

amō ōsapotawan

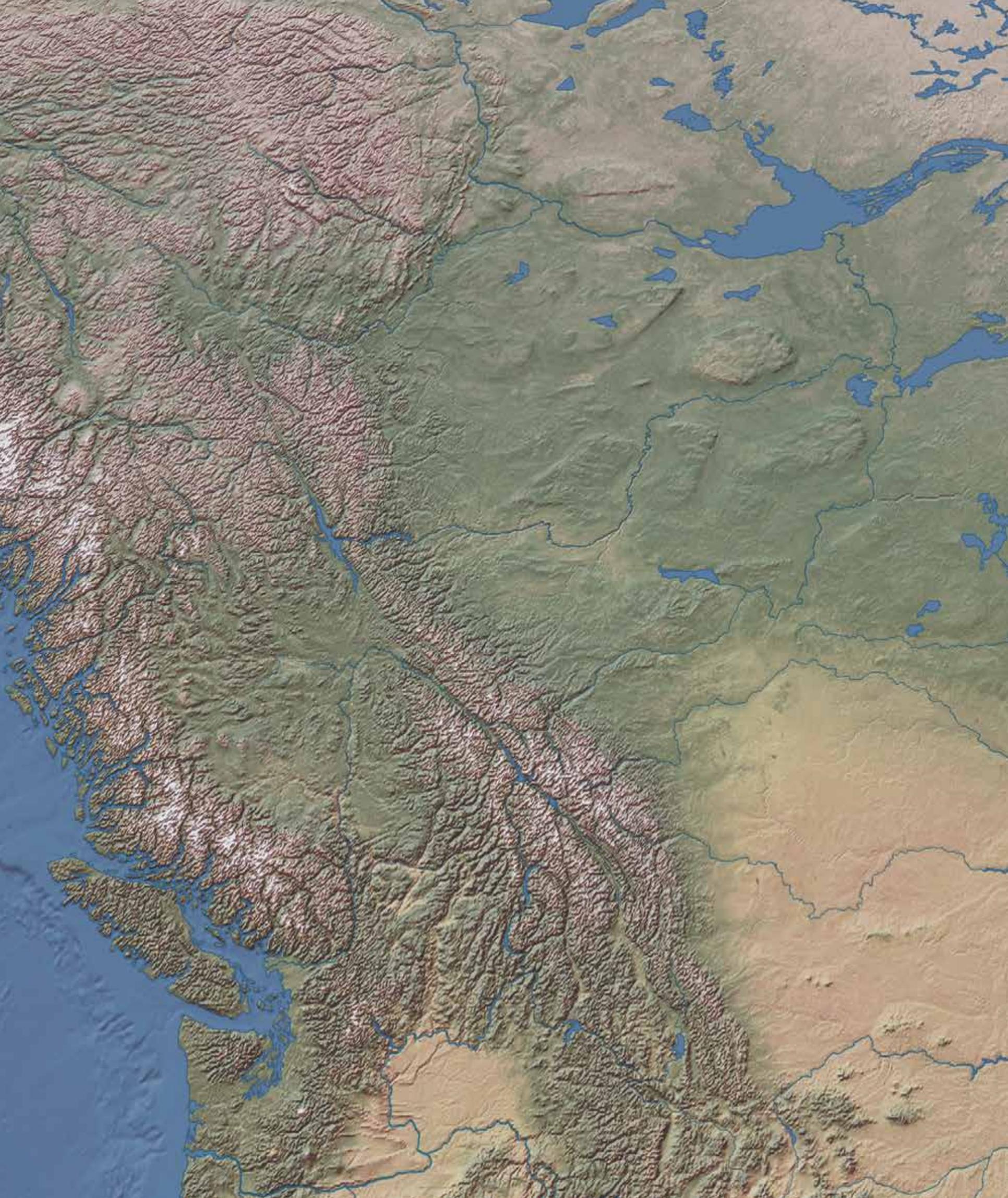
AMŌ'S Sapotawan

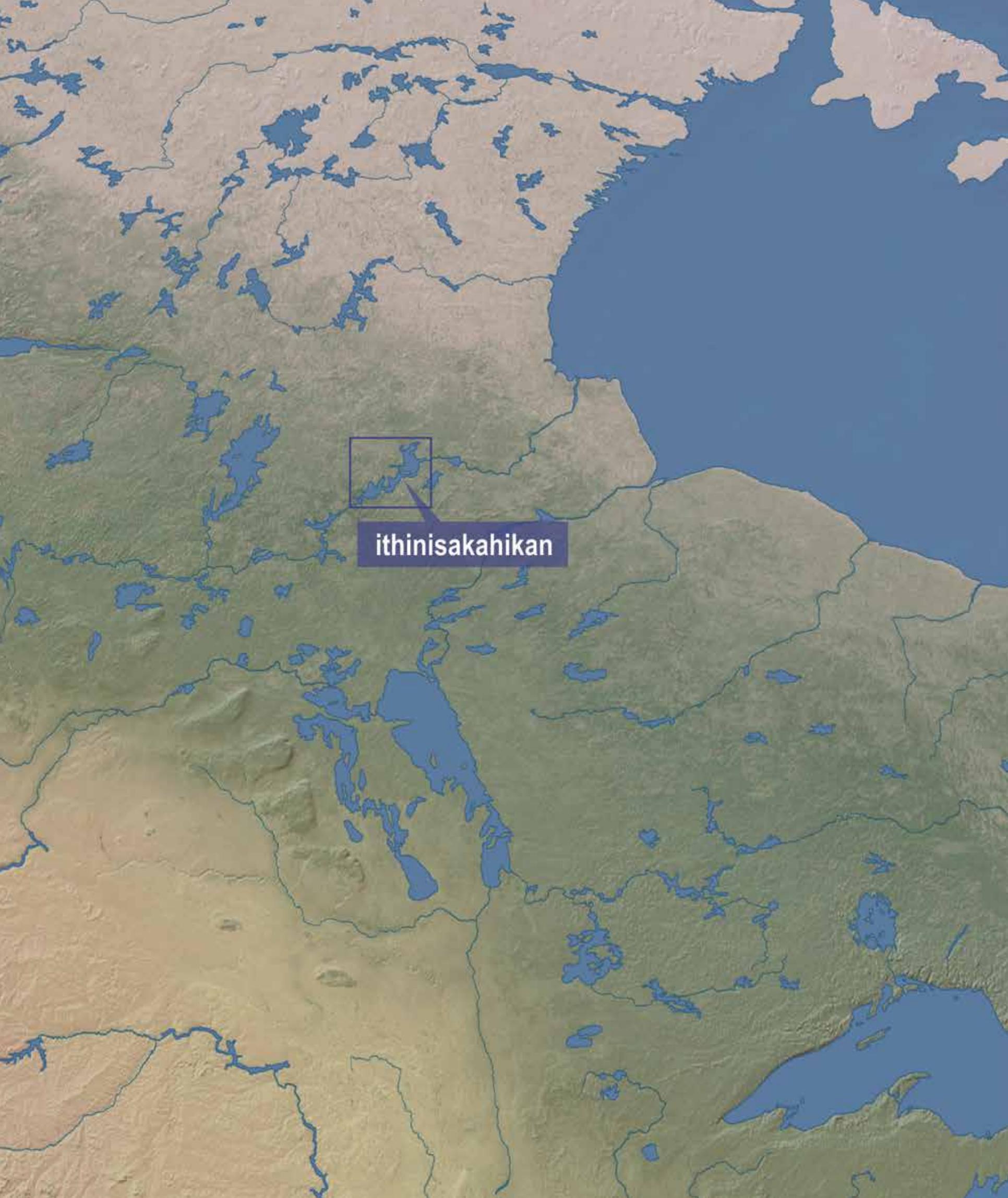
BOOK TWO



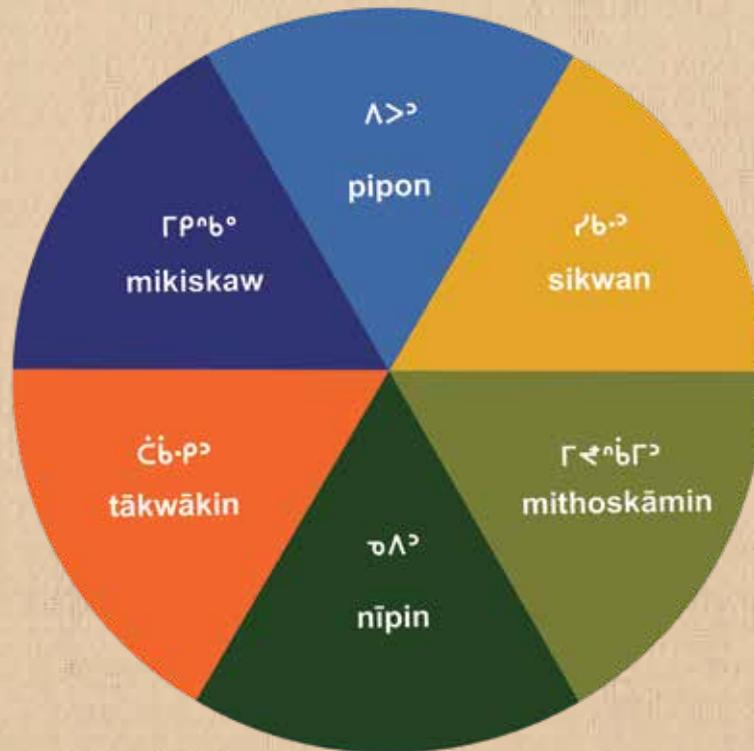
By William Dumas
Illustrated by Rhian Brynjolson







ithinisakahikan



The Six Seasons of the Asiniskaw Īthiniwak series tells the stories of the asiniskaw ĩthiniwak (Rocky Cree) and their life on the land of what is now north-central Manitoba. These stories are set during the mid-1600s before direct contact with Europeans in this area. They seek to teach young people about the old ways. *Amō's Sapotawan* is set in nīpin.

Nīpin, or summer, translates to “gifts from the water” (nipi = water; in = to give) because this is the season of the raspberry rains followed by the blueberry rains. The moons for this season are paskahawī pīsim (egg hatching moon) and paskowī pīsim (moulting moon). Paskowī pīsim happens in midsummer when all the birds lose their flying feathers. At this time, the birds are not hunted. They are raising their young. The asiniskaw ĩthiniwak fish, gather berries and medicine, and make pottery and baskets during this time.



amō ōsapotawan

AMŌ'S Sapotawan

BOOK TWO IN THE SIX SEASONS SERIES



By William Dumas

Illustrated by Rhian Brynjolson



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HIGHWATER
PRESS

Introduction

Sapotawana: Rites of Passage.

Generation after generation, the asiniskaw īthiniwak, the Rocky Cree, lived according to the cycle of the six seasons and thirteen moons. Each season posed unique challenges that tested the asiniskaw īthiniwak and required them to develop survival skills—physical, emotional, spiritual and mental.

One of the most important asiniskaw īthiniwak tools for survival is sapotawana: the rites of passage that acknowledge each person as they attain certain skill levels at particular stages of life. Sapotawana encourage people to discover their gifts, learn about their responsibilities, and find their life’s purpose.

At each sapotawan, you are going through a metamorphosis, like many of our relatives the animals do. Think of a caterpillar turning into a butterfly, or a bird moulting so that its new wing feathers can grow in.

The first sapotawan occurs when a person enters this world. These rites of passage continue as you unfold through the different transitions of your life:

awasis, child; oskatis, young adult; kīhti aya, adult; and kisi amiya, an elder, the time of life when your work is done.

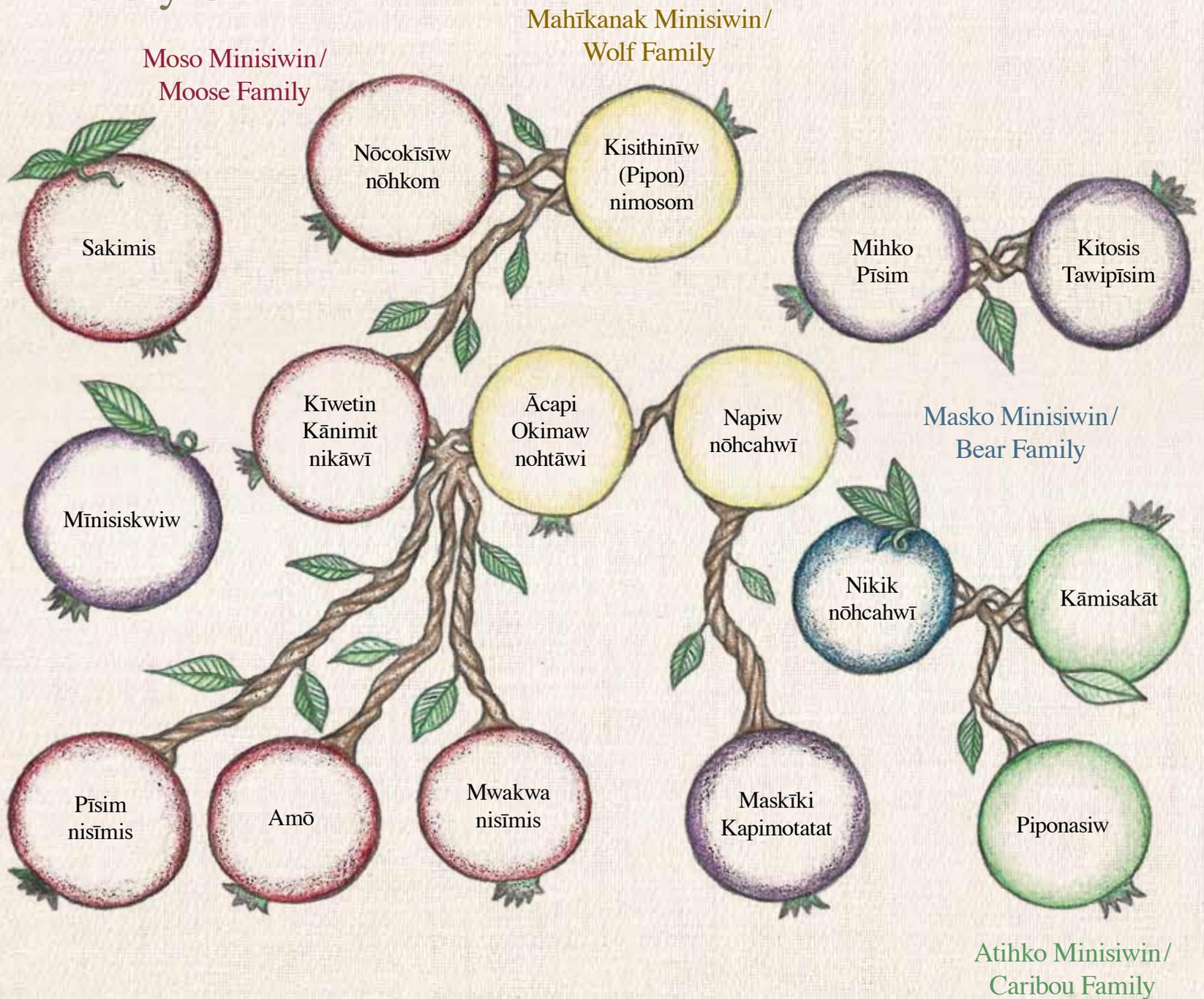
Sapotawana are there to guide each of us on our miskanaw, our path in life. Each sapotawan is acknowledged and celebrated by our minisiwin, our immediate family, as well as by our ototimīhītowin, our grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, and our wāhkotowin, our adopted relatives.

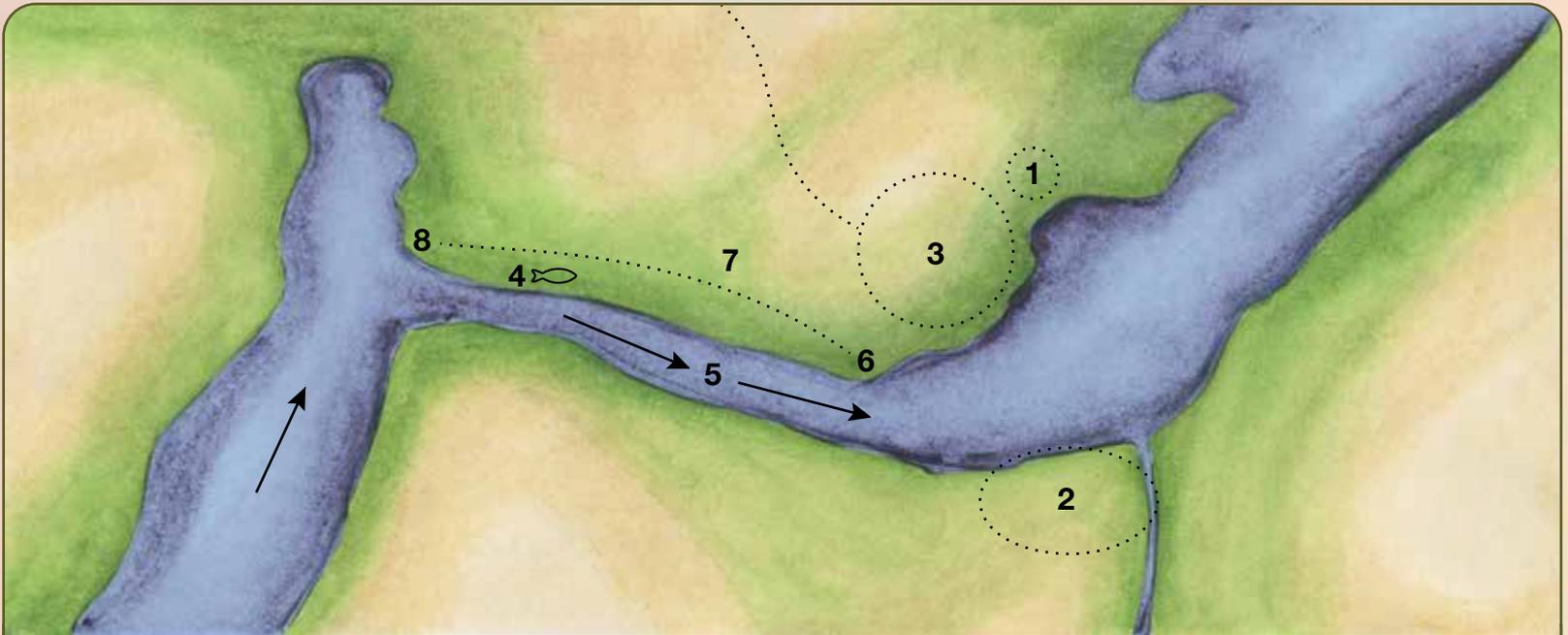
Although the understanding of these rites of passage has changed over time, the underlying concept is still the same: celebrating a person’s accomplishments as they go through life. Today we might think of advancing to the next grade level as a sapotawan, or graduating from school, getting married, or starting your first job.

Sapotawana recognize that you are always learning throughout different times of your life, and that you have new things to offer the world as you gain these skills.

In this book, you will learn about Amō’s sapotawan as she is recognized for her skill as a pottery maker. You’ll see how her minisiwin uses the community’s kakānohkimowina, their guiding principles, to help prepare her for this metamorphosis. There are also other sapotawana spread throughout this story. See which ones you can find, and imagine which sapotawana you might aim toward as you ponder your own miskanaw.

Story Characters





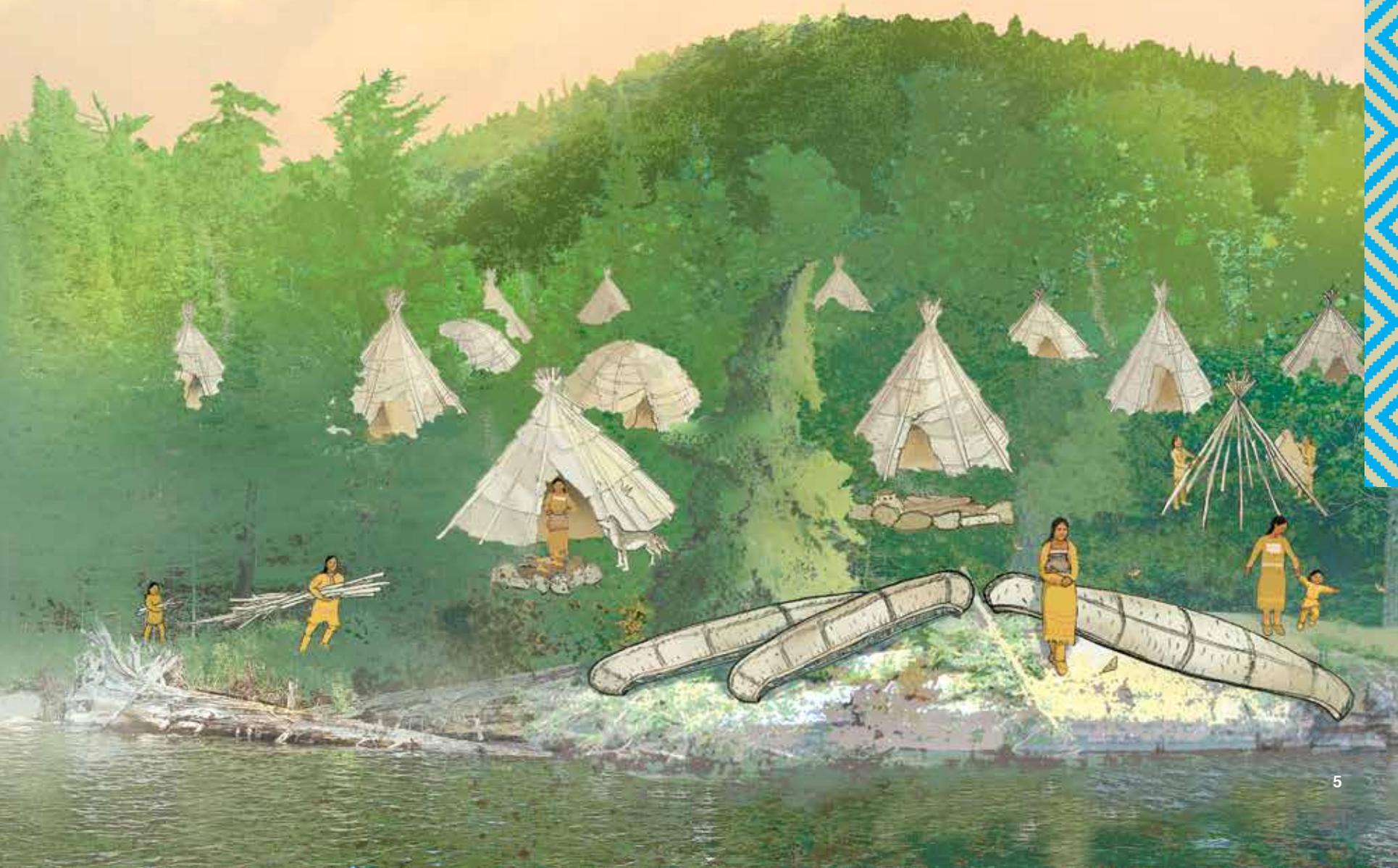
mikisiwaci (Eagle Hill)

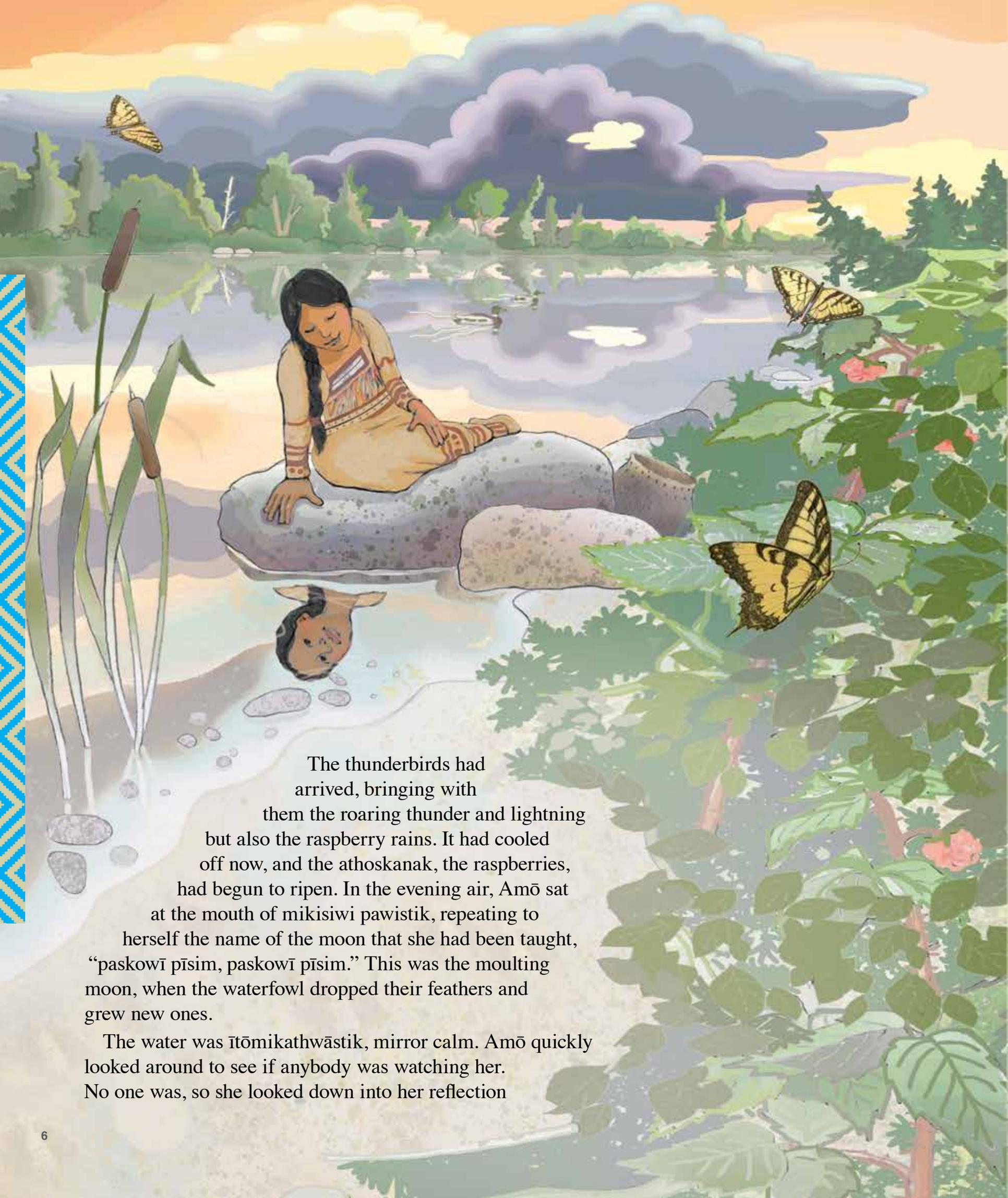
- | | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. wapatanask (clay pit) | 3. wikinanaski (campsite) | 6. kapawin (boat landing place) |
| 2. apiscithīnīwak (the place of the little people) | 4. picipothakan (fish weir) | 7. onikāhp (portage) |
| | 5. mikisiwi pawīstik (Eagle Rapids) | 8. posiwin (leaving place) |



Kayās, kapi mana niki papamacihonan tāhtwaw kakwiskayawahk patos iti niki ayanan iwithotak ita tapimacihisowak. Piyākwaw imikwa nīpihk mikisiwi pawistik niki misakanan ikiniti notamithikiyak akwa ikiniti mawisoyak. Kwayask kimithowitakwan mina kipapiyāhtakan.

Long time ago we moved from place to place with the seasonal changes. We would travel to different areas to harvest the food that was available at each season. One time, it was nīpin, midsummer, when we arrived by canoe at mikisiwi pawistik, Eagle Rapids, to harvest fish and to pick berries. It was so enjoyable and peaceful there – a time of plenty.





The thunderbirds had arrived, bringing with them the roaring thunder and lightning but also the raspberry rains. It had cooled off now, and the athoskanak, the raspberries, had begun to ripen. In the evening air, Amō sat at the mouth of mikisiwi pawistik, repeating to herself the name of the moon that she had been taught, “paskowī pīsim, paskowī pīsim.” This was the moulting moon, when the waterfowl dropped their feathers and grew new ones.

The water was ītōmikathwāstik, mirror calm. Amō quickly looked around to see if anybody was watching her. No one was, so she looked down into her reflection

THUNDERBIRDS

Thunderbirds represent powerful forces in asiniskaw ṭhiniwak culture, manifested in many aspects of the natural world, for example, in thunderstorms and lightning strikes. The appearance of the Thunderbirds marks the beginning of particular activities on the land. When the Thunderbirds are heard in the spring, it is the signal for people to pick medicine plants. They also take their medicine bundles out to have them blessed by the Thunderbirds. Later in the season, the Thunderbirds signal the beginning of the ripening periods and the start of the forest fire season.

OLD SONGS AND NEW SONGS

Songs are important for capturing and carrying family and group history. There are many songs that have been handed down through the generations. Songs also come to people from the spirit world or as they observe the land and each other. The land carries the rhythm of the language. The children of the asiniskaw ṭhiniwak learn this rhythm through song, beginning with the lullabies sung to them as infants. Songs are often accompanied by a mitihikan, a hand drum that represents the beating of the heart. Singers have the important role of moving people forward on their miskanaw, their life's path.

CREE VOCABULARY

ṭōmikathwāstik: mirror calm. ṭōmi means calm and wāstik means shining.

apiscithīnīwak: little people. As explained in the Six Seasons book *The Gift of the Little People*, there are two other kinds of little people. The apiscithīnīwak are exact replicas of us humans, except much smaller. The word comes from apisci (small) and īnīwak (human beings).

MWAKWA'S EVENING SONG

achahko pimotihōwin
miskanaw nipimotan
tapwisa mithawasin
achahko pimotihōwin
miskanaw nipimotan
māskīkīy inataman

māskīkīy inataman
kitwam nitotimak tamithwayacik
akwa
makoko nitotimak kakinikanoticik
ipinaci nakiskawicik
ipapimotiyak
ipapapiyak mina
iyacimoyak
kayās mana oci

tapwisa mithwasin
omahita katakosinan
ititho ipiyatakak
ikotahota māskīkīy
tapimatisimakak
kayās ikiyapatak
kiyam maka nakiwan
nakiwitatan oma
māskīkīy nitotimak
ipipapimotiya achahko
pimotihōwin
miskanaw inikamoyan

WI OH HI HI OH HI OH HI
OH HI OH HI OH HI OH HI OH HI
OH HI OH HI
WI OH HI OH HI OH HI OH HI OH
HI OH WI HI OH
HI OH HI OH HI HO HI

achahko pimotihōwin
miskanaw nipimotan
tapwisa mithawasin

[English Translation]

Spirit travelling,
I'm on my journey.
It is so beautiful.
Spirit travelling,
I'm on my journey.

I go to gather medicine.
I go to gather medicine
so that my family
will be well again.

Here come my relatives
those who went ahead of us
coming to meet me halfway.

We walk together,
we laugh together
and we tell stories
that happened long ago.

It is so beautiful
where we've arrived.
It is so peaceful here
where the medicine lives
that was used long ago.

It's all right now, I'll go home.
I will take this medicine
for my relatives.
I walk the spirit-traveling path
as I sing.

WI OH HI HI OH HI OH HI
OH HI OH HI OH HI
OH HI OH HI OH HI OH HI
WI OH HI OH HI OH
HI OH HI OH HI OH
WI HI OH
HI OH HI OH HI HO HI

in the water and grinned. “Wow, I don't look like a little girl anymore!” she said to herself, remembering that she would soon be in her fourteenth winter.

Further along the shore she could hear her brother Mwakwa starting to beat his drum and sing the evening song. She always loved the songs that Mwakwa sang. He had such a beautiful energetic voice. Some of the songs the minisiwin sang had been passed on from generation to generation, and new ones were being made all the time. As she listened, Amō looked across the river at the rock face that jutted out of the water. The old people had often told stories about the apiscithīnīwak, the little people, who lived on the other side of the rock. It would be so nice if she could just walk over there to visit them.

“Amō! Amō! Pikiwi akwa! Pikiwi akwa! Amō, come home now!” It was her mom, Kīwitin Kānimit, Northwind Dancing, pulling Amō out of her daydream. She remembered she had been sent to get the water for the evening māskīkīwapwiy, the evening medicine tea. She stood up and picked up her two askihkwak, clay pots, and started walking up the hill. On her way to the top, where their summer mikiwāhp had been set up for a good vantage point, she met Maskīki Kapimotatat, Medicine Carrier, coming up from the river holding an armful of wihkaskwa, mint, for their tea. Maskīki Kapimotatat had the gift of finding aski māskīkīya, herbal plants for medicine, tea, and food. She was always wandering away by herself, searching for and picking the various aski māskīkīya that were available for cures and māskīkīwapwiy.





SUMMER MIKIWĀHP

Summer dwellings, mikiwāhp, are temporary shelters, set up when and where needed, for example, during travel. People build a framework of poles, large saplings, or branches and cover this with pieces of bark in summer, animal hides in winter, or whatever else is available. Winter dwellings are similar, but sturdier and more long-lasting.

ASKIHKWAK

Askihwak, pottery vessels, were made in northern Manitoba by pre-contact Indigenous people, who combined clay and water with fine rocks or sand (temper) to produce vessels that were fired and became useful artistic items. The first pots were made during the Middle Woodland period (about 2500–1000 years ago) and were cone-shaped, with a smoothed exterior and many complex decorations. During the Late Woodland period (about 1000–150 years ago), when Amō lived, people made pottery with rounded bases in fabric bags, with minimal decoration. This globular shape made the pot stable on flat surfaces and within the hot coals of a kotawān, a fire. People also used these vessels to store food and carry things.

MASKĪHKIYA

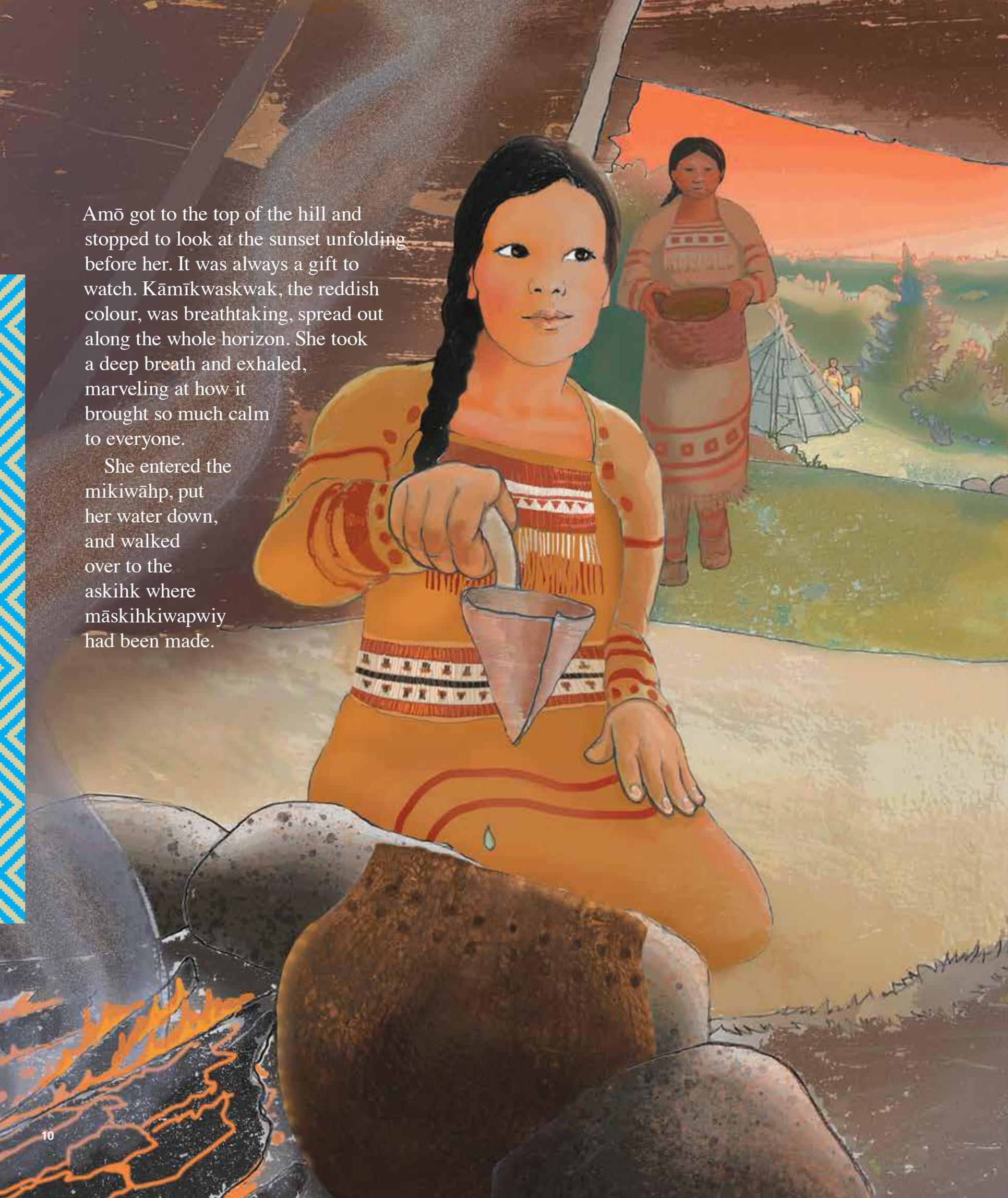
Knowledge of the gift of medicines, maskīhkiya, is passed on within families. Children are observed in the first few years of life, and those who are drawn to medicines become those chosen to carry that gift. Medicine people start their training in maskīhkiya early in life, with their gifts nurtured by close family members and other medicine carriers. Along with wihkaskwa (wild mint), the medicines that are harvested at this time in asiniskaw īthiniwak territory include ithinimina (blueberries), wīkis (rat root), waskatamo (water lily root), and aski askatask (cow parsnip).

CREE VOCABULARY

māskīkīwapwiya: medicine tea.

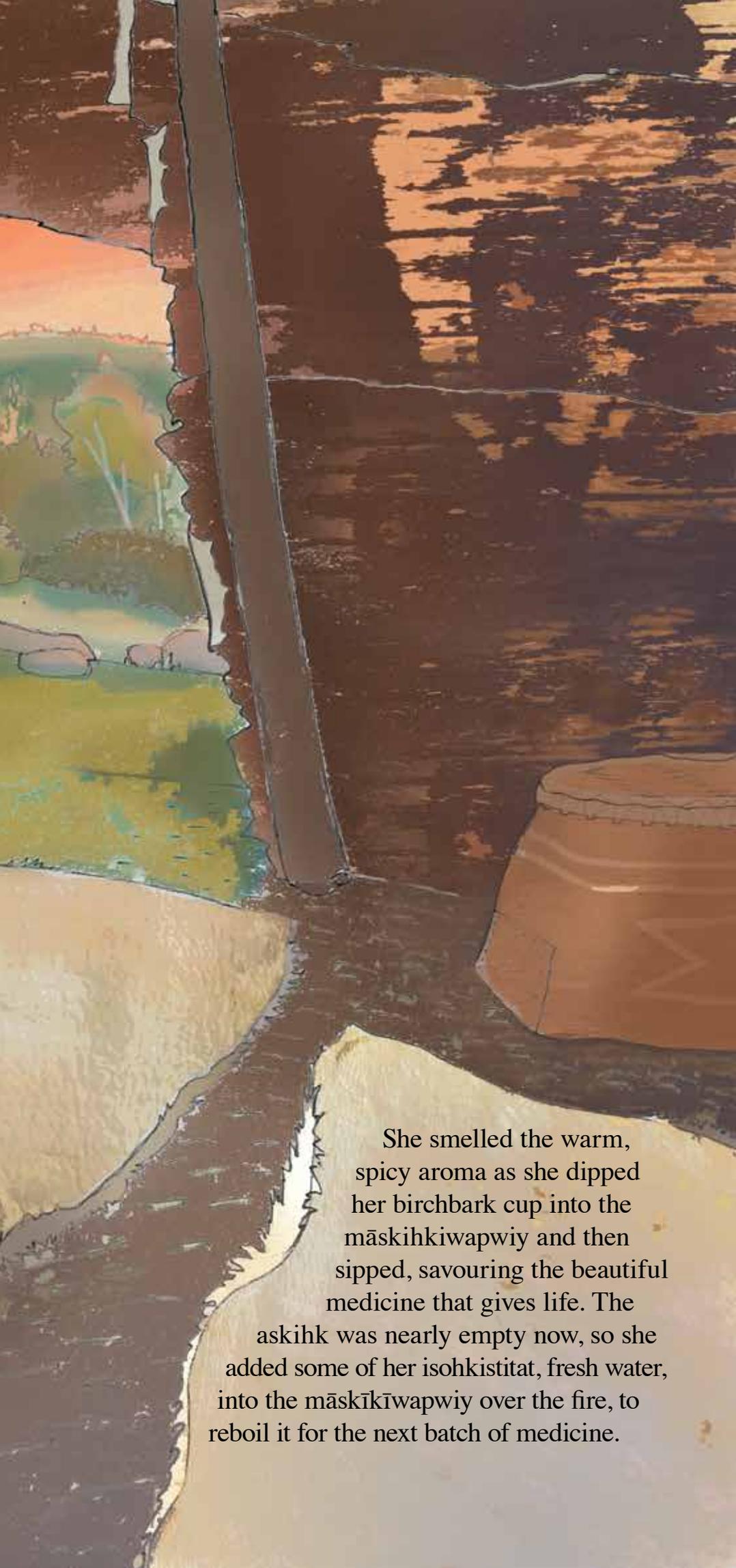
aski māskīkīya: land medicine. Every plant used as medicine is taken from the land. When you eat an animal, you are eating the medicines the animal ate.

wihkaskwa: mint tea.



Amō got to the top of the hill and stopped to look at the sunset unfolding before her. It was always a gift to watch. Kāmīkwaskwak, the reddish colour, was breathtaking, spread out along the whole horizon. She took a deep breath and exhaled, marveling at how it brought so much calm to everyone.

She entered the mikiwāhp, put her water down, and walked over to the askihk where māskihkiwapwiy had been made.



She smelled the warm, spicy aroma as she dipped her birchbark cup into the māskihkiwapwiw and then sipped, savouring the beautiful medicine that gives life. The askihk was nearly empty now, so she added some of her isohkistitat, fresh water, into the māskīkīwapwiw over the fire, to reboil it for the next batch of medicine.

BIRCHBARK CUPS

Birchbark cups are made by waterproofing a small birchbark container using a special tar. This tar is made by distilling the natural gum found in birchbark. The bark is packed into a fireproof container with a hole in the bottom, resting atop another fireproof container. The two containers are placed in the ground with hot coals. As the bark heats up, it excretes a resin that collects in the lower container and creates the tar that is used to coat utensils such as cups to make them waterproof.

LONG SUMMER DAYS AND SUNSETS

At the latitude of South Indian Lake (56.7807° N), the day at summer solstice is 17 hours and 50 minutes long. The sun rises at 4:42 a.m. and goes down at 10:32 p.m. Amō's story takes place during the Moulting Moon, two moons after the summer solstice, when days are becoming shorter. But, even at this time of the summer, the day has close to 15 hours of sunlight between 6 a.m. and 9 p.m.

CREE VOCABULARY

kāmīkwaskwak: the reddish-coloured sky at sunset. Mīkwa means red and waskō is the cloud. When the sky is reddish in the evening, it means there is good calm weather coming the next day.

Her mother sat down beside her. “Amō, from the time you were a little girl, you’ve always enjoyed making things with your hands. Kōhcawī Nikik, your uncle, has offered to show you how to make nipisiwata, willow baskets—he makes such beautiful baskets. Kōhkom Nōcokīšiw, your grandmother, has offered to show you how to make kwakwāywata, birchbark baskets, and containers and plates. Since you were a little girl you have also enjoyed making things with clay. You’ve already learned how to make little askihkwak. Your auntie, kitosis Tawipīsim, Sun Breaking Through the Clouds, has offered to begin your apprenticeship with her to make askihkwak and weave the bags for the askihkwak. Soon you will be entering your sapotawan to choose which skill you want to master.”

Amō crawled into her bed, and as she was falling asleep, she imagined herself someday mastering her mīthikowisiwin, her gift. But what would her mīthikowisiwin be? How would she know what was right for her?





APPRENTICESHIP

Children are born with innate gifts necessary for survival and for contributing to the community, but children and their parents are also responsible for developing these gifts. Children are expected to learn by listening to stories and observing their environment and the actions of those around them. Babies are often put in swings and cradleboards so they can observe those around them. When old enough, children choose one of their gifts, a *mīthikowisiwin*, to master by becoming an apprentice to someone in the community. At first, children are not given verbal instructions but are expected to observe until they are able to properly visualize what is being done. Then, when they are ready, a teacher invites them to try to imitate what the teacher does. As they practice, the child experiments with different ways of doing things. This is a hands-on, practical approach to learning, focused on understanding and interacting with the surrounding environment, until mastery is achieved.

BIRCH BASKETS

Kwakwāywata, birch baskets, are used to carry food, hold water, and store items. The first step to making a basket is to carefully remove a long, thin piece of bark encircling a birch tree with a sharp knife, usually in late spring, so that the tree has time to recover in the summer. The outer bark is then removed from these thin pieces and flattened. Bark can be cut in various shapes, depending on the type of basket that is required. A sharp awl tool (made of wood, stone, or bone) is used to make holes in the birchbark after it has been bent into shape. Lastly, spruce roots or other fibres are used as thread to sew the basket together. These fibres are cleaned and soaked to make them more pliable, so that pieces of birchbark will hold together in different shapes of baskets.

FIBRE BAGS

Globular-shaped vessels, made during Amō's time, were manufactured inside woven bags made of twisted plant fibres, bags that could also be used for carrying items. We know that this was the method used because the negative impression of the bag is preserved on the exteriors of many pottery sherds or pieces. Unique to Amō's region, some pots also have fabric impressions on the *interior*. It took countless hours to collect, process, and then twist willow or cedar fibres together into a fine textile bag. These articles undoubtedly were cherished items after they were crafted. Since they were made from organic materials, they are not preserved in archaeological sites in the boreal forest.

CREE VOCABULARY

mīthikowisiwina: the gifts you are given. Mīthi means to give, and kowisiwin means a constant movement toward mastery. Mīthikowisiwina refers especially to your talents and potential. Children are born with four gifts, and it is up to parents and teachers to help the children develop those gifts so that they can aim toward mastering them. There is never a full mastery since you always keep learning, but, if you dedicate yourself, you will eventually have enough mastery to become a teacher for the next generation.



CLAY PIT

For thousands of years, people around the world have used clay to make pots and other items. Potters search for clay with the right characteristics. Such deposits can be rare, and good locations are revisited. In Amō's time, suitable clay was dug up, cleaned of plant roots and rocks, pounded, and mixed with water to test its quality. Potters then mixed the clay with pulverized rock, sand, or other temper to improve its ability to maintain a shape. This step also helped release steam from the clay to reduce breakage during firing. The knowledge needed to achieve the right vessel form requires experience built over a lifetime.



MAKING FISH SPEARS

Fish spearheads were carved from animal bone or antler and then combined with wood for a shaft and hafting material to hold them all together. These were then decorated with feathers, paint, or other embellishments. Fish spears used to capture smaller fish on small rivers and in pihcipothākana, fish weirs, were hand-held tools thrust quickly to catch fish and then lift them up into a canoe or onto the riverbank. A specific kind of spear for catching larger fish is a harpoon. Harpoons had barbed spearheads comprised of two long, jagged edges that would catch the slippery fish in the water. The harpoon head was linked on a long line to the shaft, so that, if it detached from the shaft, it would not be lost.

Early the next morning Amō woke up to the sound of the wasipistān, the morning lark, singing, “Pitapan. Light is coming.” It was soon followed by the robin’s song, “Kinanāskomitin, opimācihiwiw kāpimacihiyin. I thank you Creator for giving me life.” She crawled out of her warm robes and walked down to the river to wash and groom her hair. When she came back into the mikiwāhp, her mother had already set māskihkiwapwiy for her to drink and food to begin her day. Kīwitin Kānimit and Tawipīsīm were sitting by the kotawān, the fire, drinking their share of māskihkiwapwiy, telling each other stories, with teasing and laughter between the stories.

When breakfast was done, Amō and Tawipīsīm walked down to the clay pit and started taking what they would need for the day’s work.

The men were out at mikisiwi pawistik, harvesting the pickerel at the fish weir that had been made such a long time ago. Amō’s aunt Kāmisakāt, Kīwitin Kānimit, Nōcokīsīw and a couple of iskwīsīsak, young girls, were helping to dress the fish and make the kinosiwi pimī, the fish oil, which was stored in jackfish containers.

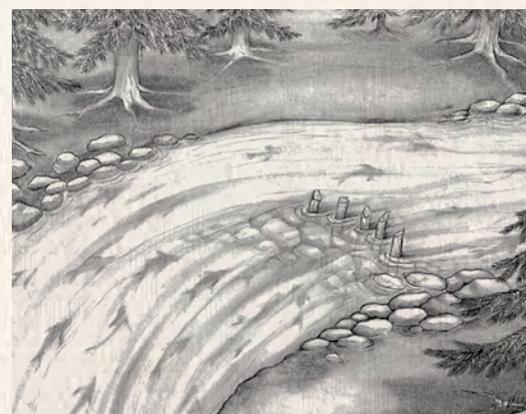
Mīnisiskwiw, Maskīki Kapimotatat, Pīsīm, and the smaller iskwīsīsak were out on the hills picking athoskanak, raspberries. Nōhcawī Nikik was in his usual spot overlooking two sides of the lake, watching for visitors who might come to the camp. Today he was also making arrowheads and fish spears.

FISH OIL AND CONTAINERS

Fish oil is made by boiling fish guts. The fat from the guts melts and forms an oil on top of the water, which is then skimmed off and stored. Pimiwāta, fish oil containers, can be made from fish intestines or opahkwaci, the swim bladder. Jackfish can be made into containers by removing the head, hollowing out the fish’s insides, filling the cavity with oil, and hanging the fish container to dry. Filling the container with oil immediately after it is made prevents it from shriveling as it dries.

FISH WEIR

Pihcipothākana, fish weirs, are structures used to trap fish in shallow, narrow, and calm waters. They are constructed in different ways depending on specific river conditions. Taking advantage of natural rock formations or bays, pihcipothākana can span the width of a river. Large sticks or logs and rocks are set into the river bottom at an angle to create a fence that allows for the flow of water but not the passage of fish. Building pihcipothākana is a lot of work, but they allow fishers to stand in the water, grab the trapped fish, and throw them to shore.



Cree Glossary

akwayan (ah kwah yan) – tent for smoking food

aniskotapiwin (ah nee sko tah pee win) – strengthening connections with ancestors and their teachings

anoc ka nipihk (ah noch kah nee peek) – this summer

apiscithīnīwak (ah pis chi thee nee wuk) – little people

apwanāsk (up whan NAASK) – handmade tool made of willow or birch used for roasting fish over a fire

asiniskaw īthiniwak (uh si nee scow EE thi ni wuk) – Rocky Cree People

aski sakatask (us kee sah kah tusk) – cow parsnip

aski māskīkiya (us kee MAA SKEE KEE yah) – medicinal herbs

askihk (us kehk) – clay pot

askihko (us kee koh) – tools for making pottery

askihkwak (us kee wuk) – clay pots

atāmiskatowin (ah TAA mi skah toh win) – gift-giving ceremony for acknowledging a person

atīhkamik (ah TEE kah mihk) – whitefish run

atīhkamikwak (ah TEE kah mihk wuk) – whitefish

athoskanak (ah thoh skah nuk) – raspberries

awasis (ah wah sis) – child

iskwīsisak (is KWEE seh suk) – young girls

isohkistitat (eh soh kehs teh tut) – fresh water

ithinimina (eh thi neh meh nah) – blueberries

Ithinisakahikan (eh thin nee sah kah hey kun) – Southern Indian Lake

itī kāpasitīk (eh TEE KAA pah seh TEEK) – “A forest fire is there.”

itōmikathwāstik (EE TOH meh ka THWAAS tehk) – mirror calm

īwīthinohīt (EE WEE thin oh HEET) – skinned black bear; sacred ceremony for preparing bear carcass

kakānohkimowina (kah KAA noh keh moh weh nah) – a community’s guiding principles

kakītiwi (kah KEE teh weh) – black or dark

kāmīkwaskwak (KAA MEE kwahs kwahk) – red-coloured sunset sky

kapasitīhk (kah pah seh tehk) – forest fire

kasaskahānawak (kah sah ska HAA nah wuk) – the process of firing pottery

kīkawinaw (KEE kah weh now) – our mother (root word: nika, the first teacher)

kīhty amaya (KEE tee yah mah yah) – an elder

kinosiwi pimī (keh noh seh weh peh MEE) – fish oil

kinosi sākahīkan (keh noh seh SAH kah HEE kun) – Fish Lake (Uhlman Lake)

kisi aya (keh seh ah yah) – adult

kisithiniw Pipon (keh seh thi new pee pon) – the old man

kotawān (koh ta waan) – campfire; kotawāna – many campfires

kwakwāywata (kwa QUIY wah tu) – birchbark baskets

kwiskītikī (kwee SKEE TEE KEE) – if the wind turns

mahīkanak minisiwin (mah HEE kah nuk) – wolf family group

mamawīwin (mah mah WEE win) – gathering

māskihkiwapwiw (MAA skeh keh wah pwey) – medicine tea

maskīhkiya (mah SKEE keh yah) – knowledge of medicine

māskīkiy (MAA SKEE KEEY) – medicine

masko minisiwin (mus ko meh neh seh win) – bear family group

maskwa (mus quah) – bear

mikisiwi pawistikōhk (meh keh seh weh pa weh steh KOHK) – Eagle Rapids

mikisiwi pawistik (meh keh seh weh pa weh stick) – Eagle Rapids

mikisiwi waci (meh keh seh weh) – Eagle Hill

mikiwāhp (meh keh WAAP) – dome-shaped dwellings made of trees growing in season or animal skins, often referred to as wigwams in English

minisiwin (meh neh seh win) – family group or clan

Misinipi (mih sih nih pi) – Big Water, specifically the Churchill River

miskanaw (meh skaa now) – one’s individual life journey

Story Contributors

NISICHAWAYASIIK CREE NATION KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS

Carol Prince
Alma Spence
Christina Spence
Mona Hart
Natalie Spence
Henry Wood
Harry Spence
Larry Tait
Andrew Wood
Clifford Hart
Leroy Francois

O-PIPON-NA-PIWIN CREE NATION KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS

Bernard Dumas
Wilbur Wood
Thomas Spence

ASINISKAW İTHINIWAK MAMAWIWIN

Jennie Tait
Virginia Moose
Georgina Moodie
Larry Tait
Margaret Dumas
William Dumas

RESEARCHERS

Margaret Dumas
Warren Cariou
Mavis Reimer
Scott Hamilton
Roland Bohr
Doris Wolf
Linda DeRiviere
Jill Taylor-Hollings
Melanie Braith

RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

Alex Oldroyd
Melanie Belmore
Krystalyn Harms
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A Rocky Cree girl must choose the skill that will define her miskanaw, the path of her life, in the second book of *The Six Seasons of the Asiniskaw Īthiniwak* series.

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Amō has always loved making things. Her uncle can show her how to make nipisiwata, willow baskets. Her grandmother can teach her how to make kwakwāywata, birchbark containers and plates. Her auntie has offered to begin Amō's apprenticeship in making askihkwak, pottery.

What will Amō's mīthikowisiwin be? Which skill should she choose? And how will she know what is right for her?



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