sitting on the edge of his kettle of boiling water. After the duck flew away, Wiinabozho looked into the kettle and found manoomin floating upon the water, but he did not know what it was! He ate his supper from the kettle, and it was the best soup he ever tasted! Later, he followed in the direction the duck had taken, and came to a lake full of manoomin: wild rice. He saw all kinds of ducks and geese and mud hens, and all the other water birds eating the sacred grain. After that, when Wiinabozho did not kill a deer, he knew where to find food to eat..."

Since the day Wiinabozho discovered manoomin, the Anishinaabeg regard zhiishiib and the snipe – a wading bird they call *manidoominikeshii*, the ricing bird, as special messengers, a sure sign of ripe grain. The stylized, sterling silver image of the startled water bird flying over a golden rice bed that jeweler Zhaawano Giizhik placed inside the silver and gold bracelet visualizes the relationship between the waterfowl and Manoomin and the Ojibwe People who so heavily depend on both...



Click on image to read about the symbolism of the bracelet.



**MASHKIKIWAN**, or **aniibiishag**, and **editegin**: respectively medicines (medicinal plants, medicinal herbs) and berries. The Ojibwe *doodem* (totem) of *nanaandawi'iwewin* (healing) is represented by the otter - as well as by the turtle, the frog, the rattlesnake, the water snake, and the mermaid/merman. *Mashkikiwininiwag* are herbalists; Ojibwe specialists who have an encyclopedic knowledge of the mysterious properties of an enormous variety of plants, herbs, roots, and berries. Many of these medicine persons are *women*, and should therefore be referred to as *mashkikiikewik-wewag* ("Women who are of the medicine making").



Carl Ray, Medicine Bear (Shaking Tent ritual), 1977, acrylic on canvas, 73.7 x 99.1 cm



Merman with medicine pouch by David Morrisseau

The Anishinaabeg have always lived according the cyclical rhythm set by, as they called it, *aandakiwinan*, the seasonal changes.

In the old days, during the warm moons in the period called *niibinisiwin* (summer camping), the Ojibwe Anishinaabeg of the northwoods, as soon as the ice on the lakes and rivers melted, left their winter camps and headed for the shores of *gichigamiin*, the Great Lakes. Here they stayed during the summer moons near the river mouths, where the men fished for *namebinag* (sucker) and *namewag* (sturgeon) that were entering the rivers and streams to spawn.

Others set up summer camps near the shores of the *zaaga'iganan* (inland lakes) and fished, hunted, and gathered plant foods and medicinal herbs. These temporary summer villages were usually composed of single-family *waaginogaanan* and *asawa'ogaanan* (respectively circular or domed and conical wigwams made of bent-over saplings and covered with birch bark sheets) that generally housed populations of 50 to 70 persons.

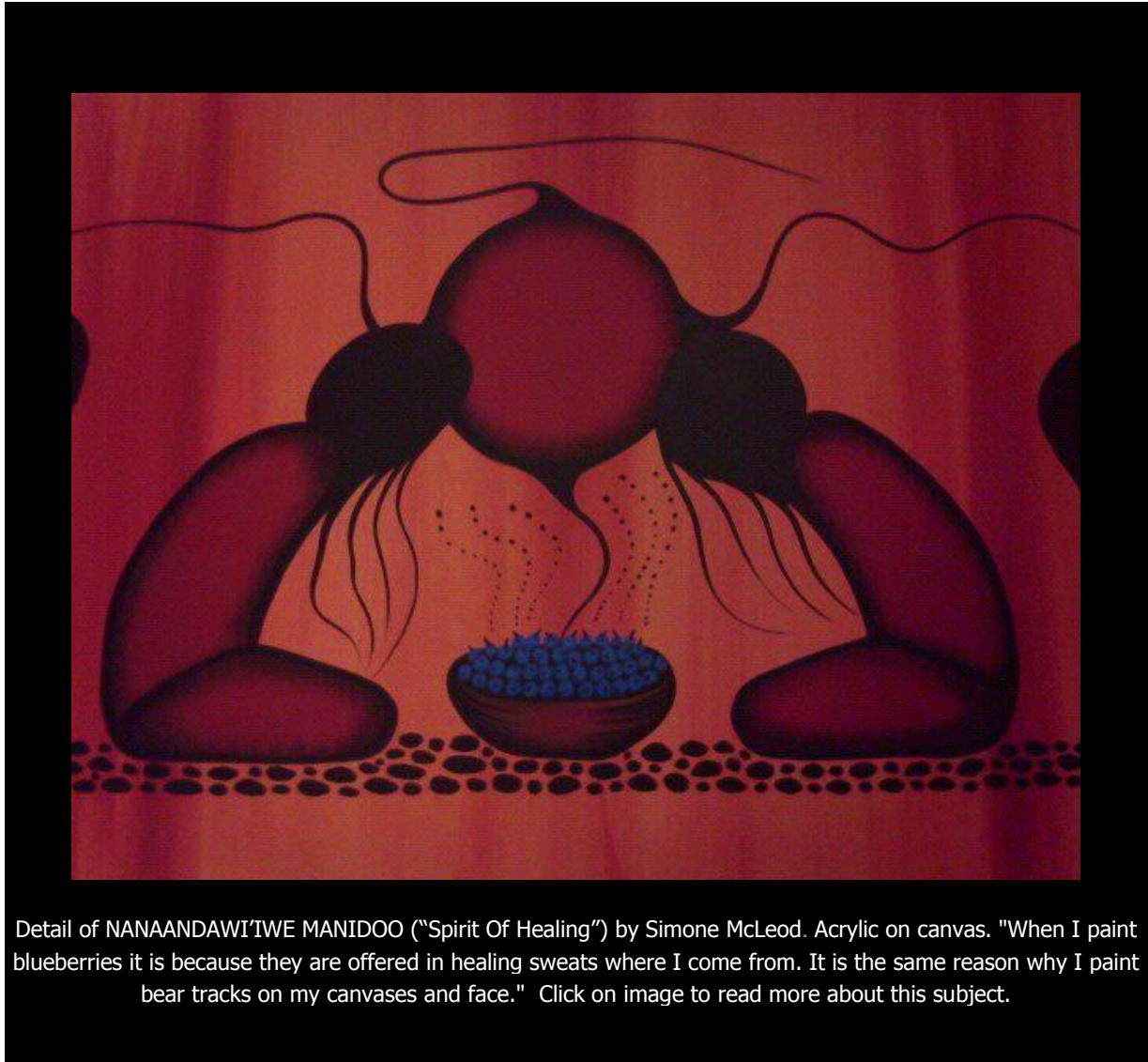
Meanwhile the many small Anishinaabe clan groups that lived south of *gichigamiin*, who, unlike their Ojibwe relatives from Canada were semi-agricultural people, organized themselves into band units of (sometimes up to) 300 to 400 people as soon as the ice thawed and camped in regions with fertile soil and plenty of fish and game and other food sources. These southern Ojibweg hunted, fished, tapped sugar from *ininaatigoog* (sugar maple trees) and *wiigwaasag* (birch trees) and collected other plant foods and berries, and tended gardens of *mandaamin* (maize), *anijiiminan* (beans), and *nabagokwisimaan* (squash). Their summer villages were usually made up of small, round *wiigiwaaman* (wigwams) made of sapling frames and covered with cattail leaf mats and tree bark.

*Niibinishiwin* was not only a time of labor but also of social activities and weddings and ceremonies. At the end of the season called *dagwaagin* (fall), some of these summer camps served as a base for productive fish expeditions to the tempestuous *gichigamiin* where the men netted *adikamegwag* and *maazhamegosag* (whitefish and trout) that spawned in gigantic numbers. After the abundant catch the fish was cleaned, smoked, and freezeed for the wintermoons. While the men took care of fishing, these kinds of activities would put a heavy demand on the collective labor of the women.

Since time immemorial, the moons of June, July, and August have been associated with wild berries, which are ready for picking in early summer and midsummer, and some even in late summer and fall. So, in many parts of Turtle Island in what is now Canada and the United States, the moon of June is named after the strawberry ("heart berry"); July, depending on the area and community, is often called *miskomini-giizis* (red raspberry moon) by the Ojibwe Anishinaabeg in Canada, or *miin(ikaa)-giizis* (blueberry moon, called so by those who belong to the southeastern and northwestern branches of the Ojibwe Anishinaabe Nation. August, a time when blueberries and blackberries are still harvestable, is also called *miin-giizis* in some parts of Canada.

The Anishinaabe and Cree ancestors have always been very fond of berries. Berries, cherries, and acorns were traditionally compounded with other herbs in making medicine. Dried berries, sometimes combined with deer tallow and moose fat, provided nutrition for in the winter moons. When boiled, berries were seasoned with *ziinzibaakwad* (maple sugar) or combined with other foods. Strawberries and bunchberries were eaten raw. Cranberries - harvested in the fall when the fruit takes on its distinctive deep red color - were cooked using sugar. Blackberries, cherries, chokecherries, red raspberries, and currants, after being cooked (usually without sugar), were traditionally spread on slates of *wiigwaas* (birch bark) and then stored in *makakoon* (birch bark baskets and boxes) for winter use.\*

It is the teaching of the Midewiwin, the age-old Anishinaabe society of the Good Hearted Ones, that every tree, bush, plant, and fruit has a use. *Bimaadiziwin*, health and long life, represented to our ancestors a central guideline in life and a code for upright living, and those who had knowledge of plants and fruits and their medicinal and ceremonial use were most highly esteemed among their community. This knowledge often came directly from *manidoog* (the spirits), particularly from *bawaaganag*, spirits in animal form visiting the healer in a dream or vision. But not all herb specialists received their knowledge from the spirit world. Many medicine persons who had an encyclopedic knowledge of the mysterious properties of plants, herbs, roots, and berries, used to be women...



Detail of NANAANDAWITWE MANIDOO ("Spirit Of Healing") by Simone McLeod. Acrylic on canvas. "When I paint blueberries it is because they are offered in healing sweats where I come from. It is the same reason why I paint bear tracks on my canvases and face." Click on image to read more about this subject.

Some of the fruits and berries that grow abundantly in summer, such *miinagaawanzhig* (blueberries) and *bagwaji-ode'iminan* (wild strawberries, literally: wild heart berries) are traditionally not only used for food and medicine, but they also have a ceremonial function. Berries are often associated with makwa the bear. In the old days, when a person was fond of, let's say, cherries, the people would say: Look, there goes a bear". (See also: **MAKWA MANIDOO**, page 68.)

Traditionally, the Anishinaabeg approach life in a sacred manner. When taking a *mashkiki* (plant), *ojiibik* (root), or *mashkosiw* (herb), one always explains to its spirit why it is being done, and offers some *asemaa* (tobacco) in return. While putting asemaa in the hole one would respectfully tell the spirit of the dug-up plant or root that GICHI-MANIDOO allowed it to grow in that certain spot for the benefit of mankind and that the tobacco is been given in return so that the plant will do it's best to make the medicine work. This is the way it has always been done and always will be done.



Using a feather to fan the smoke of a *nookwezigan*, or smudge stick resting in a shell that is used as a bowl.

To the Mideg, those who practice the medicinal ways of the Midewiwin, and all the others who follow *Anishinaabe-bimaadiziwin*, the Traditional Road, there are four plants that are especially revered while used in daily living. These plants are:

- **ASEMAA**, tobacco, representing the Eastern direction. The oldtime Anishinaabeg also used *giniginige* (commonly written as "kinnikinnick"), a mixture of *mishkoobimizh* (red osier dogwood) with *zaagaakominagaanzh* (bearberry) and tobacco, or sometimes *mishkwaabiimizh* (red willow) with *wiingashk* (sweetgrass). Both asemaa and giniginige are still used in the offering of prayer to GICHI-MANIDOO, as a way of communication, their smoke lifting the prayers to the Great Mystery, or set on the ground in a clean place as an offering. Either offered through the fire (*Zagaswaawin*, smoking of tobacco) or just held in hand, using tobacco to extend prayers of thankfulness is something that is done on a daily basis as each new day is greeted. And to this day, *Asemaakewin* (tobacco offering) is customary when seeking knowledge or advice from an Elder or when a Pipe and/or a Drum is present.
- **GIIZHIK**, white cedar, representing the Southern direction. When burned, its snipped leaves act as a purifier, giving out a pleasant piny scent, cleansing the area as well as body and soul of any participant.
- **MASHKODEWASHK**, white sage, representing the Western direction. It is burned as a purifier, emitting a spicy scent.
- **WIINGASHK**, sweetgrass, representing the North. This too, is a purifier, replacing negative with positive. It gives out a sweet, aromatic scent, especially when burnt or when it rains. When it is harvested, it is cut, never pulled. Many things are made with it such as *wiingashkoo`iinan* (coiled baskets), and when braided it signifies the hair of **Omizakamigokwe** (Ogashinan), the Earthmother.

According to Midewiwin tradition, a long time ago the Anishinaabeg mysteriously lost the gift of health and long life, and they fell prey to a terrible epidemic in droves. One of the

many victims was a *gwiwizens* (boy), and as after travelling *jiibay-miikana*, the Path that leads to the Land Of Souls, he was about to enter the entrance, trembling with misery, the boy was asked why he grieved, and he answered that he wanted life for his People who were suffering so much. GICHI-MANIDOO, feeling sorry for the dying Anishinaabeg, granted the boy's request. The boy was told that the Anishinaabeg were to found the MIDEWIWIN, the Medicine Lodge Of Good Hearted Ones so that they could obtain *bizaanide'ewin* (peace of heart) by seeking for the good in life and by performing rituals for the gift of good health. The boy was told that his People must change their life style and that they, to receive permission to enter the Land of Souls, must strive for inner peace and live according to the code of upright living. In order to regain their health they were to seek a powerful medicine called *Miskojiibik* (Blood Root) in the depths of the sea and bring it to land. Possessing and symbolizing the power of life, growth, and self-healing, the bloodroot would be a sign to Wiinabozho, who at that time lived among the People as the spirit messenger of GICHI-MANIDOO, that he had to make known the proper rituals of the Midewiwin. And so it came to pass, the Midewiwin was founded and their medicine men and women introduced to the People rituals for warding off sickness and death, and thanks to the *gwiwizens* and Wiinabozho, the Anishinaabeg were saved from extinction.



**Nookweziganan**, medicines (such as sage, cedar, and sweetgrass) for burning to make a smudge. When smudging, one is not supposed to use one's breath to blow smoke since the human breath is not always considered clean. Using a feather or large leaf to fan the burning herbs or embers is preferred. Photo courtesy: Simone Mcleod.

The Anishinaabe forefathers, whose herbalists obtained their vast knowledge of medicinal herbs not only through experiment and hard study but also through dreams, were often visited by *bawaaganag* (dream visitors), particularly the bear. Today's healers of the Midewiwin still attribute many healing powers to makwa the bear, nigig the otter (who once saved the People from extinction by bringing from the depths of the waters a healing plant called *ginebig-washk* or "snake root"), and makadeshigan the black bass

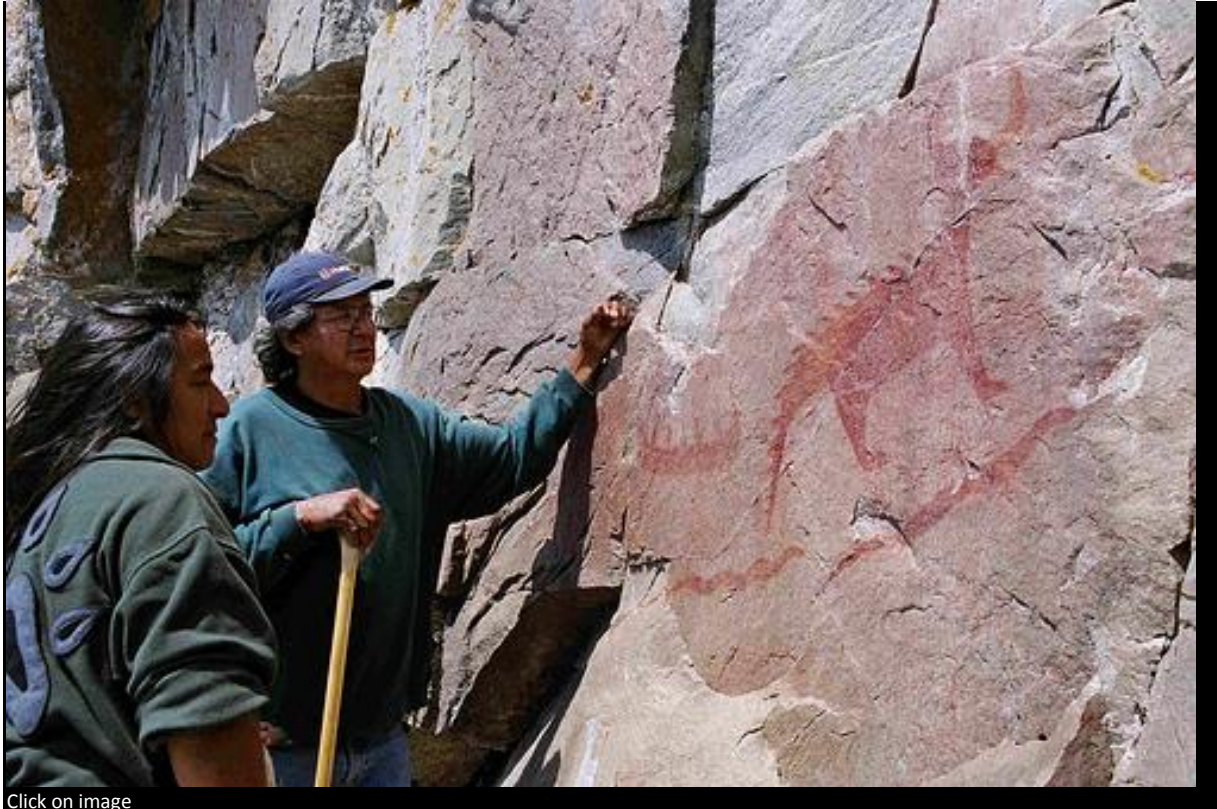
(see below image). It is understood though, that some of the best Mide remedies were received from grandfather makwa (see also: **MAKWA MANIDOO**, page 68).

**Bear Medicine**- a power specifically associated with the spirit of the bear, particularly the ability to heal - is held in very high regard by the healers of the Midewiwin, and two of the strongest of these medicines are known as *zaasabikwan*, also called *makomagizh-ojibik* (bear entrails root, or dogbane), and *baabiimaakwad-jiibikagisin*, which means "bear root, it is found here and there" (spreading dogbane). So great are the spiritual and curative powers possessed by grandfather bear, that Mide healers follow *makomii* (the bear path) in proceeding from a lower to a higher degree in the Midewiwin society.

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Detail of a sterling silver bolo tie designed and handcrafted by Zhaawano Giizhik, depicting Makadeshigan, the spirit of the Underworld. According to Anishinaabe tradition, Makadeshigan the Black Bass offered himself in the form of a medicine from the depths of the Underworld that would protect the Anishinaabeg against sickness and also bring them game animals for their sustenance. But first of all, Makadeshigan presented the People with the gift of ceremony and ritual, thus laying the foundation for the MIDEWIWIN, the Grand Medicine Society of the Anishinaabe People. Click on the above image to read more details about this bolo tie.



Click on image

**MAZINAAJIMOWIN:** pictorial spirit writings. Since the pre-dawn time the footsteps of the ancestors of the *Gichi gami-Anishinaabeg* (the Peoples from the Great Lakes area) walked the earth. We can still see their mysterious handprints scattered all over the Great Lakes district of Turtle Island (North America), often in out-of-the-way places in the woods or at petroglyph sites such as cliffs or in caves and on island shorelines along the Great Lakes. Many pictographs or petroforms – some of which are perhaps two millennia or at least many, many generations old - hide in locations where the *manidoog* (spirits) reside, particularly in those mystic places near the coastline where the sky, the earth, the water, the underground, and the underwater meet.



These *mazinaajimowin* or 'pictorial spirit writings' - which were painted on rocks and etched on other sacred items such as birch bark, copper and slate, and animal hide - were a form of spiritual as well as educational communication, painted dreams that provided the Anishinaabeg structure and meaning to the cosmos. Some of the pictographs depicted a series of constellations in the sky, or underwater lynxes, or sacred stories about *Wiinabozho* and other *aadizookaanag* (supernatural beings, spirit grandfathers playing a role in the *aadizookaanan* or sacred stories). Other pictographs expressed the countless adventures the Anishinaabeg experienced during their incredible migrations throughout the northern part of the continent - which eventually led them to *gaa-zaaga'eganikag*, the "land of many lakes".

The *niigaanaajimowinan* (prophecies) and *midewaajimowinan* (traditional teachings) behind these enigmatic graphic expressions have been passed down for centuries, and as they recount a myriad of scientific knowledge and history, they also contain essential life lessons of the Gichigami-Anishinaabeg that are still taught today.



[Click on image](#)

*Wiigwaasabakoon* or birch bark scrolls carry all kinds of, often complex, geometrical patterns and shapes, called *mazinaajimowinan* (design stories). These bark sheets, which are an amazingly time-resistant material and can remain intact for many centuries, sometimes convey traditional teachings, for example about the origins of the *Midewiwin*, or songs and details of Mide rituals and *midewigaanan* (the medicine lodges). Such a scroll, when used for ritual purposes, is called a *midewiigwaas* (literally: ritual birch bark). The birch bark scrolls, most of which are from present-day Minnesota, do not necessarily provide an exact narrative translation of the rock paintings and carvings that have been found in various places at the Great Lakes, but they do tell us about the *Manidoog*, the *Aadizookanag*, and a myriad of Mide Spiritual practices.

Birch bark scrolls are mnemonic, which means they add the memory, and their recurring motifs have components that used to be common figurative signs among all Ojibwe Anishinaabe Midewiwin practitioners. The figures with upraised arms and bent legs, the medicine bags, the half emerged figures, the zigzag power or spirit lines, the horned serpents and other symbols found in the birch bark scrolls reflect the painted designs and carvings that can be found everywhere in the bedrock and on cliff walls in several remote places in the Great Lakes region.

The drawing to the right is a typical example of a modern interpretation of sacred Anishinaabe *mazinaajimowin*: an (adapted) 'X-ray' painting by second-generation Canadian Woodland Painter Brian Marion depicting an antlered Midewinini (Mide medicine man) making direct contact with the spirit world. This type of *mideg* (spirit medicine men or women) is often wrongfully dubbed (stereotyped) "shaman", which is a concept originated in Eurasia and originally used for healers of the Tungusic peoples of [Siberia](#). The term shaman, which is offensive to the traditional Natives and their Elders, is nowadays used by many Western anthropologists, archaeologist, historians, and art dealers - not to mention all sorts of commercialized pseudo -"Indian" groups - who are insensible to the unique and incomparable character of Native American spiritualism.



The **Midewiwin**, or The Good Way Of The Heart, is an age-old animistic-medicinal institution conserving the concept of *mino-bimaadiziwn*, a set of seven grandfather teachings on human conduct and a spiritual way for living. Its principal focus is recovering and keeping alive the seven *mide-wiigwaasan* (birch bark scrolls used for ritual purposes) and their sacred teachings - which in recent history had been forced underground. These complex writings also include astronomy, mapping, information about the clan system and family lineage, and up to 1000-year-old migration routes. Until today, many of these Mide writings and records have been kept secret - passed on only in sacred spaces by community-acknowledged Keepers of ceremony -, in order to keep the scrolls safe, to interpret them correctly, and to await a better time - when a generation will rise up that walks according to a more intelligent and respectful worldview than we experience now. (See also: **MIDEWIWIN**, page 96.)

The ancient visual language of *mazinaajimowin* - be it written on rock or bark any other natural feature or material - features figures consisting of simple, articulated, flowing outlines that are always, in some way or another, interconnected. These outlined figures often have 'spirit lines' emanating from the interior or exterior, and sometimes enclose



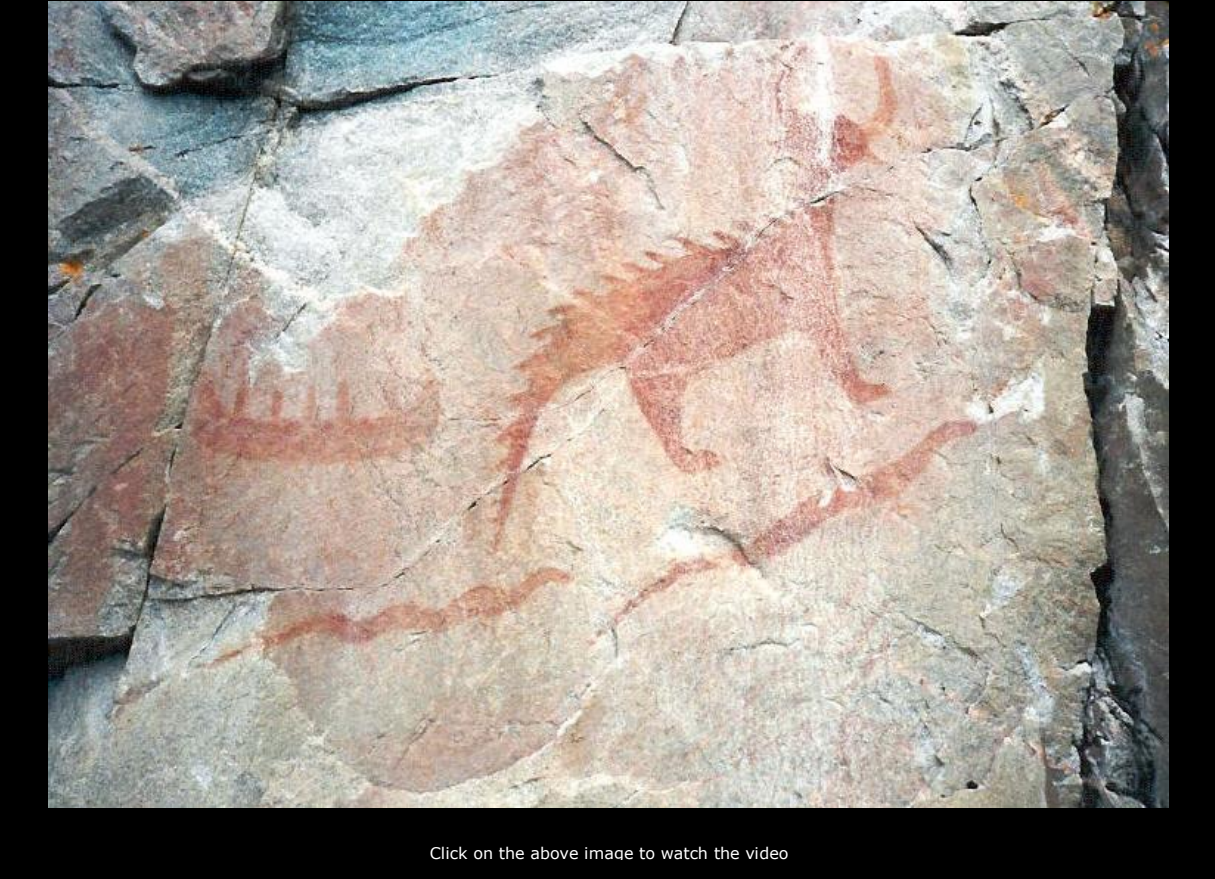
mystic 'inside views' (so-called 'X-ray anatomy') of images of people, animals, plants and trees, and supernatural beings.

During the 1960's , these pictographs (often done in red ochre) and birch bark writings became an endless source of inspiration to the painters of a Canadian-based, modern Indigenous art movement. The typical outline drawing style - known as 'linear determinatives' - of these 'Medicine' painters – and, in one case, a [jeweler](#) working in the Native Woodland art style - is directly based on the ancient spirit writings of their Anishinaabe forefathers. In order to fit the need of their art practices, the Medicine Painters – led by the late [Norval Morrisseau](#) – began to stylize many of these archaic components into a new abstract visual language, which became known as [THE NEW WOODLAND SCHOOL OF ART](#).



Above illustration: a graphical evolution in three phases, from ancient mazinaajimowin (spirit writing) on rock (petroglyphs and petrographs) to modern medicine painting on paper (the latter allegedly done by Norval Morrisseau, the founder of the Native Woodland School of Art). The original rock painting, which is said to represent *Gaa-biboonikaan* (a winter star constellation) in the form of a sky-medicine healer of the Midewiwin who holds an otter medicine bag and from whose head runs a lightning bolt directly connecting him to sky-power, was painted on a cliff wall located along a rough canoe route along the Bloodvein range between Lac Seul and Lake Winnipeg. It is [suggested](#) that the position of several Ojibwe pictographs found all over the Great Lakes and the Canadian Shield is oriented toward viewing the constellations (such as Orion) in the winter sky. The Ojibwe Anishinaabeg call Orion *Gaa-biboonikaan*, the Bringer of Winter, as its presence in the night sky heralds winter.

Illustration top right: Overlay gold pendant designed and handcrafted by Zhaawano Giizhik: MANIDOO NAGAMO ("The Spirit Sings"). 18K yellow gold, sterling silver, 14K red gold inlay, 25x20 mm (0.1 x 0.08 inch). The design is inspired by ancient mazinaajimowin/spirit writing on rocks. [Click on image to view details.](#)



[Click on the above image to watch the video](#)

Images: Anishinaabe rock paintings at Agawa, Lake Superior, Ontario, depicting *aadizookaanag* (spirit grandfathers) e.g. **Name**, the Spirit of Sturgeon (top image), and a horned underwater manidoo (manitu) by

the name of **Mishibizhiw**, the Great Lynx . The site's name in Anishinaabemowin (Ojibwe) is *Mazinaabikiniganing*, which means "the painted rock". The sacred red ochre paint used to depict this, and many similar, accounts was generally created by mixing iron hematite with boiled sturgeon spine or bear grease.

Mishibizhiw the horned underwater lynx is associated with the water realm, and revered by the Anishinaabeg and Cree as one who controls the moods of the Lake and a sometimes dangerous guard of rapids and swift or troubled waters. Like other manidoog and aadizookaanag, Mishibizhiw has the power to shapeshift into various animal forms. Mishibizhiw is said to aid those who seek to cross dangerous water, provided that a suitable offer is made.

Some Anishinaabeg, particularly medicine men who seek to be granted the power to enter the sacred rocks, still leave offerings like asemaa (tobacco), clothing, and bundles of colored sticks. The rock painting featuring Mishibizhiw and the canoe recounts the daring crossing of eastern Lake Superior in 1850 by a fleet of war canoes, led by the warrior and Mide medicine man Ma-iingan (Wolf), with the blessing of Mishibizhiw.

Illustration below: Misi-ginebig ("The Great Horned Underwater Snake") by Zhaawano Giizhik (2012) – Click on image.



Ojibwe Anishinaabe spirit writing migration story on birch bark (Diba Jimooyung exhibition of the Saginaw Chippewa.



Miigisag from the Pacific; photo courtesy Simone McLeod

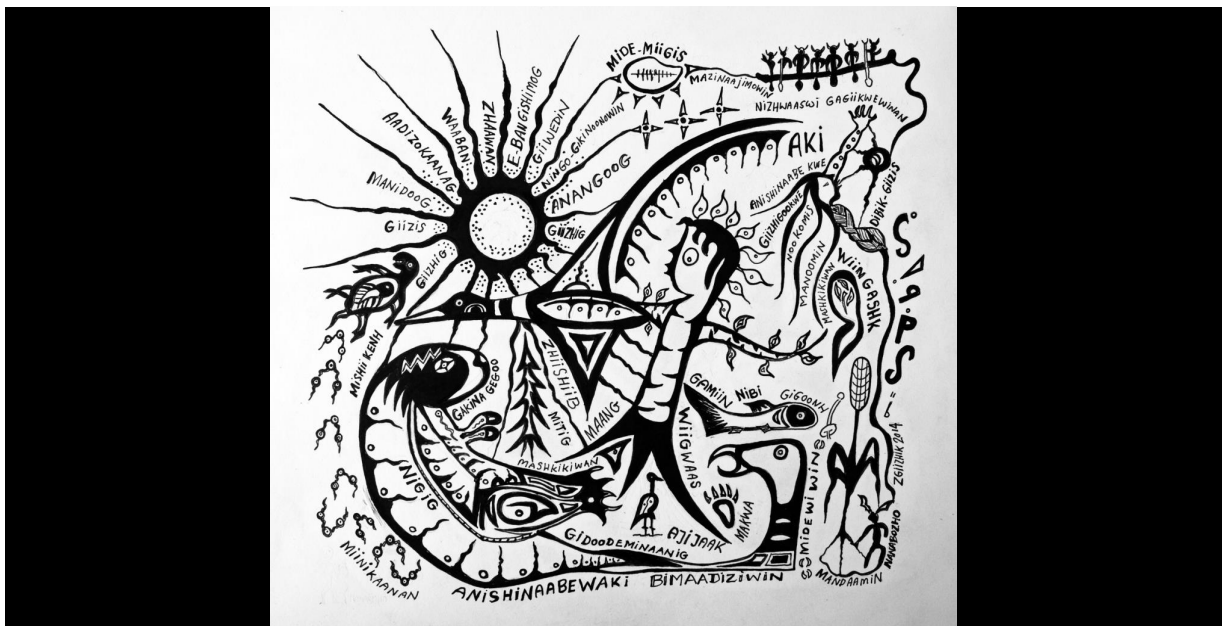
**MIDE-MIIGIS:** the sacred cowry shell, symbol of origins from the sea and lakes and water routes. According to ancient tradition a white cowry shell arose from the water and shone in the sky as a beacon for the People to follow during their legendary migration from the Atlantic Ocean to the Great Lakes. As it gave direction, warmth, and light and was therefore regarded as a representation of the sun, the miigis became an extremely respected and revered object and the

it in at least six different *Midewiwin* ceremonies. Miigis, besides the bear and the otter, is the main and central symbol of the Midewiwin itself and the shells play an essential role in the instruction for the ascending four to eight levels of Midewiwin.

The image of *miigis* is drawn on a number of sacred Origin birchbark scrolls, where the story and ceremonies for reenactment of the Creation Story are recorded in pictorial mnemonics and diagrams. The poles in a *midewigaan* (rectangular Mide lodge) are sometimes covered with dots of paint, or clay, imitating the miigisag. These representations of the miigis, as well as those engraved in the birch bark scrolls, carry details of the origin story of the Anishinaabeg. In the below drawing, the woman's outstretched left arm shows 5 dots, representing *miigisag*, symbolic of great spirit power.

According to one creation story, when GICHI-MANIDOO created the world, and after it placed the flora and fauna on the planet, it took four parts of Mother Earth and blew into them using a Sacred Shell.

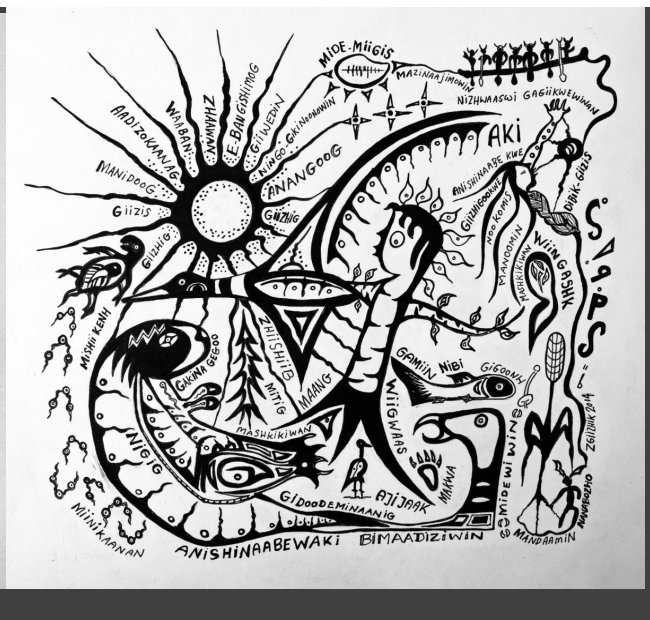
From the union of these Four Sacred Elements and its holy breath were created the *Anishinaabeg*, the last creatures to be placed on the Earth. The image of the radiant cowry shell shown at the top center of Zhaawano Giizhik's drawing (see below) refers to an ancient Midewiwin allegory, in which a sacred shell appearing in the sky led a band of prodigal *Anishinaabeg* on a long and legendary migration from the shores of the Atlantic Ocean back to their ancient homeland in the west, around the Great Lakes.





Bears are associated, and allied, with *miigisag* and therefore often depicted in line drawings covered with shells (see the 1980s acrylic painting to the left, titled "Magic Bear", by Norval Morrisseau showing a bear covered with dots that possibly represent shells). One [origin story](#) relates of Makwa the bear who carried the Gift of Life, including the *miigisag*, to the Anishinaabeg "as he pushed a cedar tree through the four worlds and crossed a

huge body of water to a large *miigis*-shaped island and as he emerged from the water he was covered with *miigisag*". The ancestors knew that *miigisag*, which are native to salt water of the oceans, live deep within the earth; also, to them, as these shells are covered with a deep coating of enamel on the outer surface which gives them a brilliantly polished appearance, they were symbolic of early human characteristics. The idea behind this is that the Anishinaabeg were believed by some to have originated from the sea (the Atlantic Ocean) where they were still covered with scales; when they started to shed those scales, Anishinaabeg lost the power and protection that the scales originally provided...



*Miigisag* (sacred cowry shells) symbolize life-giving and healing powers, they are symbolic of the Sun which means they give the People warmth and light, and they symbolically refer to the origin of the Anishinaabeg and their *Mide* beliefs that came to them from *Waabanakiing*, the Dawn Land in the east, near the shores of the Atlantic ocean. The above left pen drawing by the author is based on [an old birch bark scroll inscription accompanying a \*Mide\* song](#). The arm, covered with seven magic shells (the original diagram shows five *miigisag*) belongs to a *Mide* person and reaches toward the sky so that the petitioner receives special (healing) powers from *GICHI-MANIDOO*, the Great Mystery. The outstretched left arm of the female figure (see the top right corner of the the pen drawing to the right) is covered with 5 *miigisag*.



"Return After The Flood" by the late Norval Morrisseau/MiskwaabikAnimikii, Ojibwe visionary/artist

According to an old Midewiwin allegory, a great many strings of life ago a large group of Anishinaabeg left their homeland in the Great Lakes area in search for a land of Abundance, which they presumed was in the east. After many years of travelling the migrants came to the northern shores of the Atlantic Ocean, and so long did they remain that most forgot their origin, and they began to refer to themselves as WAABANAKI, People Of The Dawn Land. For many years these Waabanaki People were seemingly living a life undisturbed by strife, turmoil, or disagreement. One day six *Omishoomis-imaag* (Grandfathers) - or *Midemiigis-gaa-niigaani-gikendangig* (Cowry Shell Prophets) - emerged from the ocean, and they established a system of kinship based on *odoodeman* (clans or totems). After sharing their message to eight *gaa-niigaani-gikendangig* (prophets), seven of these prophets asked their *mizhinawe* (messenger) to see if he could find ways to improve the condition and wellbeing of the Waabanaki People. The messenger began a quest that would lead him to an *abinoojiinh* (child), and after receiving approval from the Seven Grandfathers, the *mizhinawe* tutored the child in *mino-bimaadiziwin* (how to live a full and healthy life). Each of the Grandfathers then instructed the child with a principle, a guideline that honored one of the basic virtues intrinsic to *mino-bimaadiziwin*. These *Nizhwaaswi Gagiikwewin* (Seven Sacred Teachings, or laws) became the foundation of **Midewiwin spiritual practice** (see: **MIDEWIWIN**).

Along with a set of moral values and a new form of kinship, the Grandfathers left the Waabanaki People with seven predictions of what the future would bring, warning them of a time when a light-skinned race would arrive at the shores and bring death and destruction. If the People would not leave, the shadow of illness would befall on them, their once happy world befouled, and the waters would forever turn bitter by disrespect. One of these seven prophecies said that *"the Nation will rise up and follow the sacred shell of the Midewiwin Lodge, and each time a radiating shell emerges from the water of a lake or appears in the sand at its shores, they will know where to stop and establish a settlement. This Mide Miigis (Sacred Seashell) will lead the way to the chosen ground of the Anishinaabeg. You are to look for a turtle-shaped island that is linked to the purification of the earth. The Midewiwin Lodge will serve as a rallying point for the Nation and its traditional ways will be the source of great strength."*

This prophecy, along with the other six, would initiate the biggest mass migration in the history of Turtle Island, or North America, and it was a miigis shell that played a crucial role in it.

*"While our forefathers were living on the great salt water toward the rising sun, the great Megis (miigis; sea-shell) showed itself above the surface of the great water, and the rays of the sun for a long period were reflected from its glossy back. It gave warmth and light to the An-is-in-aub-ag. All at once it sank into the deep, and for a time our ancestors were not blessed with its light. It rose to the surface and appeared again on the great river which drains the waters of the Great Lakes, and again for a long time it gave life to our forefathers, and reflected back the rays of the sun. Again it disappeared from sight and it rose not, till it appeared to the eyes of the An-is-in-aub-ag on the shores of the first great lake. Again it sank from sight, and death daily visited the wigwams of our forefathers, till it showed its back, and reflected the rays of the sun once more at Bow-e-ting (Baawiting; Sault Ste. Marie). Here it remained for a long time, but once more, and for the last time, it disappeared, and the An-ish-in-aub-ag was left in darkness and misery, till it floated and once more showed its bright back at Mo-ning-wun-a-kaun-ing (La Pointe Island), where it has ever since reflected back the rays of the sun, and blessed our ancestors with life, light, and wisdom. Its rays reach the remotest village of the wide-spread Ojibways."*

-[William W. Warren](#)



ˆThe Great Migrationˆ by Michael Kinoshameg; click on image to view more of his work



In various *Mide*-ceremonies, initiates or patients are "shot" by *Midewiwininiwag* (priests), who point the nose of a *Mide-nigig-wayaan* (beaded otter-skin medicine bundle) at the initiate, or patient. The "patient" is "killed" by the bundle's powerful contents, consisting of *Mide-miigisag* (sacred cowry shells) that fly into his or her body; then, with his breath, the priest would revive the "dead" person. When the candidate member/patient rises, he or she, in a symbolical way, is been "healed" by the repeated shootings, songs, and prayers. In this dramatic fashion are enacted life and death, loss and restoration, and infection and decontamination.

It is very probable that in the old days, since they grow only on reefs in the South Pacific, the small white cowries had been obtained by trade with indigenous people from the south. It is certain that *Miigisag* had already been found in earthen mounds in ancient and forgotten forests in the areas around the Great Lakes, long before the first contact with European traders.

Go to [ZhaawanArt Blogspot](#) to read more about the role of the **miigis** shell in connection with the **Seven Fires prophecy** that lead to the **Migration**, and about the *Nizhwaaswi Gagiikewin* (**Seven Sacred Teachings**) that became the foundation of **Midewiwin** practice.



**MIDEWIWIN:** alternately pronounced as *muh-DAY-w'win* and *mi-DAY-win*, its literal meaning being "**Society (Lodge) of Those Who Are In A Mide State**" (Mide meaning something like "Sacred And Unseen"), Midewiwin is a prestigious lodge or association of male and female healers and thinkers and artists, respected keepers and protectors of the traditional Anishinaabe way of life and ceremonies that are many thousands of years old. Midewiwin persons are generally called Mide, plural *Mideg*, participants of the ceremonies are referred to as Midew, plural *Midewiig*. Mideg themselves sometimes give the

following, traditionalistic, explanation about the meaning of Midewiwin: "**Society of the Good-hearted Ones**" or "**The Good Heart Sound Of Life**", or "**The Way Of The Heartbeat**".

**Midewiwin** – some claim the word partially derives from the Anishinaabe word MINODE' which means Good Heart, others suggest it derives from MADWEWE which means Sound Resonance, as in the echoing of the Mide waterdrum whose omnipresent sound represents the Earth's heartbeat and that of the Great Mystery of Life – is said to have been founded many strings of life ago by the first herbalist/medicine man of his People, who went by the legendary name of *Ode'imín* (Heart-shaped Berry or strawberry). Under the skilful tutelage of his supernatural teacher *Wiinabozho*, who taught him to study the nature of plants from the conduct of animals, Ode'imín forever institutionalized the knowledge of curing and *Bimaadiziwin*, or the Code for Long Life and Upright Living. He taught the People the properties and the curative powers of all beings of the plant world and conferred to them the philosophy of *Bimaadiziwin*, which would forever be propagated through the ceremonies of the Midewiwin. Ode'imín explained to the ancestors that the physical side of life and the physical strength of a human being and that of his community should always be in perfect balance with the spiritual side of life and



being, and that a healer could only reach the highest possible order of healing powers through a high ethical standard, and not by knowledge alone. So, what counted for an herbalist was not only *knowledge* of plant and self, but also the ability to *bring together* the healing capacities of both plant and self. Only an herbalist gifted with and keeping up a high standard of inner power could expect the plant being to reveal his own healing power; only then the plant would allow the herbalist to confer his (or her) inner curative power upon the plant itself.

And to this day, whenever or wherever they establish their villages and homes, the *Anishinaabeg* never neglect their duty to annually honor, celebrate, and carry on the gift of knowledge that was handed down to their ancestors by Ode'imín, the Heart-shaped Berry. See also: **MASHKIKIWAN** (page 81).

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### An origin story of the Midewiwin

19th century *Misi-zaaga'iganiing* (Mille Lacs) *ogimaa* (chief) Bayezhig related the story of *Gwiizens wedizhichigewinid*: Deeds of a little boy, a traditional origin story of the Anishinaabeg and their Midewiwin Society, [as follows](#):

*"In the beginning, GICHI-MANIDOO made the MIDE MANIDOOG (Mide Spirits). He first created two men, and two women; but they had no power of thought or reason. Then GICHI-MANIDOO made them rational beings. He took them in his hands so that they should multiply; he paired them, and from this sprung the ANISHINAABEG. When there were people he placed them upon the earth, but he soon observed that they were subject to sickness, misery, and death, and that unless he provided them with the Sacred Medicine they would soon become extinct."*

*"Between the position occupied by GICHI-MANIDOO and the earth were four lesser manidoog with whom GICHI-MANIDOO decided to commune, and to impart to them the mysteries by which the Anishinaabeg could be benefited. So he first spoke to a manidoog and told him all he had to say, who in turn communicated the same information to the next, and he in turn to next, who also communed with the next. They all met in council, and determined to call in the four wind manidoog. After consulting as to what would be best for the comfort and welfare of the Anishinaabeg, these manidoog agreed to ask GICHI-MANIDOO to communicate the Mystery of the Sacred Medicine to the people."*

*"GICHI-MANIDOO then went to GIIZIS the Sun Spirit and asked him to go to the earth and instruct the people as had been decided upon by the council. GIIZIS, in the form of a gwiizens (little boy), went to the earth and lived with a woman who had a little boy of her own. This family went away in the autumn to hunt, and during the winter this woman's son died. The parents were so much distressed that they decided to return to the village and bury the body there; so they made preparations to return, and as they traveled along, they would each evening erect several poles upon which the body was placed to prevent the wild beasts from devouring it. When the dead boy was thus hanging upon the poles, the adopted child—who was the Sun Spirit—would play about the camp and amuse himself, and finally told his adopted father he pitied him, and his mother, for their sorrow. The adopted son said he could bring his dead brother to life, whereupon the parents expressed great surprise and desired to know how that could be accomplished."*

*"The adopted boy then had the party hasten to the village, when he said, "Get the women to make a wiigiwaam (lodge) of bark, put the dead boy in a covering*

of wiigwaas (birch bark) and place the body on the ground in the middle of the wiigiwaam.”

“On the next morning after this had been done, the family and friends went into this lodge and seated themselves around the corpse. When they had all been sitting quietly for some time, they saw through the doorway the approach of a bear, which gradually came towards the wiigiwaam, entered it, and placed itself before the dead body and said, “ho, ho, ho, ho,” when he passed around it towards the left side, with a trembling motion, and as he did so, the body began quivering, and the quivering increased as the bear continued until he had passed around four times, when the body came to life again and stood up. Then the bear called to the father, who was sitting in the distant right-hand corner of the wiigiwaam, and addressed to him the following words:

*Noos gaawiin anishinaabewisii, ayaawiyaan manidoo ningwizis.  
Bi-mayaa-miniik niiji-manidoo mayaa zhigwa ji-gi-aawiyaa.  
Noose, zhigwa asemaa ji-atooyeg. E-mikondem mii eta  
aabiding ji-gashkitood wenji-bimaadizid omaa agaawaa  
bimaadizid mii omaa; niijii-manidoo mayaa zhigwa ji-giiweyaan.*

(“My father is not a human. I, a son, am a Spirit.  
Just as - my fellow Spirit - you now are.  
Father! Now, you shall put out tobacco. Recalling that he could do this  
only once in order to barely live here, thus he lived here;  
my fellow Spirit, so now, I must go home.”)



“The little bear boy was the one who did this. He then remained among the Anishinaabeg and taught them the mysteries of the *Midewiwin*; and, after he had finished, he told his adopted tather that as his mission had been fulfilled he was to return to his kindred *manidoog*, for the Anishinaabeg would have no need to fear sickness as they now possessed the *Midewiwin* which would enable them to live. He also said that his spirit could bring a body to life but once, and he would now return to Giizis (the sun) from which they would feel his influence.”

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**Photo:** a contemporary grandfather drum used in cultural celebrations within a school community in Ontario. Traditionally, a *Midewiwin* Lodge is presided over by the Spirit of the *Midewiwin* called *MIDE MANIDOO*, in the form of the Grandfather Water Drum. In *Midewiwin* practice, the Grandfather is supported by *Oshkaabewis*, his ceremonial helper, called the Little Boy Water Drum in reference to the above-told origin story of the *Midewiwin*, about a little bear boy who descended from the Sun and remained for some time among the Anishinaabeg to teach them the mysteries of the *Midewiwin*. According to *Midewiwin* belief the sound of the *Mide* drum causes the sky to brighten up and the water to be calm for the person who carries the drum. Both *midewe'igan* (*Mide* drum) and *baagaakokwaan* (drumstick) are considered to be gifts from *GICHI-MANIDOO*; the latter is held even more sacred than the drum itself. Click on image to view the source of this photo. For more reading about the *Mide* Grandfather drum, see [Simone's & Zhaawano's Artblog](#).

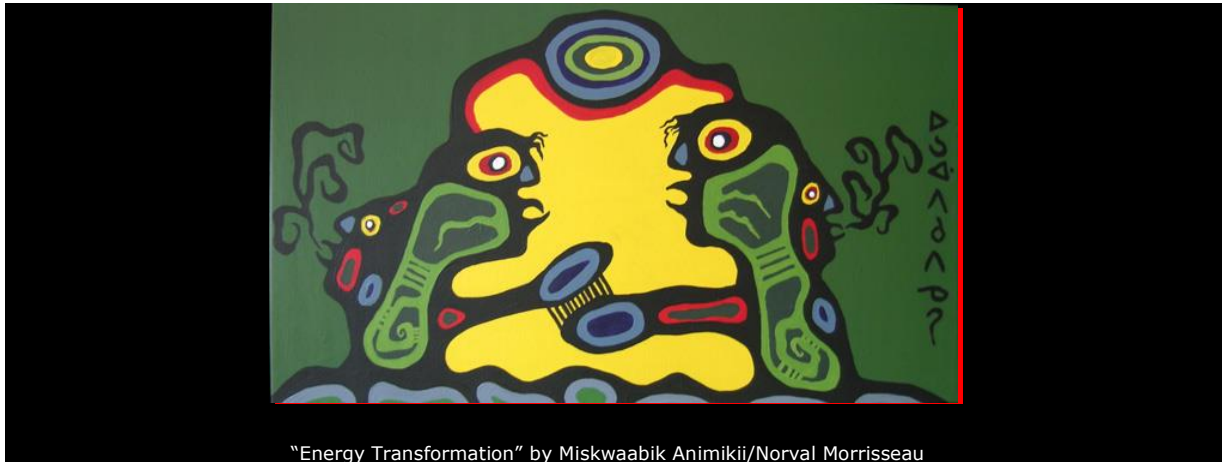


### Midewiwin leadership

From of old, Midewiwin functions as a keeper of cultural knowledge and records that exist since the Anishinaabeg still lived in the Dawn Land along the North Atlantic coast, thousands of years ago. Traditionally, Mide ceremonies and rituals are concerned not only with the receiving of spirit powers and blessings from the spirit world on an individual base, but also with the use of these acquired powers for the benefit of the People as a whole. Because the Anishinaabeg made no distinction between spiritual and political power, the function and roles of Mideg, besides involving healing and the spiritual and moral instruction of their own communities, also had an economic and military nature as they dealt with relationships with other nations through trade and treaty negotiations. Since they had acquired from the *manidoog* (spirits) and the *aadizookaanag* (spirit grandfathers) many specific spiritual (healing) powers, had accumulated considerable knowledge how to survive on the land, were well-versed in many fields of life, and possessed great scientific and spiritual knowledge of the origins and the narratives and the history of the People, Mideg were looked upon as Elders whom others relied on for advice and decision-making concerning the welfare and the socio-political stability of the entire community. So, succesful leadership – and playing a succesfull role in external affairs – could, and still can, only be achieved through access to the spirit world and through honoring the original teachings of GICHI-MANIDOO, the Great Mystery – called Seven Grandfather Teachings.

A great deal of visionaries and healers of the Midewiwin, many of whom regarded themselves as messengers of the **owl** (see the above [illustration](#) by the late Richard Bedwash) because this spirit-bird actively mediates with the four directions and winds and reflects and integrates those typical dichotomies that exist in Mide ceremonies involving light and dark, life and death, and the seen and the unseen, were active not only in the spiritual, but also in the political domain. Because of their exceptional powers and skills and their knowledge of the Seven Grandfather Teachings, when the Ojibweg were confronted with the European and American military powers and settlers encroaching and flooding the borders of Anishinaabe Akiing, were looked upon by their communities as apt political leaders, advisers, and decision makers fit to represent their People in trade and treaty negotiations with the *Zhaaganaashag* (British) and *Gichi-mookomaanag* (Americans) – and thus earned and achieved the kind of status, prestige, and authority that was otherwise only reserved for hereditary *ogimaag* (chiefs). It was, and still is, commonly understood that the survival of the Anishinaabeg, their cultural values, and their traditional organizational community/doodem structures depend a great deal upon the ability of high-ranking Mideg – with *Makwa doodemag* (bear clans) leading

the way- to deal with the military and political powers of the Europeans and Americans and with the gigantic political and environmental challenges that faced - and still face - the entire Anishinaabe Nation.



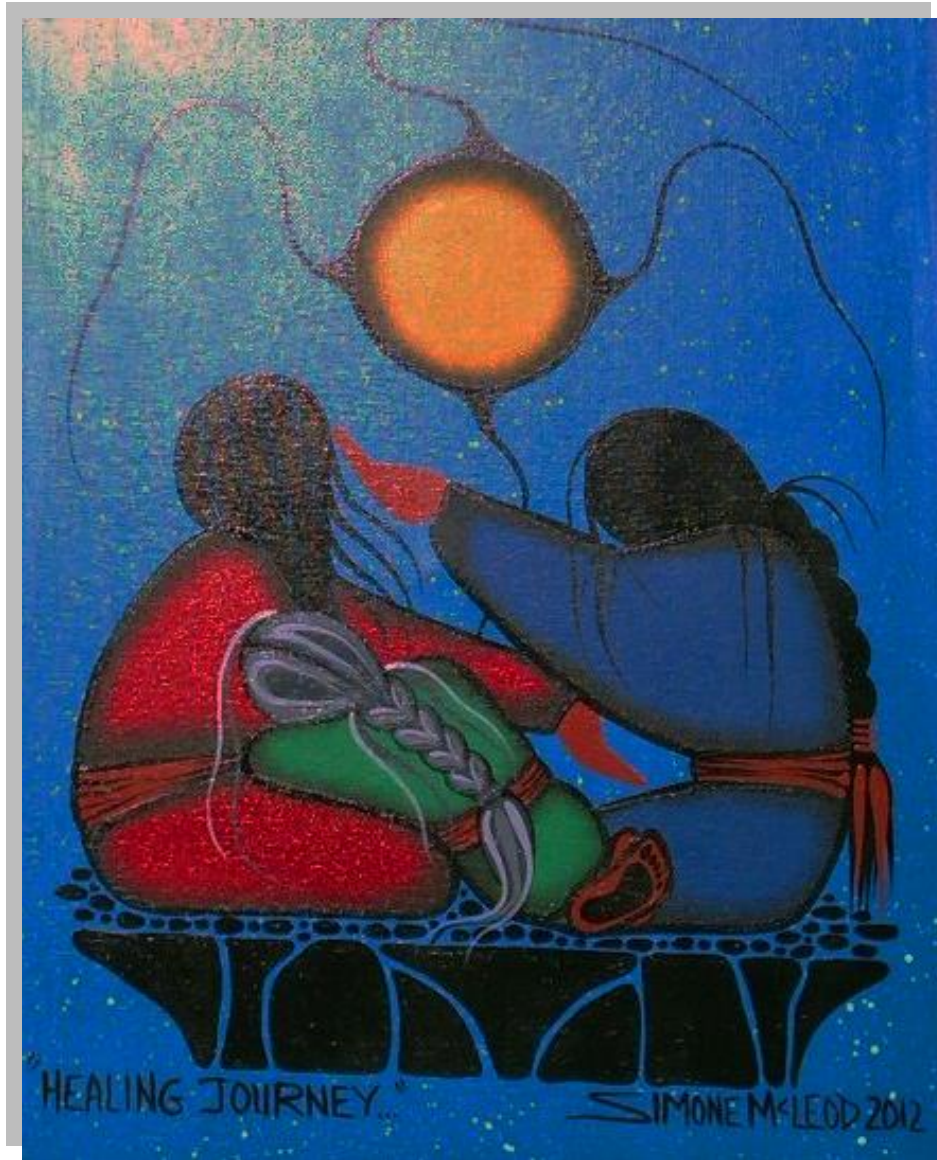
"Energy Transformation" by Miskwaabik Animikii/Norval Morrisseau

### Midewiwin symbols and ceremonies

The *Midewiwin* has four to eight grades or orders of (usually) invited membership: the four at the bottom are known as the *Aki (Earth)mide* and the four at the top are known as the *Giizhigoo (Sky)mide*. Each member, even after having reached the highest degree of *Midewiwin*, is obligated to attend one ceremony a year for a renewal of him (or her) self and of his (or her) power. In several ceremonies, such as the *Wiikindiwin* or initiation rite, novices are tested and symbolically purified before they can enter the society. *Mid-nigig-wiyaanag*, or otter skin-medicine bundles with special powers are used in order to "shoot" the sacred contents of such a bundle - small white cowry shells, called *midemiigis* - into a candidate member, after which he or she is "brought back to life" by the breath of the priest who leads the ceremony. Once revived from symbolic death, the new member is entitled to endow others with his or her powers and test those of future candidates.



"Healing" by Miskwaabik Animikii/Norval Morrisseau



Simone McLeod: Healing Journey # 2, acrylic on canvas 2012

Contrary to common (European) belief, the Midewiwin has never been a society of “worshippers”. Instead, Mideg pay homage to a series of *aadizookaanag* and *manidoog* called *Mide Manidoog* (Grand Medicine Spirits) in order to acquire special powers for healing purposes. Subordinate to these Spirit Beings are four *manidoog*, one at each of the cardinal points, and many of “lesser” *manidoog*, who take on the forms of animals. The *manidoog* in the form of, for example, a bear or a bird or *memegwesiwag* (bank-dwelling dwarfs), or animals who live in the water, are most closely connected to Midewiwin. Traditionally, all practitioners of the various levels of Midewiwin had distinctive designs painted on their faces that are specific to their level (first, second, third, fourth, - sometimes - up to eight grades). All Midewiwin are supposed to carry a bag of the skin of an animal or bird specific to the level they are in. This bag - called *Midewayaan* - is one of the most valued possessions and is supposed to be buried with the member upon their death. These *Midewayaanag*, which carry the medicinal herbs, charms, and *miigisag* (shells) that are used for “shooting” novices during their initiation. serve as a guardian against harm and carry the People’s spirit powers, hopes, and trials. Birch bark scrolls, called *Midewiigwaasag*, were used to scratch the Midewiwin Teachings on and were shown to the novices upon entrance into the society.



“Mide Man With Otter-Skin Bag” by Norval Morrisseau / Miskwaabik Animikii

The *Midewigaanan*, or lodges in which all ceremonies are conducted, are modelled after the rectangular open-air lodge first built for Ode'imín by *Wiinabožho*. They are always oriented east to west, with an entrance at each end, and open at the top so as not to shut out the light and sounds of Aki (the universe). In the midewigaan there is a symbiosis between humans and the guardian spirits of animals – some of which are represented by effigies -, who shared the same space in near identity with one another. Each order of Midewiwin requires its own type of Midewigaan. One to four posts of *giizhik*, the northern white cedar, cut alive, and erected as *Midewatigoog* (Trees of Life), stand within the lodge; in some Midewigaanan, *adaazi*, the poplar tree is placed in the center of the lodge. The number of posts corresponds with the order of the Midewiwin involved. Around the central post or posts is an enclosed space whose symbolic purpose is to keep inside the spirit of the ceremonies.



Midewinini in front of a Midewigaan at Gaa-waabaabiganikaag, White Earth, Minnesota (click in image)

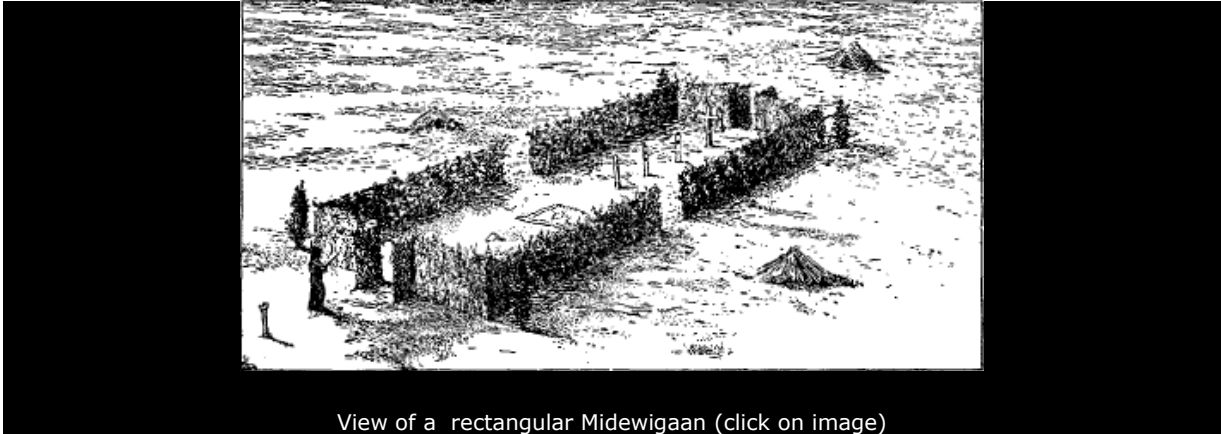
**A** *Midewaaticg* symbolizes the primacy of the plant beings; plants can exist alone, but neither animals nor men can survive without plants.

Near the *Midewaaticg* is a fire tended by the *Boodaawaadamii* or Keeper of the Fire, symbolizing one of the four basic elements of the physical world. A wooden kettledrum, called *Midewewigan*, along with the *zhiishiigwanag* (ceremonial rattles), are placed next to where the *Midemiigisag* (Sacred Shells) are. The shells, which are perhaps the most sacred of all objects/spirits present, represent the gift of *Bimaadiziwin* (long life) that the ancestors, in the form of medicine, obtained from *Makadeshigan*, the Black Bass, Spirit of the Underworld (some sources state that the Gift Of Long Life was received by the Bear).



Click on image

**At** the base of each *Midewaaticg* are placed all kinds of offerings, *Midewiyaanag* (medicine pouches), and *Mide-wiigwaasag* (birch bark teaching scrolls) – the latter inscribed with sacred symbols, images, and mnemonic objects (devices adding the memory) for each of the number of levels of the *Midewiwin*. The carved images of the *Aadizoogaanag* (grandfathers of an-other-than-human-category that live beneath or above the earth, such as the Black Bass and the Thunderbirds) and the *odoodemiwan* (totemic effigies) of a multitude of animals/spirit helpers, of which those of *nigig* the otter (the leading patron) and *makwa* the bear (the watcher) are the most important, are strategically placed in the center, near the entrance and exit, and at the cardinal points.



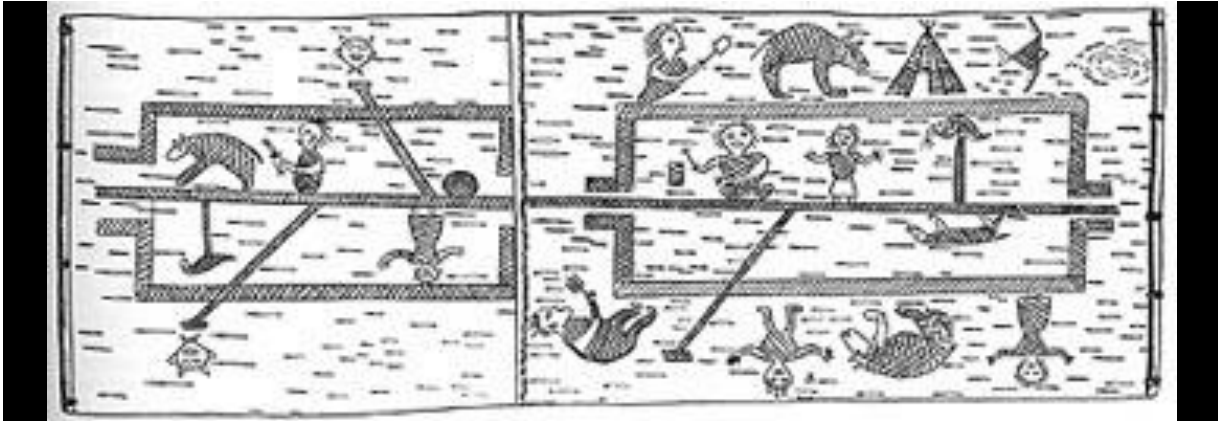
View of a rectangular Midewigaan (click on image)

The ancestors have chosen *Awesiiyag*, the Animal Beings, to represent their *doodemag* (totems), since animals appear to live in harmony with the laws of nature, and thus prove themselves the older, wiser brothers of man. In the *Midewiwin*, some animals are represented as *contraries*. At the entrance to the outer enclosure, a candidate member undergoing the initiation rites is met with four *Midewewiniwag* of the fourth order dressed in bear robes, who join in the chants and the rattling of the turtle shells, and who cheer the initiate as he or she makes his or her symbolic way around the *Midewigaan*. Then four other bears (contraries), representing the evils and temptations the novice will meet in his or her later life and calling, appear growling and blocking the pathway. The presence of these contraries symbolizes the paradoxes in life, and the fact that there are two sides to everything. The good bears, however, by pushing the snarling bears out of the way, remind the novice that he must not hesitate, or shrink from the forces of evil.



Above image: *Giizhikomashkiki Makwa* (Sky Medicine Bear), a domed graphic overlay belt buckle of sterling silver set with turquoise and red coral, dreamed of, designed, and handcrafted by Zhaawano Giizhik (click on image).





**Above:** Birch bark inscriptions of Midewiwin, enabling the memorization of complex ideas. The most well-known birch bark sacred writings are called the Order of Songs. Secretly, these sacred writings were usually translated and discussed among the priests and medicine people in the Midewiwin Lodge. Sacred icons were also conceptualized in pictographs or petroforms found in locations where the sky, earth, water, the underground, and the underwater meet. This is where the *manidoog* (spirits or mysteries) reside. In Whiteshell, Manitoba, there is a location known as Manitou-abi that translates to 'where the Spirit sits'.

After a four-day period of fasting and praying and cleansing in a purification lodge, followed by four ceremonial processions around the rectangular *Midewigaan* (during which the candidate member encounters two groups of four contrary-bears), the priests and novice enter through the eastern entrance and file into the sacred enclosure. By having "withstanding" the forces of evil represented by the evil bears the novice's entering the *Midewigaan's* inner sanctum symbolizes his or her triumph of good over evil, and the promise of a new and better way of life. After the singing of chants by the candidate, and the chanting of songs of welcome by the assembled priest, the candidate sits down for a series of tests through which he (or she) demonstrates his (or her) integrity and knowledge of plants.

Then the head priest symbolically "shoots" the nominee with the *midemiigisag* (sacred shells), which represent a return to *bimaadiziwin* (a good way of life), in order for him (or her) to find accomplishment and to recommence purpose and determination.

After this the Mide priest arouses the "corpse" from "death" with the breath of life. In this dramatic fashion the candidate, once revived by the breath of life, is reminded of the fact that, only through the death of his teacher Ode'imín, his student and successor had been able to really enlarge (and put to good use) his inner curative powers that would be to the benefit of his People ...

Besides the *Wiikindiwin* or initiation rite, there are at least five other ceremonies of the *Midewiwin* constructed around elements such as the Tree of Life, the *Mide* offerings and holy birchbark scrolls, the fire, the sacred pipe, the totems of the animals and effigies of the spirit- grandfathers, the *Mide* drum and rattles, and, perhaps the most sanctified objects of all: the little yet omnipresent *Midemiigisag*. Although the subject matter of the ceremonies is diverse and there are minor variations in different areas of *Anishinaabe Aki*, always the same ritual elements pervade. In outline, a ceremony will always be conducted as described in the following.

After a four days' time of fasting and praying and purification, four processions are held around the rectangular *Midewigaan*. The reason for this is that, since GICHI-MANIDOO caused everything in the universe to be in fours, the ancestors decided that mankind should also do everything possible in fours.



"Healing Journey 1" ("Bear Paws Hidden In The Base Of Mother") acrylic on canvas by Simone McLeod "(2012)

Then, when the four circuits are completed, the attendants of the ceremony enter the lodge through the eastern entrance. The eastern entrance is used, because it is in the eastern sky that the sun begins his daily ritual dance through the universe. When everyone is seated the *Boodaawaadamii* lights the Sacred Fire from the embers that he keeps smouldering in a special casing. From the fire, an *Oshkaabewis*, or Keeper of the Sacred Pipe, lights the pipe, and hands it over to an elder priest. Holding the pipe reverentially the priest makes his petitions to GICHI-MANIDOO (the Great Mystery), OGASHINAN (Earth), and WENDAANIMAG NOODINOON (the Four Directions). Finally he addresses *Makadeshigan* (the Spirit Of The Underworld), appealing his spirit and honoring him for giving medicine and game and songs to the ancestors.

The next stage of a ceremony is characterized by an absolute silence introducing the final state of *nanagadawenindisowin* (self-reflection), in which each attendant, seeking for the



A contemporary Three Fires Midewiwin Teaching lodge at Garden River First Nation's Reserve, Ontario (Click on image)

good in life and the gift of good health, withdraws into the very depths of his or her soul; so that he or she, in his or her turn, can teach *bimaadiziwin* (the good way of life) and embody it and pass it on to others.

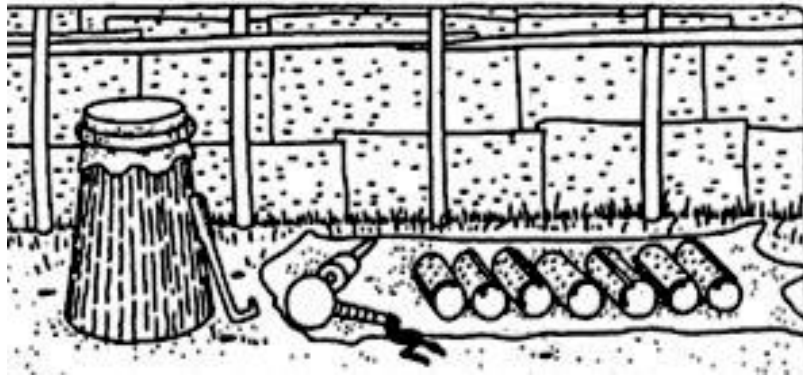
Finally, after unwrapping the bearskin casing of the Sacred Drum, the attendants sing the mystic chants that *Makadeshigan* once taught the ancestors. These sacred petitions are carried by the drumbeats and sound of rattles from the present to infinite space, where, provided that the ceremony has been properly conducted, the *aadizoogaanag* might hear them and deliver them to GICHI-MANIDOO in the upper world, and to *Makadeshigan* in the underworld. After this the ceremony draws to an end; and the *Midewewiniwag* and *Midewikweg* dance and feast in thanksgiving.

### The Three Fires Lodge

The Three Fires Midewiwin Lodge is a contemporary revival movement of the Midewiwin. It was inspired by the historic, pre-Columbian, Algonkian-speaking confederacy of Native American nations known as the [Three Fires Confederacy](#). Indigenous nations known as the Mamaceqtaw (Menominee), Ojibweg (Ojibwe), Odaawaag (Odawa), and Bodéwadmik (Potawatomi), who consider themselves as the Anishinaabe people, as well as other Native nations, partake in the annual ceremonies of the Three Fires Midewiwin Lodge. The revival of the Midewiwin Lodge is in accordance with the [Seven Grandfather prophecies and teachings](#), spiritually delivered to the Anishinaabe people long before the predicted arrival of the Europeans on Turtle Island (North America).

Like the ancient Midewiwin, the Three Fires Midewiwin Lodge is considered a sacred place, both earthly and in the Spirit World, that was given to all Spontaneous People (Anishinaabeg) by GICHI-MANIDOO. It is a contemporary movement of spiritual revival, renewal, maintenance, and strengthening of the original Teachings, Rituals, Ceremonies, and Prophecies as vested in the ancient Midewiwin. The Three Fires Mide Lodge is presided over by the Spirit, MIDE MANIDOO, in the form of MIDEDE-WE'IGAN (also called MITIGWAKIK), the Grandfather Water Drum. The Grandfather is supported by Oshkaabewis, his ceremonial helper, called the Little Boy Water Drum in reference to one origin story of the Midewiwin that says that a little bear boy descended from the Sun and remained for some time among the Anishinaabeg to teach them the mysteries of the Midewiwin.

Members of the Three Fires Midewiwin Lodge are initiated into the various levels of the Midewiwin, and come from across the Turtle Island (North America). The Three Fires Mide members meet in fellowship frequently, mainly at the four seasonal ceremonies which are held in Anishinaabe communities throughout Anishinaabewaki, the land of the Anishinaabe Peoples.



Above image: a *Midedewe'igan* (Mide drum), a Mide rattle and seven *Mide-wiigwaasag* (birch bark scrolls) displayed in a *Midewigaan*, a Midewiwin lodge. According to Midewiwin belief, the sound of the Mide drum causes the sky to brighten up and the water to be calm for the person who carries the drum. Both *Midedewe'igan* and *baaga'akokwaan* (the drum stick representing the *Midedewe'igan*) are considered to be gifts from GITCHI-MANIDOO; the drum stick is held even more sacred than the drum itself.

*Wiigwaasabakoon*, or birch bark scrolls, are documents on which the Mide People wrote complex geometrical patterns and shapes. When used specifically for Midewiwin ritual purposes, these scrolls are called *mide-wiigwaas* (plural: *Mide-wiigwaasag*). Scrolls were often hidden away in caves and underground man-made pits. The seven "ritual birch bark teaching scrolls" in the above image enable the memorization of complex ideas, passing along oral history, creation stories, songs, and details of Mide rituals, and many hundreds of years old Ojibwe migration records to succeeding generations.

"Midewiwin teaching scroll", painting on birch bark, a free rendering of the ancient scrolls by the late Ojibwe Anishinaabe Medicine painter Norval Morrisseau/Miskwaabik Animikii.

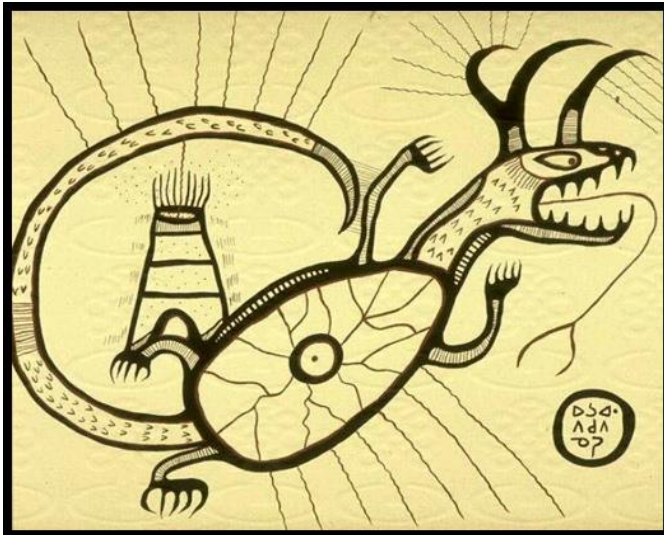


## Herbalists and seers

Two methods of treating the sick are in use among the Midewiwin; both methods depend on communication with, and the aid of, the spirit world, but most Mide specialists are basically plant doctors, herbalists who have an encyclopedic knowledge of the mysterious properties of an enormous variety of plants, herbs, roots, and berries. This herbal knowledge is often obtained from dreams, the remedies and knowledge and know-how handed down from the spirit world ALWAYS being individual, and NEVER general.

*Inaabandamowinan* (dreaming) or seeking *waasayaa-bindamiwin* (a vision) are the primary means by which a healer can enter into direct social interaction with the spirit world.

Some of the best Mide remedies are received from the bear through dreams.



Then there is another type of Anishinaabe Mide doctor, called **JAASAKIIDJIG** (seers using the **Shaking Tent**), a special category of healers belonging to the highest (fourth) degree of Midewiwin practitioners, who treat the sick without material means, without using herbs and medicinal plants, but via ecstatic trance-journey. Some jaasakiidjig receive their power from the water, others from the wind or earth. A special category of

jaasakiidjig has the power to make a tent and everything that's in it shake by inviting a myriad of beings from various spirit worlds, including the thunderbirds, the bear, and the turtle. It is with the aid of these spirits from the waters, the winds, and the earth (*mikinaak* the snapping turtle being the most prominent intermediary) that jaasakiidjig pass on their spiritual medicine power to their patients or apprentices. Perhaps this practice of the Shaking Tent comes closest to the definition of a SHAMAN: a specialist who with the aid of rhythmic drumming and chanting enters a very deep or "ecstatic" trance, undertaking trance-journeys for practical purposes, in service to his or her community. However, SHAMAN, a term originally used for Native healers in Siberia, has become a NEW AGE-inspired catch-all term that is foreign to, and way too general to be applied to, any type of Native American spiritual practitioner. Unfortunately, nowadays the terms "medicine man" and "shaman" are being used interchangeably to describe Native American healers and philosophers and artists. Nowadays it is widely assumed that "shaman" is a Native American, or Inuit word, and that "shamanism" is a universal "Native Religion". Yet there are MANY HUNDREDS of Native American Nations on Turtle Island, each with their own culture, language, and spiritual belief system (of which Midewiwin is just one). Many of these Nations are very different from one another in their spiritual traditions, and NONE of them describe their beliefs as SHAMANISM. Art gallery owners, plastic medicine men, "[Grand Shaman Artists](#)" and self-appointed gurus with a Native background, the entertainment industries, teachers, written publications, and a tsunami of misinformed New Age-inspired web pages ("shamanic portals") all promote these unfortunate misconceptions.

Above illustration:

Mikkinnuk (Mikinaak) the Turtle And The Shaking Tent by Norval Morrisseau/Miskwaabik Animikii;  
ink on paper, 23" x 29", 1969.



AAYAANIKAAJ ISHKODE ( 'Ancestral Fire'). 2.16 x 0.47 inch (55x12 mm) eagle feather overlay pendant designed and handcrafted by Zhaawano Giizhik: 14K warm yellow gold, 14K red gold, inlay of 14K palladium white gold.

### The historic Three Fires Confederacy

According to Midewiwin tradition, about two to three millennia ago, a large portion of the Waabanaki People - as the ancestors of the Ojibwe Anishinaabeg were known when they still lived in the Land of Dawn -, heeded the warnings of seven prophets who emerged from the waves of the Atlantic ocean, and the mass migration that followed would eventually lead the People to the Great Lakes area and even farther north and west. Along the migration, which lasted approximately 1500 to 2000 years, small *odoodeman* (family groups or totem clans) stopped, set up settlements – with the societies centered around the Medicine Lodge of the Midewiwin – while the larger body moved on. As the migrants from the Dawn Land travelled deeper into unknown territories, they began to refer to themselves as Anishinaabeg.

About 700 summers ago after reaching Lower Peninsula of present-day Michigan and northern Indiana, three groups began to emerge from the Anishinaabe migrants: the OJIBWEG (Chippewa), appointed as 'Faith Keepers', or keepers of the religion and caretakers of the Sacred Rattle (and later, the water drum) of the Midewiwin; the ODAAWAAG (Ottawa) or Trader People, responsible for sustenance; and the BODWEWAADAMIIG/BODÉWADMIK (Potawatomi) or People of the Fire Pit, who came in charge of the Sacred Ancestral Fire. These three groups formed a loose political-military confederation, called the **NISWII-MISHKODEWIN** (Three Fires). The **confederation of the Three Fires** is still very much alive today, not only politically but also in a spiritual/religious sense; the **Three Fires Midewiwin Lodge**, a contemporary movement of the Midewiwin Society, was inspired by the historic Three Fires Confederacy.



The fire in the overlay design of the pendant symbolizes the original council fire of the LENNI-LENAPE, the ancestors of the Ojibwe Anishinaabeg when they still lived in Waabanakiing, the old country in the east. The Lenape were regarded by all Algonkin-speaking Peoples (such as Mi'kmaq, Algonquin, and Abenaki) as their grandfather, their 'first among peers'. It was a term of great respect stemming from the widespread belief that the Lenape were the original People of the Dawn Land. This 'grandfather fire' thus predates the founding of the Three Fires Confederacy.

The tripartite design that I depicted beneath the fire hints at the dividing of the Waabanaki/Anishinaabe into three different nations and the founding of the Three Fires.

Finally, the stylized bear paw design placed at the tip of the eagle feather refers to the bear who gave the Anishinaabeg the powerful Medicine of healing, renewal, and rebirth while they still lived in the Dawn Land; [eagle feather and the bear paw combined](#) stand for the strongest medicine and ultimate power.

### Waabanowiwin, Society Of The Dawn

It is assumed by some that a long time ago, some rebellious Midewiwin members refused to abide by their society's code and erected their own Lodge, which, until today, is known as the **WAABANOWIWIN**, the Society of the Dawn. Be that as it may, Midewiwin and Waabanowiwin are counterparts, both being age-old animistic-medicinal institutions conserving the ancient teachings on human conduct and a spiritual way for living, and both require initiation rites. The power of the Waabanowiwin is similar to that exercised by the Third Order (Degree) of the Midewiwin. A *Waabanoo's* power is obtained in visions received during youth. The lodge ceremonies of both Midewiwin and



Waabanowiwin begin with a purification done through a *Madoodiswan* (purification lodge). However, unlike those of the Midewiwin, the ceremonies of Waabanowiwin – such as the Fire Dance – have never been "written down", and always conducted at night and concluded at dawn – hence, the reference to *Waaban*, dawn. Unlike the Mideg who have four to eight levels, the *Waabanoo* have sometimes two, and sometimes four; this variation depends on the particular lodge. Another difference is that Waabanowiwin ceremonies need only one or two Elders, where Midewiwin needs many to lead the ceremonies. **Minookamig** (the September Equinox) is the beginning of the new year to the Waabanowiwin, where the *Midewiwin* chose *biboon* (winter) as the birth time of new life. During the Minookamig Ceremony the *Waabanong Manidoo* (Spirit of the East) is honored. The winter Solstice ritual, which is their most important ceremony, is a time of healing for *Aki* (the Earth) and a time for personal healing. There are differing stories about the origins of the Waabanowiwin. According to oral traditions, the Lodge originated thousands of years ago, the formation of the society happening shortly after creation; Waabanowiwin Elders trace the origins of the lodge back to the original teachings of **Wiinabozho** (see: **Nanabozho**, p. 127). For this reason, many *aadizookaanan* (sacred stories) of Wiinabozho are used in the ceremonies and teachings of the Society.

Today, the Waabanowiwin is said to live a dormant existence, however, initiatives are being undertaken to [revive](#) the society. There are active Waabanowiwin lodges currently in Michigan, Indiana, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Quebec.

Above illustration: "Waabano Grand Medicine" by Michael Kinoshameg. Click on image.



Norval Morriseau Untitled (Midewiwin Vision Quest), 1969, Kenora tempera or acrylic on hide





**MIGIZI:** *Migizi*, the Bald Eagle, symbolizes courage and pre-knowledge and is therefore emblematic of leadership. The *Anishinaabeg* regard *Migizi* as a special messenger of GICHI-MANIDOO, the Great Spirit and Supreme Being of the Universe, and his feathers, which are animated by his vision, strength, and courage, have always been used as offerings and as decorations for ceremonial costumes and regalia. To be given an Eagle feather is one of the greatest honors to receive, because it recognizes achievement and great acts or deeds.



“First Feather” by Zhaawano Giizhik (Click on image to read about the offering of the first feather to mankind)

According to Midewiwin tradition, the great Migizi (Eagle manidoo) as it swooped down from the spirit world, left its imprint at the Mide lodge door where Makwa the bear sat – which is the entrance for the Mide people to enter their lodge. For this reason, Migizi is sometimes referred to as **Ogimaa Migizi**, the Eagle spirit of the Eastern Direction. Migizi is looked upon as the one who looks after the *ni’inaa ikwewag* (women of the Nation) who and insures GICHI MANIDOO each morning that the women, who are the keepers of the Sacred Water Circle, honor this path with their *asemaa* (tobacco) in hand, singing

their *nibi waabo* (water song). Another eagle spirit called **Mishomis Giniw**, the Golden eagle grandfather who is regarded as protector of **Ziigwan**, the spring time spirit, watches over all women, and particularly over women who are in new beginnings.



"Keeper of Mother Earth" by Abe Kakepetum (Keewaywin First Nation Anishinaabe)

Besides being an important prayer messenger, Migizi was chosen by GICHI MANIDOO (the Great Mystery) to represent the Teaching of **Zaagi'idiwin** (Love) because Migizi flies high above the earth and sees all that is true, and is therefore closer to GICHI-MANIDOO than any other creature. GICHI-MANIDOO explained that Love is the most elusive of all virtues and no other creature is so elusive as this mighty spirit-bird, and love has the same light and airy nature as his plumes.

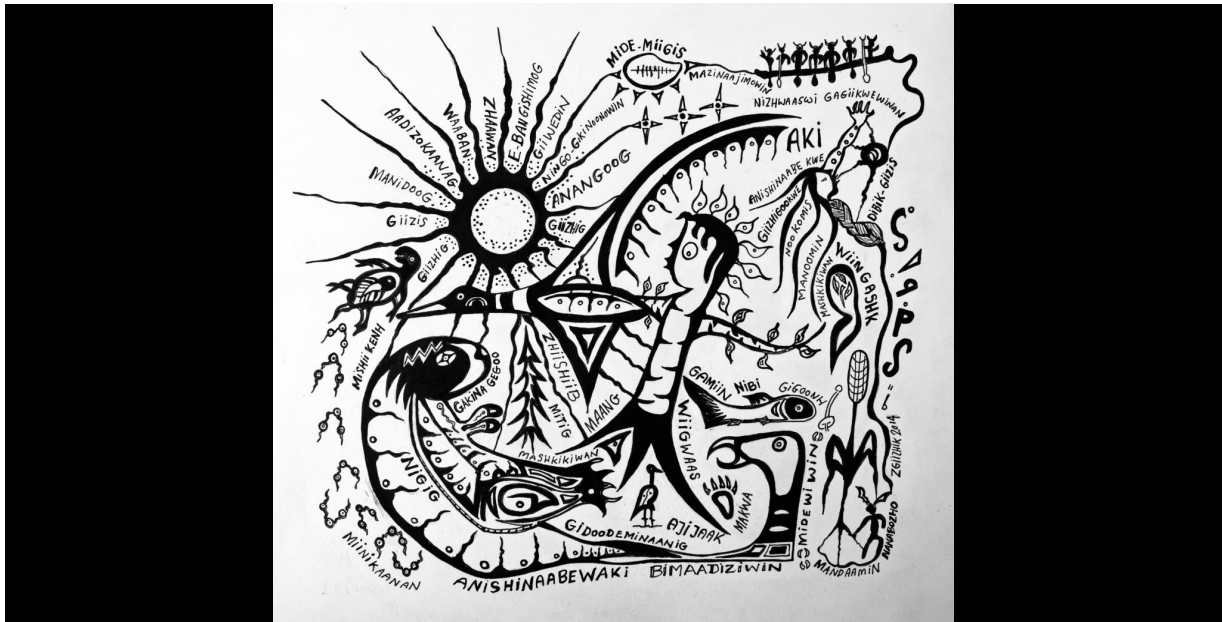
Migizi teaches humankind that **Nibwaakaawin** (wisdom) and **Zoongide'ewin** (courage) cannot exist without each other. He teaches us that there is wisdom in understanding that one cannot walk the path of life without making changes once in a while and that it takes courage to actually bring about the change.

As GICHI MANIDOO, after creating Aki, the World, spoke about the importance of *mino-bimaadiziwin*, living a life according to the Seven Grandfather Teachings, Mishoomis Migizi became inspired and told Great Mystery that he, since his feathers symbolized the intermediate region between things of the spirit world and the earth, would like his feather to be gifted to the Anishinaabe person who's the most brave and who's guided the most by the Teachings conferred on the humans by the Spirit Grandfathers. Migizi's generous offer prompted GICHI-MANIDOO to tell the Anishinaabeg of the teachings of the feather and the power of spirit flight, and he instructed them that no Eagle be harmed for their feathers since they were *manidoog* (spirits) in themselves, and that whenever a person saw an Eagle fly overhead, this mighty spirit-bird must be honored with *asemaa* (sacred tobacco) in hand. GICHI-MANIDOO added that any person, no matter what age, living their life according to the Seven Teachings would be gifted with a feather!

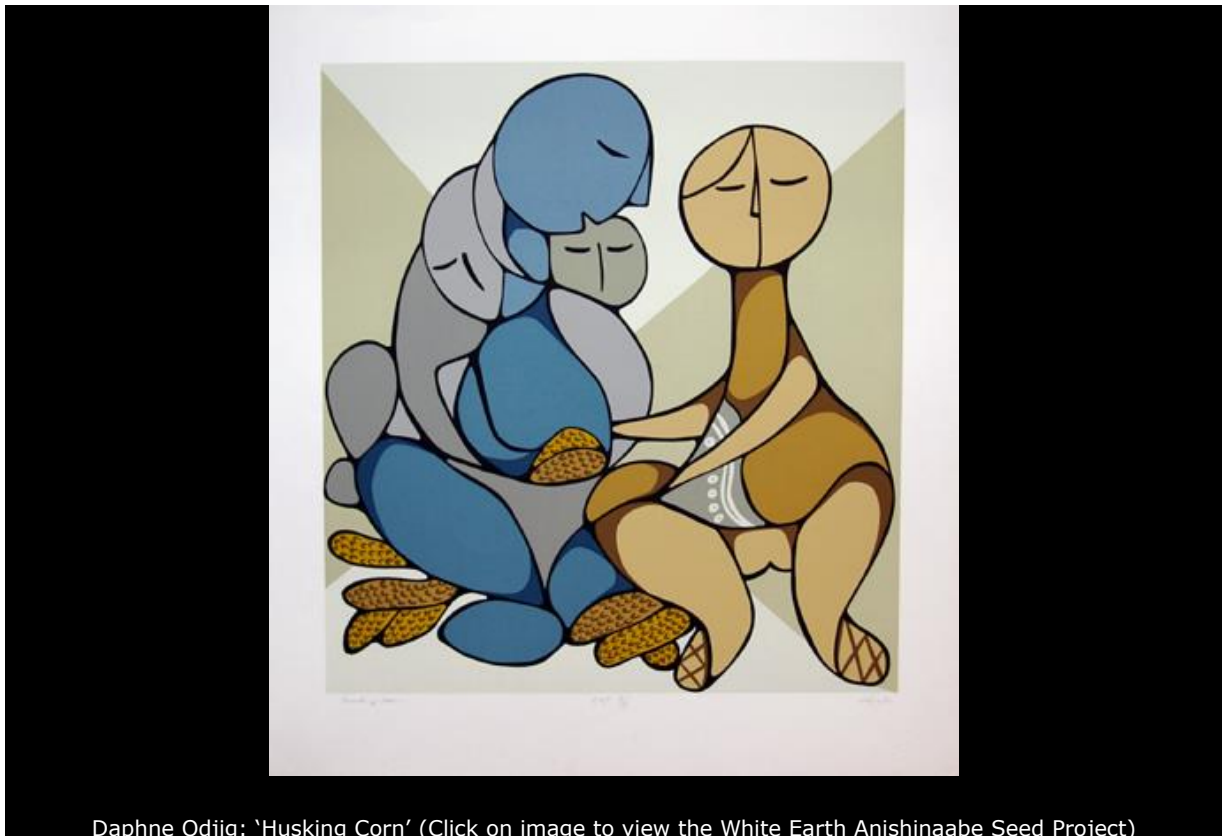
As the eagle is *anami`ewin mizhinawe*, a prayer carrier of messages and giving thanks, Anishinaabe healers sometimes envision themselves turning into eagles as they pray for another person and to GICHI-MANIDOO, the Great Mystery, asking the eagle to carry the sickness up to GICHI-MANIDOO in order to heal the patient. So highly esteemed are his spiritual powers that an Anishinaabe person would never gaze up to a flying eagle without offering a prayer with *asemaa* (the sacred tobacco) in his or her hand.

Feathers of Migizi and Giniw, the bald eagle and the golden eagle, convey human thoughts and feelings and provide persons with an opportunity to speak directly to the spirits with *debwewin* (a straight mind) and *bekide`ewin* (a pure heart). According to tradition, it were the ***animikii-binesiwag***, the thunderbirds, the most powerful birds in creation and metaphorical representations of ***migiziwag*** (eagles) and ***gekekweg*** (hawks), who imparted to eagle feathers a fragment of their celestial power; it is even said that they gave each eagle four of their feathers. Elders tell us that carrying an eagle feather is a sacred act and that it comes along with great responsibilities since the power of a feather comes from the Thunderbirds; a person who is worthy of bearing an eagle feather must therefore acknowledge that he is recognized by the Thunderbirds themselves as being able to use their formidable spirit powers...





**MINIKAANAN:** seeds, pictured in the lower left corner of the drawing as eight times three *spirit balls*, which, along with power lines (see the lines to the right connecting the miigis shell with the seven grandfathers, Sky Woman and the moon, Nanabozho, and the corn plant) and X-ray anatomy (see the otter and the turtle, below left, and the duck in the center of the drawing), are part of the Anishinaabe imagery as founded by the [Woodland School of Medicine Painters](#). Seeds, as well as growth, are considered *manidoo*: a mystery. The knowledge of curing and the wisdom of *Anishinaabe-bimaadiziwin* (how to live a good life), vested in the *Midewiwin*, a prominent association of medicine men and women and visionaries, are symbolized by a seed.



Daphne Odjig: 'Husking Corn' (Click on image to view the White Earth Anishinaabe Seed Project)



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Above image: NINDE, ZIIBI ZHAABOJIWAN

"A River Flows Through My Heart." Double-sided yellow & red gold overlay necklace by Zhaawano Giizhik.

The inlaid orbs (sun symbols) of red and yellow gold that I connected by means of a free-flowing 'spirit' line, symbolize illumination and enlightenment. Yet they are at the same time symbolic of the seeds of the Earth, representing the mystery of Growth.

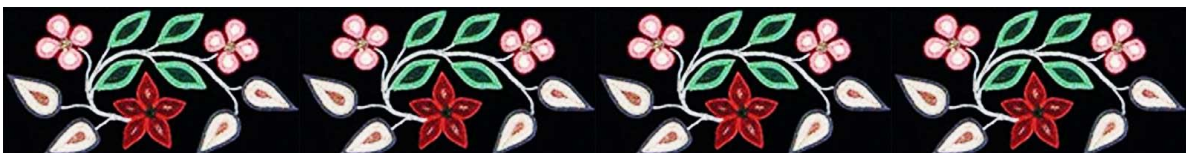
The flowing 'spirit line' design coupled with the words *ziibi* (river) and *bimijiwan* (flowing) refers to a place beyond language, like a Spiritual realm or a ceremony. It also implies the movement of Spiritual energy, which in a *Midewiwin* and *Waabanowin* context is ritualized in certain secret ceremonies.

*Manidoowi miinikaanense.*  
*Niigiwin manidoowin.*  
*Miinikaanense w'da-gikinawaajinowaan abinoojiin.*  
*Miinikaanense manidoowi, w'da mashki-akiwi.*

*(The seed is a mystery.*  
*Growth is a mystery.*  
*The seed symbolizes a child.*  
*The seed is possessed by spirit, it will heal like earth's medicine.)*

(- Ritualistic thanksgiving chant of the Anishinaabe *Waabanowin*/ Society of the Dawn)

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"Spiritual Growth" by Wikwemikong Anishinaabe painter Leland Bell (Bebaminojmat)

When in the heart of Anishinaabe Aki (Ojibwe land) the leaves of *wiigwasatigoons* (the young white birch) start to turn yellow and *asazawemin* (chokecherry) ripens, then grandmother moon begins to wax and the Anishinaabeg start canoeing their freshwater lakes and rivers gathering their sacred grass: [manoomin](#), the food-that-grows-upon-the-waters, foretold in the [Ojibwe migration prophecy](#). Traditionally, after the harvest and landing back on shore, the Anishinaabe ricers thresh the freshly harvested grain by [dancing](#) on it.



Photo obtained from Wisconsin Historical Society Archives Division

Within living memory, the ripened seeds of manoomin forms the chief cereal food in many a southern Anishinaabe community, from some areas in the east (present-day Michigan) to the Lakes region farthest to the west (present-day Wisconsin). It abounds in several lakes, ripening earliest in the shallow ones fed by streams, and later in the lakes fed by springs. By a wise provision of nature the seed of manoomin is carried southward by the plump, ring-necked *zhiishiib* – the wild duck- which the People hunt during Manoominike-Giizis, the Rice-Making Moon, the season Euro Americans call the month of September.



Reseeding manoomin in a birch bark nooshkaachinaagan (winnowing trail).

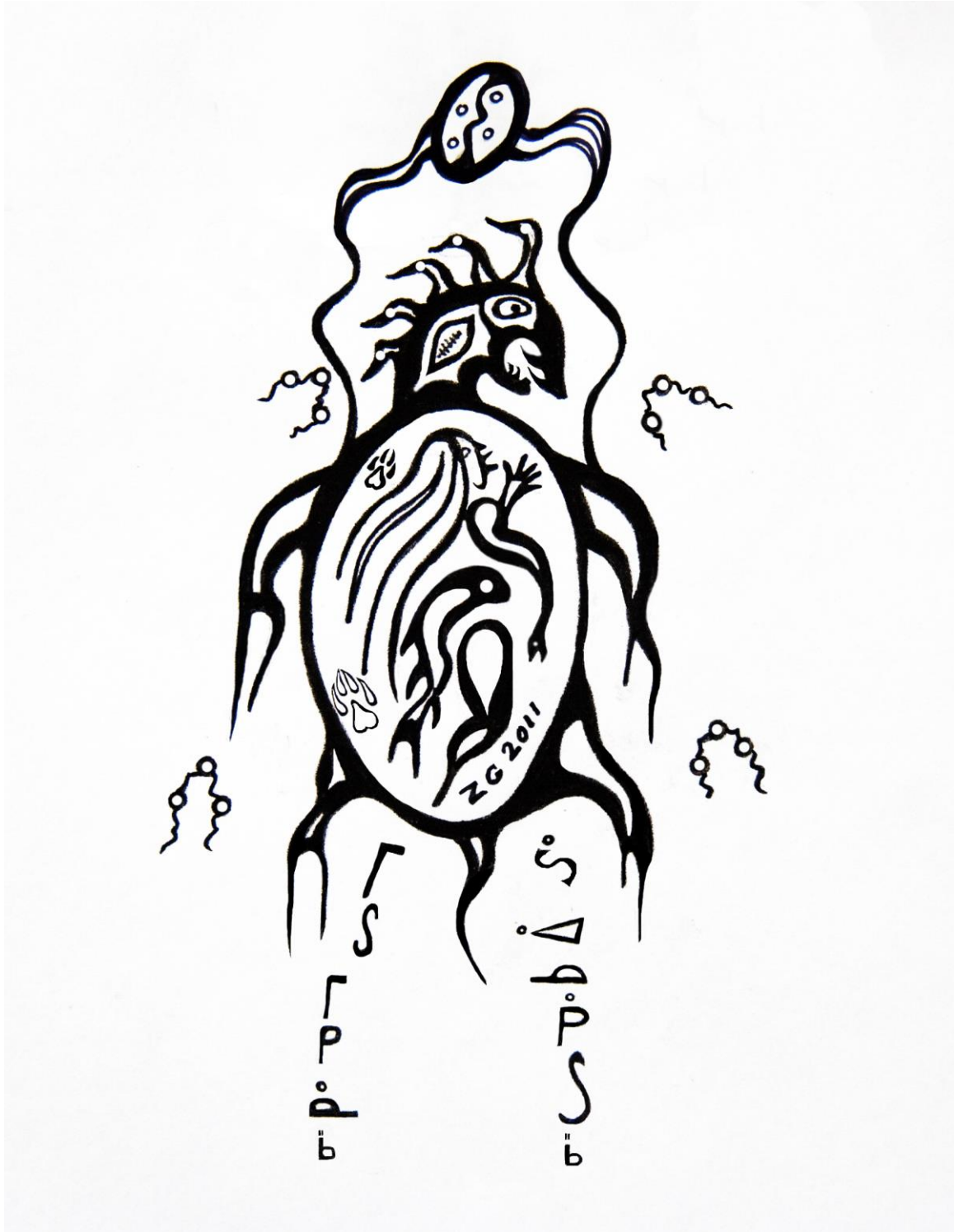
**While** "ricing" is traditionally an industry essential to food supply and trade, it has, like the maple sugar camp in the Maple-Sugaring Moon (April), a pleasant social phase, which is why the southern Anishinaabeg gave manoomin an honored place in their culture.

**Besides** being an important food staple the seed of manoomin has also a profound *spiritual* meaning. According to age-old Midewiwin knowledge, the ancestors of the Anishinaabeg were told by seven prophets to leave their homeland near the Atlantic coast and move to a land where food grows upon the water; after a 1500 to 2000 years-long migration during which they followed a *miigis* shell in the sky and the call of a spirit bird that GICHI-MANIDOO had sent to earth to show them the way, the Anishinaabeg reached this place in present-day Minnesota, and their migration had come (more or less) to an end, their spiritual manifest destiny fulfilled. Also, the seed of manoomin had a spiritual meaning in everyday life: in the long ago GICHI-MANIDOO blessed the sleep of certain chosen people with the knowledge of manoomin and these "Rice Dreamers" showed their People how to feed themselves with the sacred grain. And until today, when someone dies, the Anishinaabeg still offer manoomin for the spirit/soul to travel its journey...



[Click on image to go to the 'Protect Our Manoomin' blog](#)

**MISHIKENH (MIKINAAK):** the mud turtle, respectively snapping turtle, two related *aadizoogaanag* (spirit grandfathers), who were appointed as the chief bearers of good dreams and ideals from the spirit world, and who taught the *Anishinaabeg* healing and communication. Having served mankind by offering his back as a refuge to the supernatural creator *Giizhigookwe* (Sky Woman), and by lending his shell for the re-creation of *Anishinaabe Aki* (the world), the turtle, as a token of appreciation, was endowed with unique powers, enabling him to interchange his physical and incorporeal qualities, and travel backward and forward in time.



MISHI MIKINAAKOMINIS NIIGIWIN, Birth of the Great Turtle Island, pen and ink drawing by Zhaawano Giizhik

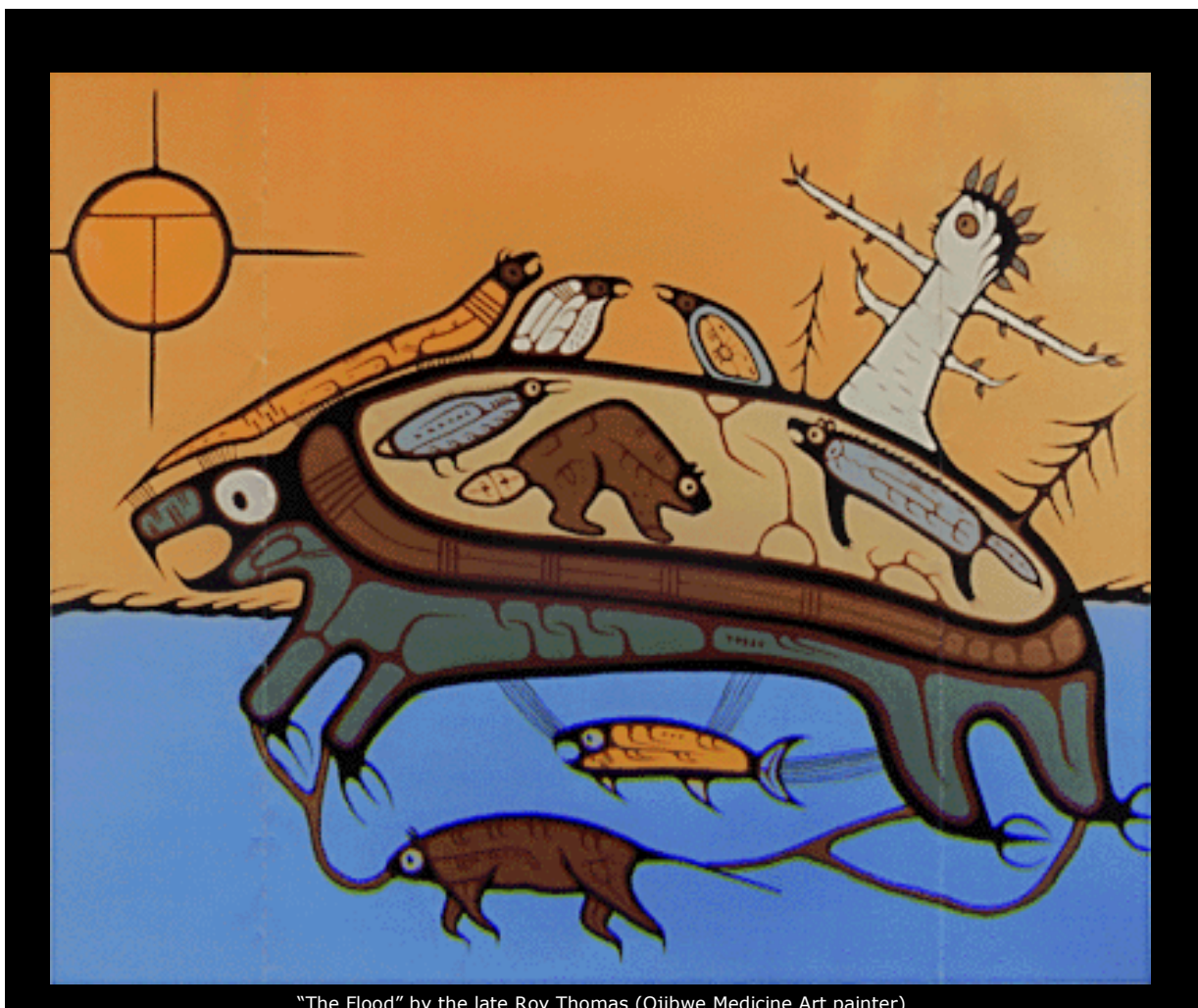


**Mishiikenh**, or **Mikinaak**, teaches the Ojibwe Anishinaabeg healing and communication with the Mystery World. Although physically the slowest of all creatures, he/she symbolizes swiftness of the mind and is regarded as a master of communication (of thought).

For this reason the *jaasakiidjig*, the Mide-specialists often referred to as Shaking Tent Seers, and who claim to draw their spiritual healing power from the Thunder Beings, elected the turtle as their patron (see also **MIDEWIWIN**, page 96).

**Tradition** has it that a long, long time ago disaster fell upon the world in the form of a great flood, which killed the plants and all land creatures, including mankind. The island that was created afterwards by **GIIZHIGOOKWE** (a female spirit who resided in the skies) who, with the aid of **Wazashk** (muskrat) and **Ma'ingan** (wolf), made it grow on the back of **Mikinaak**, or **Mishiikenh** as he is called by some, along with new flora and fauna, is still being called **TURTLE ISLAND** by most Original Americans.

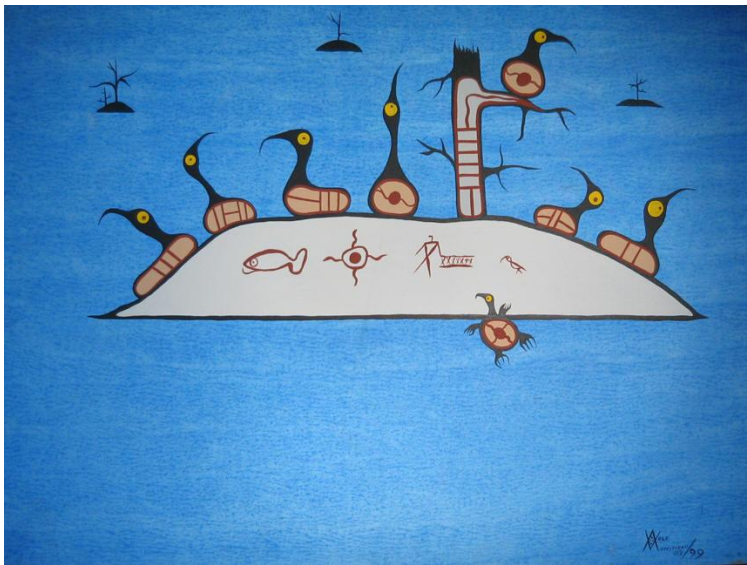
"The first mother of the Anishinaabeg was once an **AADIZOKAAN**, a supernatural being residing alone in the sky. **GICHI-MANIDOO**, the Creator of Earth and Skies, pitying **GIIZHIGOOKWE**'s loneliness, sent a male aadizookaan to Sky Woman to keep her company. **ANIMIKII** (Thunder), for that was his name, traveled to the sky lodge of **GIIZHIGOOKWE** and from the union that took place (rumor has it that Sky Woman showed her lover every hole and corner of the universe) were born the **ANISH-I-NAAB-EG** (a twin brother and sister), whom she planned to place on the back of a giant **MIKINAAK** (snapping turtle).



"The Flood" by the late Roy Thomas (Ojibwe Medicine Art painter)

But first GIIZHIGOOKWE had to convince MIKINAAK to lend his back to the re-creation of the world, because at that time the world was inundated with water below her and most animals had been drowned in the Great Flood that had hit the first world. As Sky Woman noticed that a few animals had survived the flood she called to her aid the giant turtle. He came to the surface so that she could sit on his back and call others to her side. Maang (the loon), Amik (the beaver), Nigig (the otter), and Wajashk (the little muskrat) were among her assistants.

That day, long ago, she spoke to the water animals as follows: 'I don't have all the powers of creation that GICHI-MANIDOO has. But I am a female spirit and I have a special gift. I have the power to recreate. I can recreate the world GICHI-MANIDOO created, but I can't do it by myself. I need your help. I need you to dive deep. I need you to bring me a handful of the original soil made by GICHI-MANIDOO. The soil will be the seed I use to recreate the Earth.



All day long the water animals took turns trying to reach the soil covered by the great depth of water but to no avail. At the end of the day it was only Wajashk the little muskrat, not used to swimming in deep water, who had not given it a try. The brave little animal decided that with no one else available to help it was up to him to do the job. He took many deep breaths and dived down and down.

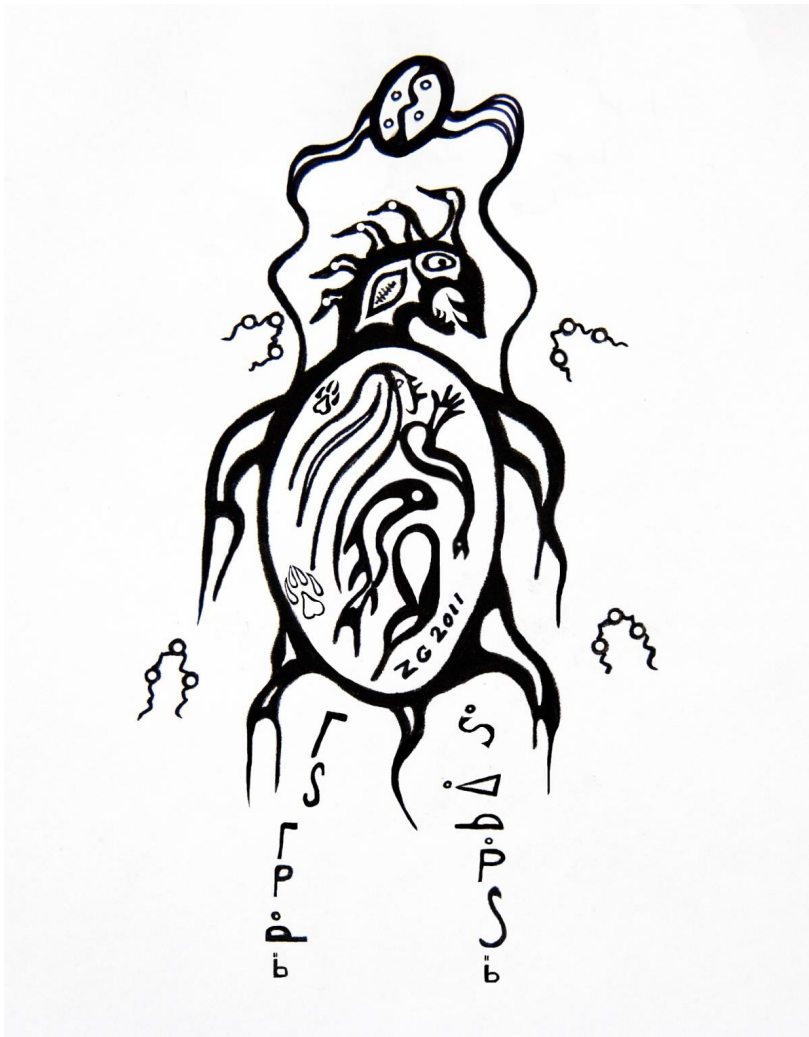
As he finally came back to the surface Wajashk had clutched in his paw the soil from the

bottom of the sea. Gratefully GIIZHIGOOKWE took the soil, dried it and breathed life into it, then rubbed it on the turtle's back. She rubbed the soil round and round and as she did so - some say aided by MA'IINGAN the wolf- an island took shape above the water. This is said to have occurred at MISHI-MIKINAAK-ONG, the present-day Mackinac Island in Lake Huron. GIIZHIGOOKWE continued to move over the new soil. She and the wolf walked in wider and wider circles; it took them 14 summers to complete the job! And so the Earth was recreated. Forever after the Anishinaabeg called the world MIKINAAK-OO-MINIS, or Turtle Island.

Once the new island was complete, GIIZHIGOOKWE nurtured the twins to manhood and womanhood, and then, as her purpose and nature were finally fulfilled, she ascended back into the sky, where she changed her name in WEZAAWI-GIIZHIG-OO-KWE, Yellow Sky Woman, and became known as NOOKOMIS DIBIK-GIIZIS, Grandmother Moon. From here on, Nookomis Moon watched over her children by night; by day MISHOOMIS GIIZIS (the Sunfather) and OMIZAKAMIG-OO-KWE (the Earthmother) took care of them. And Nookomis' existence, her gift of life, and the primacy of women are still remembered by the Anishinaabeg each time Dibik-giizis, the Night Sun shines on their precious island-home. "

*Giwwenh:* so the story goes.

Above image: Turtle Island Paradise by David Wolf Morrisseau.



The female figure that I depicted inside the turtle (see image), represents Sky Woman who, after fulfilling her task of recreating the world, ascends into her home, the sky world. The sturgeon and the water snake (which is also Sky Woman's right arm) depicted inside the turtle's body symbolize the water creatures and the *doodemag* (clans) of Science and Medicine, while the stylized wolf footprints that run around the circumference of the turtle's back shell refer to the land creatures - and to the warrior clans, the wolf *doodem* included: it was wolf himself who helped creating a new island home for the Anishinaabe People. The plant world (in the form of the long grains of wild rice) is represented by Sky Woman's loose hair streaming after her. The five birds depicted on top

of the turtle's head refer to the origins of the Anishinaabeg and the five original doodeman (animal totems), which formed the basis of an extensive family clan system that exists even until today. These five are: Crane, Bear, Marten, Catfish, and Turtle. Finally, the stylized sea shell or *miigis* depicted inside the turtle's head is a sacred symbol representing the seven great *mide miigisag*, radiant beings that appeared in human form to the Ojibwe Anishinaabeg to teach the people about the midewiwin life-style. (See also **MIDE-MIIGIS**, page 92).

The floating seed designs that surround the great snapping turtle are seeds of life, or balls of *spirit power*. These stylistic elements are powerful carriers of symbolic meaning, reminiscent of the sacred rock and birch bark art of the Ancients. The oval-shaped Power circle over the turtle's head and the flowing power lines that are connected to the turtle's fore legs express interdependence and communication and indicate a high level of spiritual power that's present in the drawing.

The Power circle, or unity symbol, depicted in the top of the drawing, and which I stylized after the oval shape of a *miigis*, symbolizes the duality of life. The divided circle represents dualities present in the new world that Sky Woman created - womanhood and manhood, sky and earth, good and evil, birth and decay, day and night, moon and sun, ebb and flood, honesty and dishonesty, function and dysfunction. One section of the circle inspires, complements, and strengthens the other part. Each part depends on the other. The four smaller circles depicted inside the power circle/unity symbol, representing the four cardinal directions, are a reference to GICHI-MANIDOO, the Great Mystery that encompasses the four directions and everything that is.



**MITIGOOG:** the trees. A *mitig*, or tree, is alternately or simultaneously *manidoo* (a spirit), and *bemaadizid* (a person). A tree is regarded as a carved image of *bimaadiziwin*, or life. Mitig gives life, serving all the People's needs. In return, the People can give nothing but for their songs and chants, and *asemaa*, tobacco-offerings. The Anishinaabeg believe that, if you want to know what happened in the past, before the time of the oldest person alive, you should talk to the *mitigonabi-aya'aag*, the spirits in the trees.

The tree persons that are considered most eminent (sacred) are the *wiigwaasaatig* the birch, *giizhik* the cedar, *ininaatig* the sugar maple, and *azaadi* the poplar.

**Wiigwaas**, the bark of the birch tree (see the pen drawing by Zhaawano Giizhik), forms the People's *wiigiwaaman* or homes; shapes their elegant *djiimaan* (canoes) and *makakoon* (containers); is used in dyes and for medicines against stomach pains; and was transformed by the ancestors into indented works of art, and sacred scrolls recording history and teachings of the *Midewiwin*. Throughout the past until this day, the usage of birch bark as a means of recording the creation stories, songs, history, symbolic images, and world view of the People, has been of great importance in passing along history and stories to succeeding generations.

*Wiigwaasabakoon* or birch bark scrolls carry all kinds of complex geometrical patterns and shapes etched on the soft surface of the bark. These bark sheets are a very time-resistant material and can remain intact for many centuries (to a 1000 years or more!). In case a scroll conveys traditional teachings, for example about the origins of the *Midewiwin*, or songs and details of Mide rituals, it is called *midewiigwaas* (plural: *midewigwaasag*). Many writings include astronomy, rituals, family lineage, songs, and migration routes. The recordings of the up to 1000-year-old canoe routes followed by Anishinaabe migrants and traders are probably the oldest known geographical maps of Turtle Island (North America)!

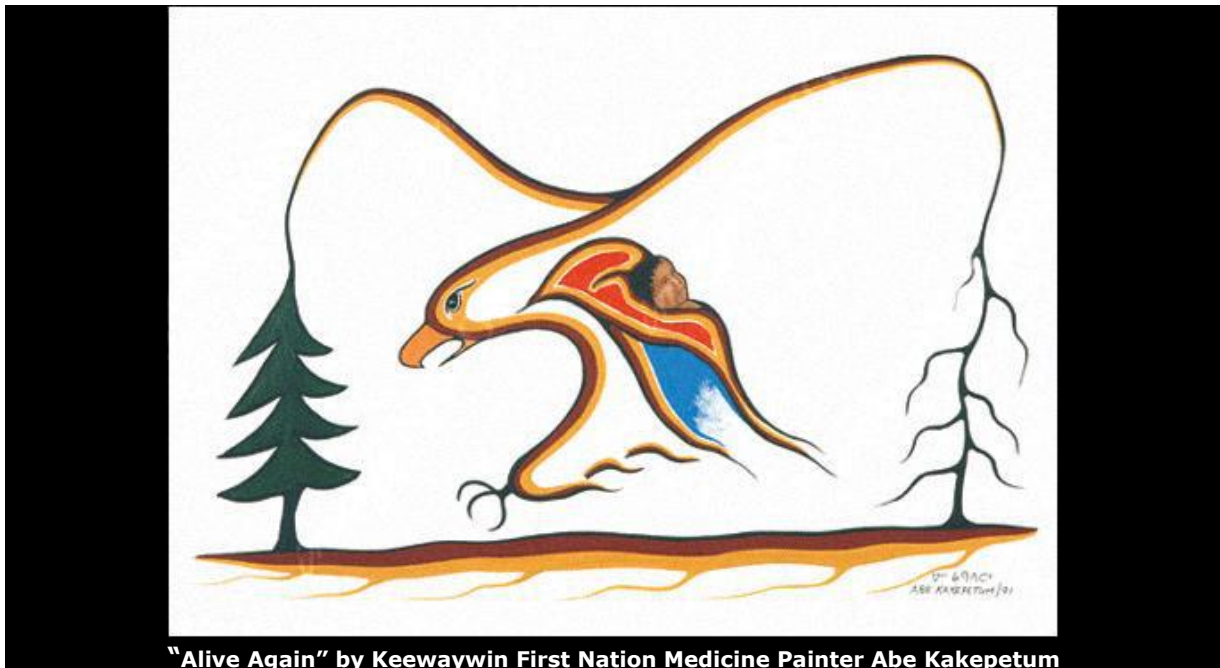
**Giizhik**, the eastern or northern white cedar, provides the People with ferns that cushion their bodies in sleep; the burned wood, mixed with bear's gall, serves as coughing medicine; the leaves, when snipped, are burned to produce an aromatic healing incense used as a purifier of individuals, lodges, *opwaaganag* or tobacco pipes, and other sacred objects; sometimes leaves are used as charms: elders say *put some snipped cedar leaves in your shoes and only good will come your way*; *mashkikiwininiwag*, or herb doctors, may soak or boil his leaves to create decoctions and infusions to be used to relieve coughs and headaches, and to purify the blood; his long arched *giizhikaandagoog* or boughs serve as toboggan and canoe-framework and adorn the roofs, walls, and floors of ceremonial lodges, form protective circles around sacred fires, and, hanging above entryways, shield homes from disease and evil; the fibrous bark is used for the construction of *giizhikashkimodan* or carrying bags and to line the interior walls of lodges, and the inner bark is used in dyes; and the *Mide* Grand Medicine People keep his trunk within their sacred purification lodge, symbolizing *Midewaatic*, the Tree of Life.



Acrylic on canvas by Simone McLeod/Aki-egwaniizid, 2013. The first Anishinaabeg, a twin brother and sister, and seven MIDEMIIGIS shells representing the Seven Grandfather Teachings rest beneath the roots of GIIZHIK, the Tree Of Life. GIIZHIK, whose branches the artist stylized after the MIDEWIWIN symbol of the Road of Life, connects the underworld and the Earth surface to the Sky world, represented by two Spirit Birds in the shape of ZHASHAGIWAG (blue herons), and WEZAAWI-GIIZHIGOOKWE, Yellow Sky woman, who is our Grandmother Moon. Standing behind WEZAAWI-GIIZHIGOOKWE the artist depicted GIIZHIHOOKWE or Sky woman, the female Sky Spirit who according to tradition created the Anishinaabe twins and lowered them to Earth. Click on image to view more details about this painting.

**Ininaatig** or *aninaatig*, the sugar maple, who lends his wood for paddles for stirring maple sap and whose rotted wood is used in dyes. *Ininaatig* grants the People in early spring his nutritious sap from which they make their *Anishinaabe-ziinzibaakwaad*, or sugar - which except maybe for *manoomin* (wild rice) is their most important vegetable food.

**Azaadi**, the poplar tree. A friend and grandmother of the Three Fires Midewiwin explained to me once that before the Anishinaabeg were lowered to the earth, the question was asked, "and who shall bring healing to our people?" and Azaadi answered that he would. Because of this, the poplar became the sacred tree in the center of the Three Fires Lodge reaching up to GICHI-MANIDOO, the Great Mystery. Its relative the Cottonwood tree which is also called azaadi, or *maanazaadi*, became the [Sundance](#) tree, and it has the imprint of a 7- point star at the place where its branches joins the tree.



"Alive Again" by Keewaywin First Nation Medicine Painter Abe Kakepetum

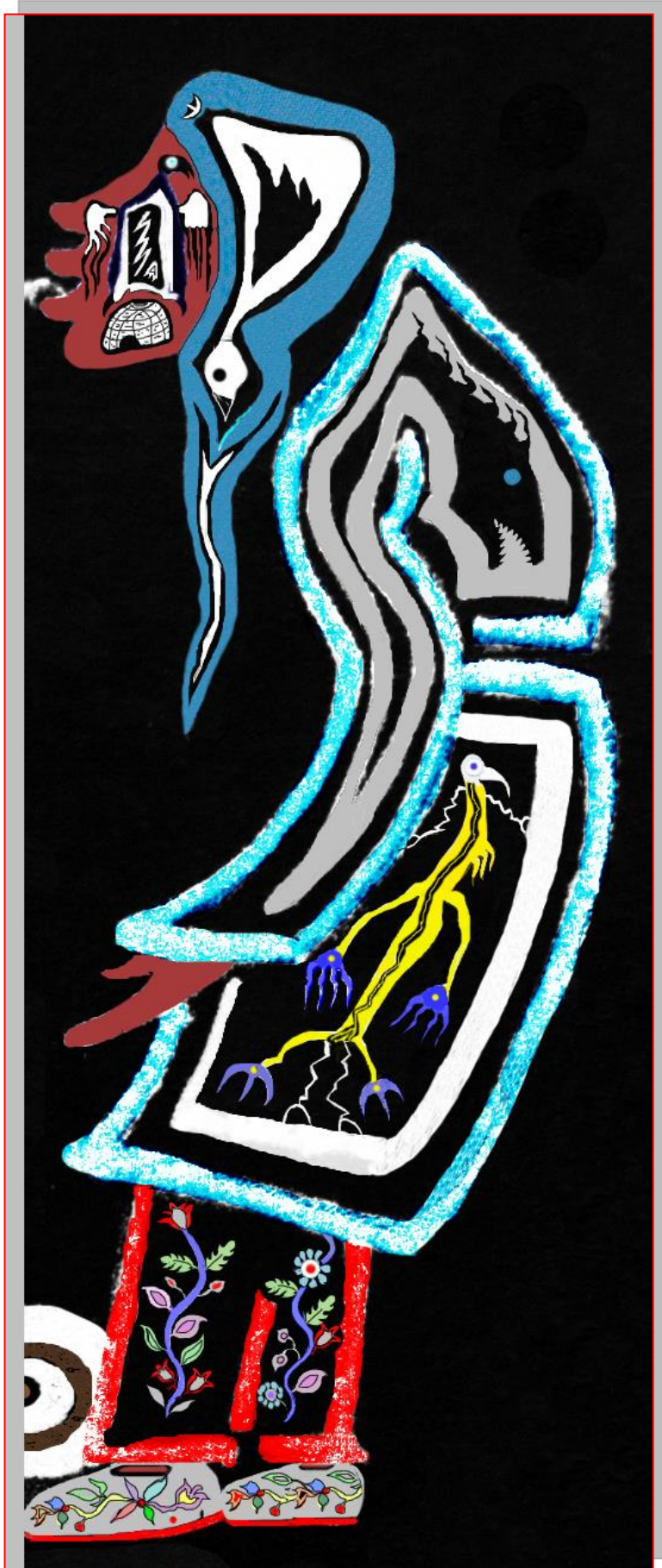
Other tree-persons of great importance to the *Anishinaabeg* are: **Aagimaak** (the Ash or *fraxinus species*, who is used in medical appliances, and furnishes the People with material for their *aagimag*, or snowshoes; in many Ojibwe communities, the term *Aagimaak* is also used to specify the black ash); **Gogbanogan** (the Black Ash proper or *fraxinus nigra marsh*, whose bark is used in covering lodges; strips of ash are used in the making of basketwork); **Ininandaag** or *Aninandaag* (the Balsam Fir or *abies balsamea*, who shields the People from the wind; balsam gum treats headaches and is used in making *baapaazhkigii* or pitch; balsam bark is an application to wounds, and the balm and resin serve to make the seams of birchbark canoes waterproof; *maminge* is the ceremonial gathering of balsam boughs, used for constructing temporary shelters during the summer); **Ikwemizh** or *Okwemizh* (the Cherry Tree or *prunus serotina*, whose roots are used as remedies, for instance in the treatment of digestive troubles, whose twigs are used in making beverages, whose berries are cooked and eaten, and who provides the People with arrow-shafts); **Mitigwaabaak** (the Hickory or *hickoria alba*, whose small shoots treat the nervous system and are used as medicine against headache, and who lends his strong wood for making *mitigwaabiig*, or bows); **Wigabiimizh** (the Basswood or *tilia Americana*, whose sap and bark serve as food, whose fiber from the inner bark is made into twines used in the weaving of mats and the tying of packets, and in sewing together the birchbark sheet-coverings of *wiigiwaaman*; his wood is made into dolls for girls to play with); **Zhingob** (the Spruce or *picea rubra*, whose fine roots are used for sewing birch bark to canoe-frames and whose gum is used in making *bigii*, or pitch; in some Ojibwe communities, the term *Zhingob* is also used to designate the balsam fir); **Zhingwaak** (the Eastern White Pine or *pinus strobus*, whose mashed woody material, along with the young inner bark of two other tree-species, is used in the form of a decoction that heals wounds and cuts).

**NANABOZHO:** the original name of Wiinabozho, undoubtedly the most prominent and beloved *aadizookaan* of the Ojibwe Anishinaabe Peoples. An *aadizookaan* is a spirit grandfather, a muse, and a protagonist of sacred stories.

Traditionally, Wiinabozho, or Nanabozho\* stories are told during long winter nights by the old ones to the young. Wiinabozho, son of **Wiininwaa**, a mortal woman, and the Spirit of the West and grandson of **Nookomis** (his grandmother on earth), is (sometimes) called **Wiisagejaak** (Crane Spirit) by the *Nakawēk* (Northwestern Ojibweg), the *Anishininiwak* (Oji-Cree), and their neighbors to the north, the Cree.

Illustration: Wiinabozho, detail of the digipainting "Wiinabozho And The Storyteller's Mirror" by Zhaawano Giizhik. Click on image to see details.

**Wiinabozho** is associated with rabbits or hare and is sometimes referred to as the Great Hare (*Misabooz*), although he is rarely depicted as taking the physical form of a rabbit or hare. He is the benefactor of the Anishinaabeg who helps little children, the poor, and the weak. But he is also known as the first man who walked the earth and the mighty creator and name-giver of plants, animals, and the geography of the landscape as the Anishinaabeg know it. And he is many other things: a shape shifter who can change from various animal forms to various human

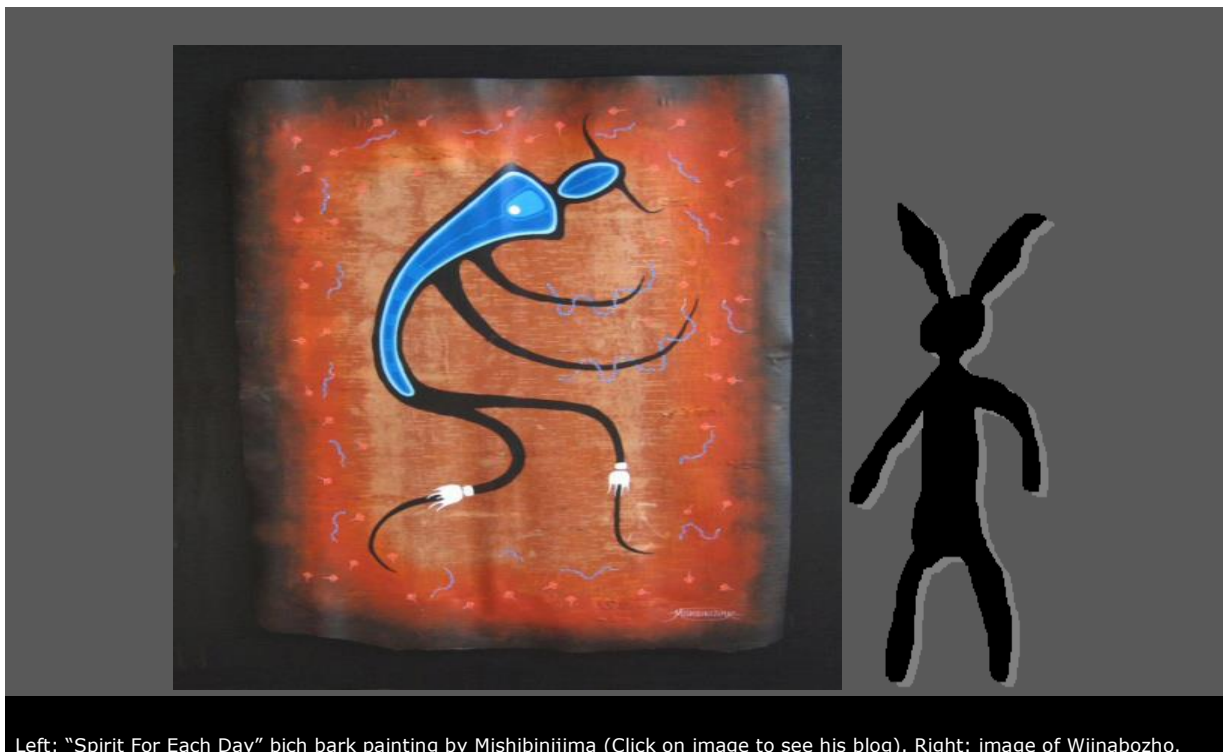


forms; a trickster that by his foolish and humorous actions holds a mirror up to humankind, constantly showing them that things aren't always what they seem; a very skillful hunter with supernatural powers, and a great adventurer, always looking for equally powerful adversaries in order to test his own strength. Building the first *midewigaan* (lodge of the Midewiwin) is an act accredited to him – although not all traditionalist sources agree that he was actually the founder of the Anishinaabe Medicine Society. However, both *Midewiwin* and [Waabanowin](#) Elders trace the origins of their lodges or societies to the original teachings of Wiinabozho. The *aadizookaanan* (sacred stories or parables - *myth* is a European concept! -) of Wiinabozho are used in the ceremonies and teachings of both societies. Waabanowin, the Society of the Dawn, is the counterpart of the – much more prominent - Midewiwin.



In these *aadizookaanan*, metamorphosis occurs with noticeably frequency where *manidoog* (manitous or spirit beings) change their form. Wiinabozho, undoubtedly the most beloved of all *aadizoogaanag* and *manidoog*, is the pinnacle of all that is good in the Anishinaabeg. Yet, paradoxically, Wiinabozho also opens a dark window on the soul, revealing all that is bad in human nature. He is basically a *manidoo* in nature and essence before anything else; outward appearance is only an incidental attribute of his incorporeal being. One of the many good deeds Wiinabozho performed for the good of the People was that he had blessed Wiigwaas, their beloved birch tree.

The principal lesson that Wiinabozho, through his many adventures and his often foolish, sometimes heroic, and sometimes wise actions, teaches mankind is that one can outgrow or overcome childish behavior and learn to act wisely and with maturity – and to live according the guiding principles of *Anishinaabe bimaadiziwin*: how to live a good and honest life. His original [name](#) (*Nanabozho*) is possibly derived from an Ojibwe word that is a corruption of *naning*, which means “trembling”, combined with *ozho* (*ozo*), shortened from *ozhowaa* (*ozowaa*), which means “having a tail”. If this is true, it is not unthinkable that the name *Nanabozho* fits Wiinabozho’s capacity of a *contrary* and thus holds up a mirror to people who are timid and unwilling to take risks or responsibility.\*



Left: “Spirit For Each Day” bich bark painting by Mishibiniijima (Click on image to see his blog). Right: image of Wiinabozho.





Kevin Belmore/Minowewegabow (Ojibwe): "Giizis Over Nanabush"

Many strings of life ago Wiinabozho suddenly disappeared from the earth; some sources relate that he went to rest in the land of his father, the Spirit of the West, while others claim that he, since sunset indicates death - which he, being an *aadizoogaan*, certainly wasn't - more likely spends his old age on an island toward the sunrise - wearing the trunk and branches of the cedar tree as an ornament on his head, with its roots all around him. And although he couldn't be destroyed because his inner essence was still *manidoo*, neither could he be permitted to roam at will through cosmos as he had done, so he was placed on this unknown island in the Great Lake (Superior) to remain there as long as the earth lives.



Roy Thomas (Ojibwe): "Thunder Bay"

Above illustrations: both paintings depict the amazing silhouette of the SLEEPING GIANT at *Animikii-Wiikwedong* (Thunder Bay), situated in the northern part of *Gichigami* (Lake superior); an island that according to a local Anishinaabe tradition is the petrified body of Nanabozho (Wiinabozho\*). Wiinabozho, who was truly fond of the Anishinaabeg, had gifted them with a mine rich with *waabishki-zhooniyaa asiniwaabik* (silver ore). GICHI-MANIDOO, the Great Mystery, had warned the Anishinaabeg not to reveal its location to strangers, or Wiinabozho would be turned to stone. Nevertheless, a canoe guide of the Bwaanag (Dakota Nation) did disclose the secret, and the European intruders whom he led to the mine (present-day Silver Islet) were drowned in a fierce storm that lashed the bay that night. The next morning the horrified Anishinaabeg, who for many generations had used the silver of the mine to craft jewelry and ornaments and tools that brought them much material wealth, noticed that, where once used to be a wide opening to the bay, now lied what appeared to be a sleeping figure of a giant. Nanabozho had been turned into rock overnight..GICHI-MANIDOO's warning had come true and Wiinabozho, the beloved manidoo of the deep waters, had been turned to stone for eternity...



\* Wiinabozho is also known by a variety of other names and spellings, including **Nanabozho**, **Nanabush**, **Wenabozho**, Waynabozho, **Winaboozhoo**, **Manabozho**, Nanabojo, and **Nanabijou**. According to some traditional sources, Wiinabozho's grandmother Nookomis, who allegedly named him "Nanabozho" ("Nanabozh" when she addressed him), used the particle "N-" to begin his name, which means "my." Some Anishinaabe speakers, however, would normally drop this endearment and use the more general prefixes W- (meaning "he") or M- (a null-person prefix). The name **Manabozho**, then, might possibly reflect the *concept or idea behind* the Wiinabozho character. A fluent Ojibwe speaker telling a Wiinabozho story or explaining something about Wiinabozho may refer to him as Wiinabozho most of the time, but switch to calling him *Nanabozho* (or *Nanabozh*) while narrating for his grandmother. Depending on the story and the narrator's role in telling the story, the name may be presented in its regular *nominative* form (**Wenabozho/Wiinabozho** or **Manabozho** or **Nanabozho**), or in its *vocative* form (without the final o: **Nanabozh**).





Wikwemikong Ojibwe painter James Mishibinjima: "Great Lakes" (Birchbark Pictograph)(Click on image)



**NIBI:** The Spirit Of The Water. For six centuries or more, the Great Lakes basin, whose abundant waters, ebbing and flowing with the seasons, feed into the North American continent and the Atlantic Ocean, has been the home of my distant ancestors, who for generations have lived close to the water's edge to survive.

Since the days when these Algonquian speaking immigrants first came to this region of bountiful freshwater lakes and islands and rivers and forests, its waters have nourished many generations of the People, physically as well as spiritually.

Along with water, all kinds of fish species, turtle spirits, snakes, muskrats, water birds, mermen and mermaids, underwater panthers (see above image), and a myriad of other water creatures, play a central role in the traditional narrations and creation stories for several Anishinaabe Nations that surround the Lakes.

From time immemorial, these proud Lake People with a shared ancestry go by the names of:

- Ojibweg (Ojibwe)
- Misizaagiwininiwag (Mississauga)
- Bodéwadmik (Potawatomi)
- Odaawaag (Odawa),
- Omàmiwininiwak (Algonquin),
- Odishkwaagamiig (N'biising, Nipissing), and
- Mamaceqtaw (Menominee).

**G**ICHIGAMIIN, the Great Seas of the Anishinaabe People is a natural resource of immense proportions once respected, revered and held sacred, yet nowadays unappreciated by many. Over the course of a great many decennia its ecosystem has largely been misused and abused by commercial fishery and timber companies, as well as power plants and various international chemical corporations.

It is an old Anishinaabe belief that, since there is no life without water, the waters of the Great Lakes should never be taken for granted, nor the water that fills the wells, the inland lakes and ponds, the rivers, and the oceans. Nibi is not merely an element but a soul (spirit) who gives us beauty, growth, generosity. Nibi gives peace.

"AT THE LAKE SINGING OUR SONG"

"Jiigewe'am naawij, nagawawin jiimaan,  
Bimaawadaaso wijiwiw giigoonh, bineshiinhyag,  
Megwe digowag, megwa anwaatin ge.  
Nagamowin nibi nagamon,  
Agamiig nagamawin nagamon."

"Paddling along on the lake in our canoe,  
Traveling along with the fishes, the birds,  
Among the waves, in calm waters too.  
Singing our water song,  
At the lake singing our song."

-Ojibwe Lake Chant



Wikwemikong Ojibwe painter Leland Bell: "Offering A Bowl Of Water Of Life"

According to tradition, the *nii`inaa ikwewag* (women of the Anishinaabe Nation) are the keepers of **Gichi-Nibi**, the sacred water circle. The idea behind this is that *Anishinaabekweg* (women) are more in tune with the natural cycles than *ininwag* (men). After all, it is the women in their period who are connected with the blood of the Earth, which is the water. Thus, Anishinaabekweg have the connection and the ways and the ceremonies to bless and purify the waters.

An important part of the ancient water ceremony is called "MIDE WAABOO". In this ceremony, during which a song is sung called NIBI WAABOO or WATER SONG, a *Midewikwe* (a member of the medicinal, spiritual, scientific and philosophical society of the Anishinaabe Peoples, the MIDEWIWIN) holds the water up in a vessel made of the sacred copper, while the water song is sung by the other women attending.

The spirit of water is addressed to in prayer and a small amount of *nibi* is shared with everyone attending the ceremony. The water is no longer just *nibi* – it is then perceived as MIDE-WAABOO: sacred medicine water.



The water songs can be sung at each new moon or even every day to bless the spirit of the water. This can be at the lake shores and at river banks, at wells and the great ocean - even at the sink in your kitchen: anywhere where there's water present. Traditionally, during the NIBI WAABOO performance, a ceremonial staff is being used and certain teachings are being shared. Women in a circle play clapper sticks of white birch bark - as it was done in the old days, before the hand drum came to women.

After a period of one hundred and fifty years in which the NIBI WAABOO had gone underground - and perhaps not been performed at all -, a group of women from the Omàmiwininiwak or Algonquin First Nation in Quebec decided to revitalize the NIBI WAABOO. Among the participants of the ceremony, which took place in February 2002 in *Kitigan-zibi reserve*, were Omàmiwinini (Algonquin) women and women of mixed blood, thirteen in total. These thirteen women represented all women of all four races of the world.

One of the women was a grandmother who in 1998 had received a vision of the ancient Nibi Waaboo. After having followed a four year-lasting spiritual journey in order to bring the rebirth of the ceremony to completion, she decided to remain anonymous. Since then the other twelve participants are the guardians of the ceremony, charged with passing on the ceremony to all the women of the world.

The MIDE WAABOO is particularly held each year at the thirteenth moon - which is the moon at the end of February/March. It is established that the water song, like all women's ceremonies, shall be sung at the new moon and only by women. It is to be sung

one time for each of the seven directions - east, south, west, north, the skies, the earth, and within oneself. According to the vision of the Omamiwinini grandmother that led to the renewed water song ceremony, thirteen grandmothers stood on the ice of a lake in order to absorb the teachings from the water under their feet....



Wikwemikong Ojibwe painter James Mishibinjima: "Thirteen Grandmothers" (Click on image)

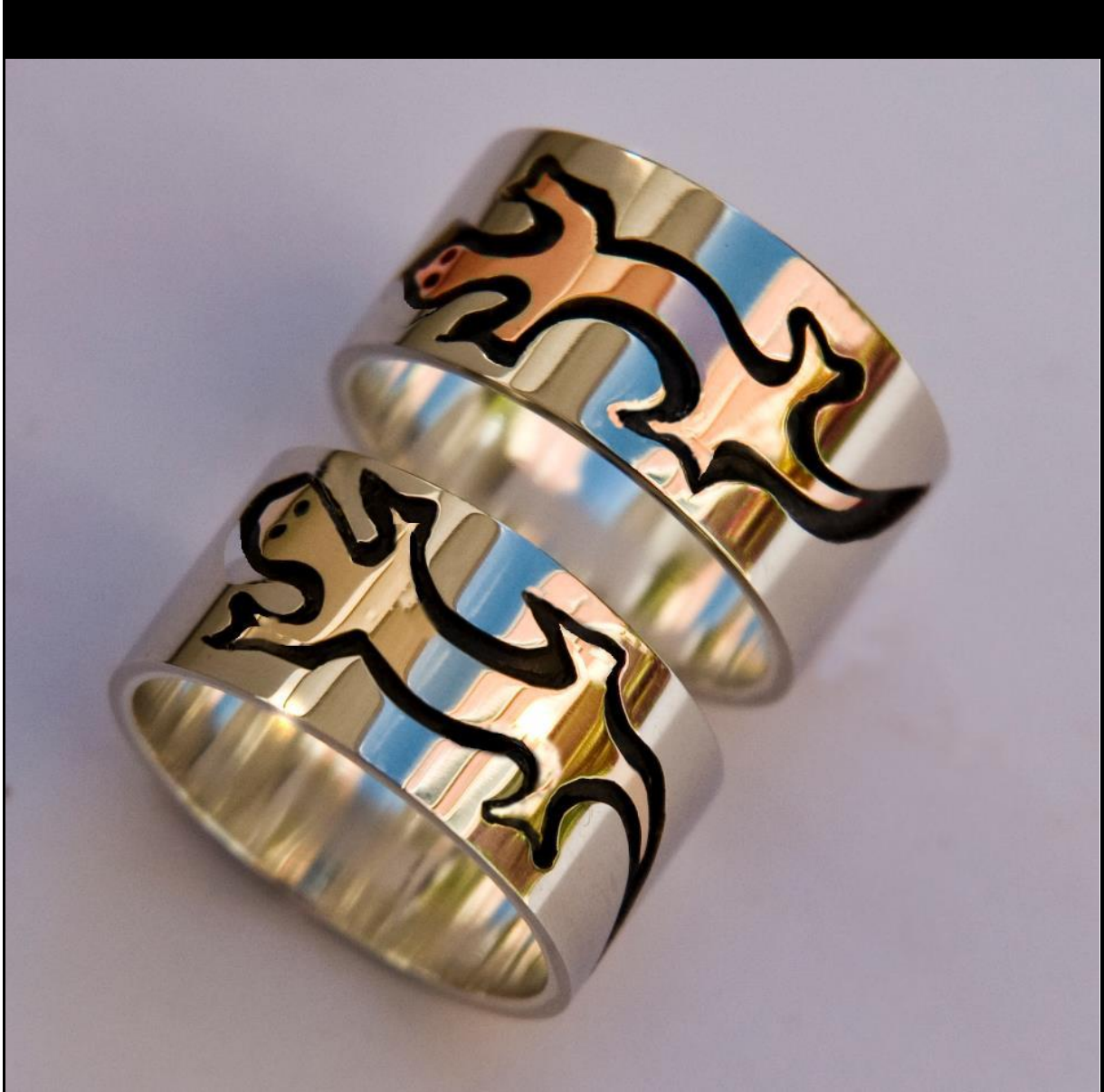
**NIGIG:** The Otter. The *Anishinaabeg* know how much they are indebted to Nigig, the otter. Nigig had once saved their ancestors from extinction by bringing a healing plant (*ginebig-washk* or "snake root") from the depths of the waters, therefore he (along with **mikinaak** the turtle) was elected the symbol of healing.



According to ancient tradition, WIINABOZHON, the benevolent messenger whom GICHI-MANIDOO (the Great Mystery) had ordained to help the People, noticed the poor condition they were in – poverty, sickness and even starvation had plunged them in sheer misery and despair – and he chose the otter to teach them about various remedies and rituals for treating the sick.

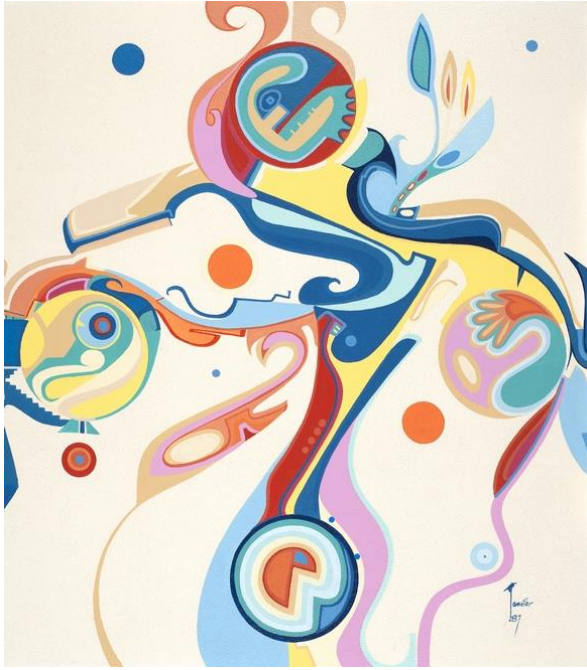
For this reason the priests of both MIDEWIWIN (Society of Good Hearted Ones) and WAABANOWIN (Society of Dawn, a counterpart of the Midewiwin) elected NIGIG the first and leading patron of their powerful Medicine Lodges.

Because of his habit of rising to the surface at night and then plunging under again, NIGIG is symbolically linked with the moon, and thus also associated with several rites of initiation. Because of this, the MIDEG (Mide priests) keep their MIDE-MIIGISAAG (sacred Cowry shells) in a NIGIG-MIDEWIYAAN: a bag of otter skin. (See above inserted image: a "Mide Sky Man" holding an otter medicine bag, painted by Norval Morrisseau.)



The title of these wedding bands, NIGIG-NIIMIWIN, is taken from OJIBWEMOWIN (the language of the Ojibwe Anishinaabeg) and translates as "DANCE OF THE OTTER". The shape of the inlaid otter design in the rings represents the diving otter bringing from the depths of the Great Lake a life-giving plant that would save humanity from extinction. Click on image to see details of these wedding bands.





**NINGO-GIKINOONOWIN:** the seasonal cycle. Ningo-gikinoonowin, or *ningo-gikinoowin*, literally means "one year"; *gikinoonowin* can also mean astrology, or any other guidedness where the individual is but a pawn in the grand scheme of things.

The Anishinaabeg have always lived according the cyclical rhythm set by, as they called it, *aandakiiwinan*, the seasonal changes.

In the old days, during the warm moons in the period called *niibinisiwin* (summer camping), the Ojibwe Anishinaabeg of the northwoods, as soon as the ice on the lakes and rivers melted, left their winter camps and headed for the shores of *gichigamiin*, the Great Lakes. Here they stayed during the summer moons near the river mouths, where the men fished for *namebinag*

(sucker) and *namewag* (sturgeon) that were entering the rivers and streams to spawn.

Above illustration: Alex Janvier, *The Four Seasons of '76, 1977*, acrylic on masonite, 91.4 x 81.3 cm

Others set up summer camps near the shores of the *zaaga'iganan* (inland lakes) and fished, hunted, and gathered plant foods and medicinal herbs. These temporary summer villages were usually composed of single family *waaginogaanan* and *asawa'ogaanan* (respectively circular or domed and conical wigwams made of bent-over saplings and covered with birch bark sheets) that generally housed populations of 50 to 70 persons.



Meanwhile the many small Anishinaabe clan groups that lived south of *gichigamiin*, who, unlike their Ojibwe relatives from Canada were semi-agricultural people, organized themselves into band units of (sometimes up to) 300 to 400 people as soon as the ice thawed and camped in regions with fertile soil and plenty of fish and game and other food sources. These southern Ojibweg hunted, fished, tapped sugar from *ininaatoog* (sugar maple trees) and *wiigwaasag* (birch trees) and collected other plant foods and berries, and tended gardens of *mandaamin* (maize), *anijiiminan* (beans), and

*nabagokwisimaan* (squash). Their summer villages were usually made up of small, round *wiigiwaaman* (wigwams) made of sapling frames and covered with cattail leaf mats and tree bark.

*Niibinisiwin* was not only a time of labor but also of social activities and weddings and ceremonies. At the end of the season called *dagwaagin* (fall), some of these summer camps served as a base for productive fish expeditions to the tempestuous *gichigamiin* where the men netted *adikamegwag* and *maazhamegosag* (whitefish and trout) that spawned in gigantic numbers. After the abundant catch the fish was cleaned, smoked, and frozen for the wintermoons. While the *ininiwag* (men) took care of fishing, these kinds of activities would put a heavy demand on the collective labor of the *ikwewag* (women).

Above illustration: "Sustenance" by Norval Morrisseau/Miskwaabik Animikii



**NIZHWAASWI GAGIIKWEWINAN: the Seven Sacred Teachings, or Natural Laws:**

*Gichi-aya'aag*, the Old Ones, told us many strings of life ago that GICHI-MANIDOO, the Great Mystery, placed the first man on a land near the borders of a great salt water sea, which soon would be known as WAABANAKIING, the Dawn Land. It was here that many winters later the offspring of first man, the great Anishinaabe Nation, would thrive before NIIZHWAASWI OMISHOOMISIMAG (Seven Grandfathers) came out of the Sea and gave them their Midewiwin belief, established five *odoodemag* (clans), and a set of seven laws to live by.



Seven Grandfathers" by Wikwemikong Ojibwe Medicine painter Leland Bell

These NIZHWAASWI GAGIIKWEWINAN (Seven Sacred Teachings, or Laws) would become guidelines that, to this day, honor basic virtues intrinsic to MINO-BIMAADIZIN, a full and healthy life. The Seven Grandfathers told the People to build around these seven laws the traditional concepts of respect and sharing that eventually would form the foundation of *Anishinaabe-bimaadiziwin*, their way of life.

These Teachings, or Grandfathers, were, in chronological order, as follows:

- Nibwaakaawin (Wisdom)
- Zaagi'idiwin (Love)
- Minaadendamowin (Respect)
- Aakode'ewin (Bravery)
- Gwayako-bimaadiziwin (Honesty)
- Dabaadendiziwin (Humility)
- Debwewin (Truth)



NIIZHWAASO-ISHKODEN (Seven Fires), sterling silver, turquoise & red coral set of necklace and ear jewelry designed and handcrafted by Zhaawano Giizhik.

This set, the necklace being an elegantly stylized variant on the classic Dine' (Navajo) squash blossom necklace, tells the story of a more than two thousand years old prophecy that led to the legendary odyssey of the Ojibwe Anishinaabeg. The migration path of the People, who at some point in history lived in the Dawn Land (along the northern shores of the Atlantic) and had been advised by Seven Grandfathers (prophets) - who appeared from the ocean to teach them of the Mide way of life - to leave their home country and expand westward, would be marked by Seven Fires. To this day, the - possibly 2000 to 2500 years lasting - migration of the Anishinaabeg is known as *niizhwaaso-ishkoden niigaanaajimowin*, the Prophecy of the Seven Fires.

The theme of this jewelry set also relates to *eko-nishwaaching*, the Eight Fire.

The eight fire, which is a term arising from the Mide teachings of the Seven Fires, is used here as a metaphor for the importance of a spiritual attitude to life, mutual respect for one another and a reciprocal exchange between all life forms, corporeal as well as incorporeal. Hence the title: "Everlasting Fire Of Life".

The Prophecy of the Seven Fires, an sacred as well as educative teaching that has been passed on for more than thousand years by many generations of Mideg (members of the Midewiwin society), not only refers to the westward migration of the Anishinaabe People, but - taken in a wider sense - also to certain phases or eras in the history of the original peoples of Turtle Island (North America).

This universal teaching, which contains seven essential spiritual lessons to the world, stresses *mino-bimaadiziwin*: the importance of living a good and honest way of life with an open eye for other people and nature around us and - placed in a bigger context - the vision that all people and races must come together on the basis of shared dignity and mutual respect.

The Seven Fires remind us that the only way humankind can survive and save the planet from social and ecological destruction is by renouncing materialism and choosing a path that is truly spiritual. "Only then, if the

people of all colors and faith choose the right path, a path of respect, wisdom, and spirituality, will the Seventh fire light the Last Fire, an eternal fire of peace, which will unfold an era of spiritual illumination..."

The traditional *Mideg* of the Ojibweg along with other Algonquin-speaking Nations speak of "two roads": a road to technology and the road to the spiritual. The thought behind this idea is that even though you are spiritual you still may not be walking on the right path; of course the question that could emerge - if the road of technology that should lead us to greater development actually leads to destruction -, is one that remains open for discussion.

The legendary migration of my distant ancestors and the age-old Midewiwin concept of the Seven Fires I depicted with the use of seven oval turquoise stones, each adorned with a crown of seven pear-shaped red corals (which substitute the blossoms of a traditional squash blossom necklace); the silver eagle feathers that I mounted on the double row of silver beads, represent spirituality, courage, and vision.

The Eight Fire is symbolized by the pendant that I fastened beneath the necklace - substituting the 'naja' of a traditional squash blossom necklace. The unity and survival strength of the Anishinaabeg as a People are represented by the turquoise stone in the center.

In the photo, the eight fires appear to form a heart-shaped path.

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"Heartbeat Of Mother Earth" by Roy Thomas (Ojibwe Medicine Art painter)

**NOOKOMIS:** a grandmother; mortal mother of *Wiininwaa* (*Winona*), and grandmother of the immortal *Wiinabozho* (*Nanabozho*), whom she raised on the edge of a distant lake; and a supernatural being in the sky, who, after having conceived the two first forebears of the *Anishinaabeg*, nurtured them to manhood and womanhood - after which she ascended to her own world. Now she continues to watch over her grandchildren at night in the shape of *Nookomis*, or Grandmother Moon.

The first two forebears whom Nookomis (who was formerly known as *Giizhigookwe*, or Sky Woman) conceived were twins, man and woman. She gave birth to them on the back of a Great Turtle. She called them *Anish-in-aab-eg*, or Spontaneous Beings, for they were apparently born out of no known substance.



Unlike two children she had conceived in the sky in an earlier time (one had been *jichaag*, made up of mere spirit - or soul - while the other being, called *Wiiyaw*, was only made up of physical substance), the new species, despite their differences, tended toward union with one another. Neither seemed to be complete or content without the other. They both had *jichaag* (spirit and soul, the life force and intelligence of a person, the core of the self residing in the heart), *djiiban* (an - under most circumstances - invisible sense that resides in the brain, providing perception and intuition, the truth that precedes logic), and *wiiyaw* (a body, or outward manifestation), and both had something that emanates from *jichaag* and *jiiban*: aura, called *jiibaaman*. Because of this, the traditional *Anishinaabe* concept of life became essentially fourfold: every human being is considered to have an outward manifestation, the capacity to reason, dream, and receive vision, a sixth sense, and a transparent substance by which the state and quality of his inner being is sensed and felt. Likewise, all other living things in the cosmos - which are also regarded as persons, but of an other than human category - possess a physical

substance, a life force, something you don't have top intuition, and a surrounding atmosphere.

**WAABAN:** The morning, and the east, called *wenji-mooka'ang* by the northeastern Ojibwe Anishinaabeg. Patron of youth and knowledge. Formerly under the guidance of the Evening Star, an elder incorporeal medicine man in the west who embodies wisdom, he began a fight with him that neither could win, but which resulted in the everlasting human conflict between youth and age, and knowledge and wisdom. Waaban is represented on earth by *asemaa*, the sacred tobacco.

**WIIGWAAS:** The (bark of the) white birch. The sacred birch bark forms *wiigwaasabakwayan* (the covering and roofing of houses), shapes canoes and containers, is used in dyes and medicines, and keeps the magic images the ancestors indented, or drew otherwise. *Wiigwaasatig*, or *Wiigwaasimitig*, the white birch tree, is told to have grown many string of life ago from the grave of a young hero who died defending his People, the Serpent River Band of Ojibweg in what is now Northern Ontario; it was also a birch tree that once served as a safe haven for *Wiinabozho*, a mischievous *aadizoogaan* (supernatural being), against the wrath of the Thunderbirds.



"Thunder Leaf": a sterling silver ring handcrafted by Woodland jeweler artist Zhaawano Giizhik. The ring is set with a Kingman turquoise and a pear-shaped red coral. The free-form turquoise stone is accompanied with a stylized birch leaf of sterling silver. The ring design celebrates the beauty and spirit powers of *Wiigwaasatig*, the beloved birch tree of the Anishinaabeg . For more reading about this topic, go to [ZhaawanArt art blog](#).

**WIINGASHK**, also called *mashkosii-wiingashk*, *wiishkobi-mashkosi*, or – in Canada - *bashkode-mashkosi*: sweetgrass. The *Anishinaabeg* approach life in a very sacred manner. To the *Mideg*, or the medicine people of the Way Of The Heartbeat Society, and all the others who follow *Anishinaabe-Bimaadiziwin*, the Traditional Road, there are certain plants that are especially revered



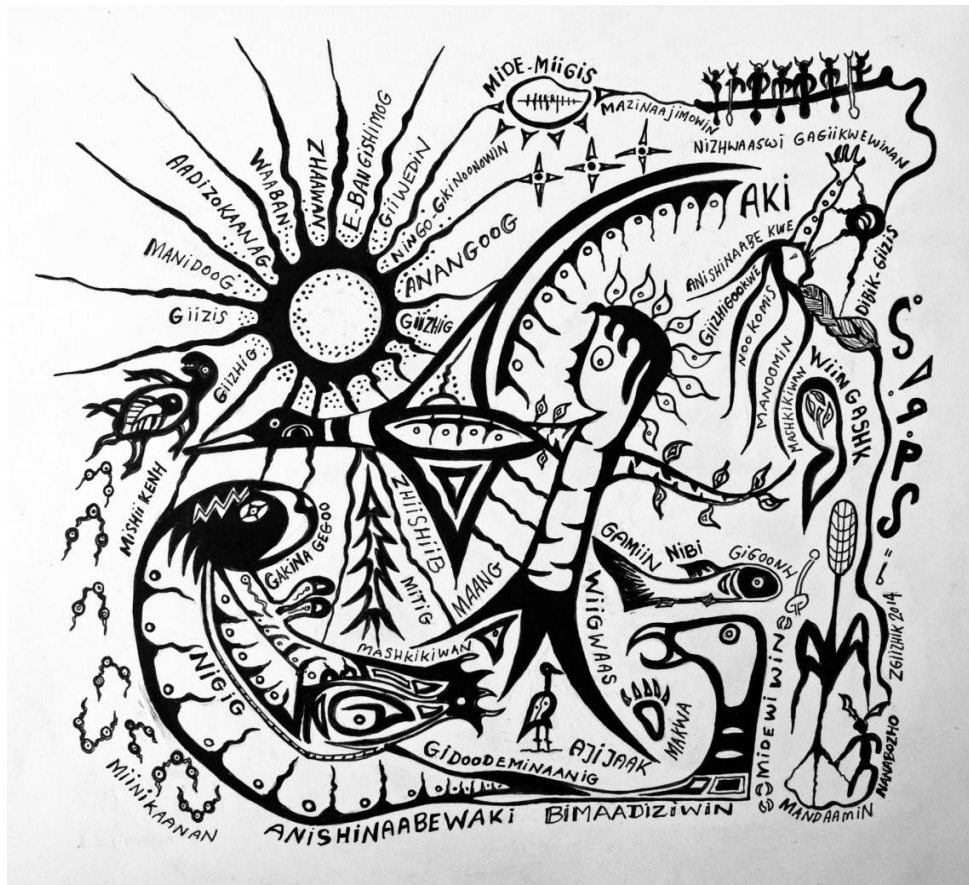
while used in daily living. When collecting the life giving plant beings and roots, traditional people always explain to the *odjiidjaagoma* (spirit) of the plant why it is being done and give offerings in return. Tobacco is offered to the four directions, to Father Sun, and then placed in the bosom of Mother Earth.

Since GICHI-MANIDOO caused everything in the universe to be fourfold, it also inspired four plant beings that it meant to become the most venerated of all plants. To each it gave a special spirit of fragrance and beauty; each it placed where it would be the most useful to mankind, and provide Mother Earth the greatest beauty and harmony. These spirit plants are: **asemaa** (tobacco, symbol of the East); **giizhig** (white cedar, symbol of the South); **mashkodewask** (sage, symbol of the West); and **wiingashk** (sweetgrass, symbol of Mother Earth; in some parts of Anishinaabe Aki, wiingashk denotes **sage**).

In the below drawing, the woman's right arm is depicted as a braid of sweetgrass.

Like cedar and sage, sweetgrass is often used as a purifier, giving out a sweet, aromatic scent, especially when burnt or when it rains. *Mashkikiwininiwag* (herbalists) keep sweetgrass in their bag with their medicinal roots and herbs, and young men used to braid sweetgrass with their hair for the fragrance. They sometimes wore two braids of sweetgrass around their necks, the braids joined in the back and falling on either side of the neck like braids of hair.

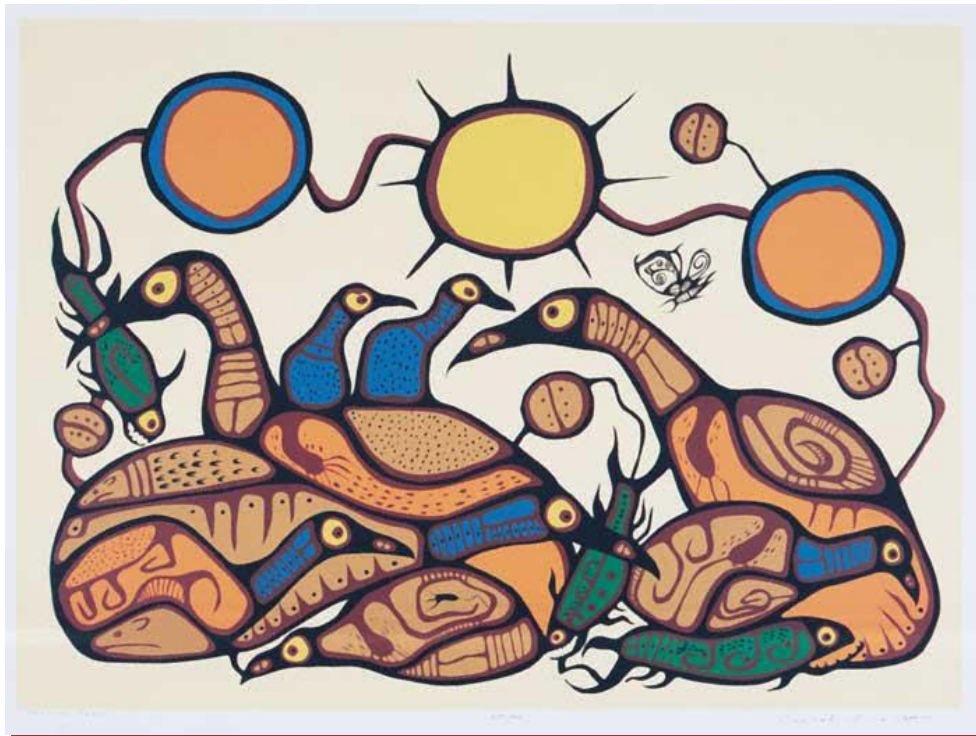
Many things are made with sweetgrass such as fiber bundles for coiled baskets, and when braided it signifies the hair of *Omizakamigokwe* (the Earthmother). Each of the three sections that go into the braid has a specific meaning, being: mind, body, and spirit.





"The Mother Earth" by Norval Morrisseau/Miskwaabik Aniimikii

**ZHAAWAN:** the south. Land of *Ziigwan* the spring, *Niibin* the summer, and *Zhaawandazii*, or *Zhaawani-noondin*, the friendly old spirit of the warm winds. Also home of the *animkii-binesiwag*, or thunderbirds, who come in springtime, together with the rain that causes grass and fruit to grow. Zhaawan is represented on earth by the purifying smoke of *giizhik*, the white cedar.



"Spiritual Feast" by Norval Morrisseau/Miskwaabik Aniimikii

**ZHIISHIIB:** the wild duck. The Gichigami Anishinaabeg (Great Lakes Ojibweg) regard *zhiishiibag* and other waterfowl - particularly the *manidoominikeshii* or snipe - as special messengers, a sure sign of ripe *manoomin* (wild rice). By a wise provision of nature the seed of *manoomin* is carried by ducks and wading birds that get hunted during *manoominike-giizis*, the rice-making moon (August/September). This is why the *Anishinaabeg* gave both wild rice and duck an honored place in their culture. See also: **MANOOMIN** (page 79).



"Duck" by Odaawaa Anishinaabe Medicine painter Iwan Shawana (1881)

