

Native Lands

T u r t l e I s l a n d

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Raven, Coyote, Sky Woman

Hero Twins across red mesas

Thunderbirds over lakes and plains

Land shapes for story-finding

20 FIGURES TO FIND IN THE LAND

TURTLE ISLAND

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Turtle Island holds many beginnings.

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous North American Mythology Field Guide

This issue is a field guide to the story traditions of Native nations on Turtle Island, not a single religion or one shared canon. Across the continent, many nations tell creation stories, journeys, star stories and accounts of powerful beings such as Raven, Coyote, Thunderbird, Sky Woman and Changing Woman. Some stories are told in closely related forms across regions; others are specific to one people, language and homeland. Here we introduce widely published versions and note, where needed, that other tellings differ.

It also invites a simple visual practice: looking out at headlands, buttes, river bends, snowfields and constellations and asking what figures of the stories they bring to mind. That is an artistic exercise in resemblance, not a claim about geology or history. A mountain may suggest a reclining body; a tower of rock may recall a lodge pole, a claw or a lifted wing. These cues are ways to pay attention, compare versions and remember names carefully.

Raven, Coyote, Sky Woman

CONTEXT

Where these stories come from

The stories in this guide come from many living Native nations across Turtle Island, with different languages, ceremonial lives and local responsibilities. There is no single body of “Native North American mythology,” so this issue uses a broad English scope label and only presents stories that have been widely published for general readers. Some were recorded by Native authors and knowledge keepers; others were written down by anthropologists, missionaries or editors, often in English and sometimes long after first contact, relocation or conversion had already changed the conditions of telling. That matters. A printed version may be one local telling, a retelling for outsiders or a synthesis made from several narrators. In living communities, some stories are seasonal, some belong to particular places, and some details are not for public circulation. For that reason, this guide stays with public, commonly cited versions: Sky Woman and Turtle Island in Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe contexts; Changing Woman and Monster Slayer in Diné tradition; Raven and Coyote in many regional tellings; Sedna in Inuit tellings; and well-known place stories connected with landmarks such as Mato Tipila and Tsé Bit’a’í.

PRINCIPAL SOURCES

Principal sources used here are Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz, *American Indian Myths and Legends*; Patricia Ann Lynch, *Native American Mythology: A to Z*; Frank Waters, *The Book of the Hopi*; Vine Deloria Jr., *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion*; Paul G. Zolbrod, *Diné Bahane’: The Navajo Creation Story*; Basil Johnston, *The Manitou: The Supernatural World of the Ojibway*; and Bernard Saladin d’Anglure, *Inuit Stories of Being and Rebirth: Gender, Shamanism, and the Third Sex*.



Stories belong to many homelands.

HOW TO READ THIS ISSUE

Treat each story as belonging first to the people who tell it. Similar themes across the continent do not make one single mythology. In this guide, “look for in the land” means artistic resemblance only: a skyline, butte or star cluster that helps you remember a story. It does not mean the land was intentionally shaped to match the tale.



Raven steals the hidden light.

Raven

trickster, transformer, culture hero, bringer of light, hungry wanderer, clever thief, world-arranger

In widely published Northwest Coast stories, Raven is restless, clever and often selfish, yet his actions change the world for everyone. In many tellings he steals or releases the sun, moon or stars, brings fire, fresh water or salmon, and reshapes the land through accident or design. Tlingit, Haida and other versions differ in sequence, motive and detail.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A black headland at dawn, with a bright gap in cloud behind it, suggests Raven freeing light.

Coyote

trickster, wanderer, glutton, maker through mistakes, law-breaker, comic teacher, dangerous helper

Coyote appears in many western and Plains story cycles as greedy, boastful, funny and often disastrous. He may steal, seduce, cheat or ignore good advice, then suffer the result; in other stories he helps bring fire, death, game or useful knowledge into human life. There is no single Coyote story: versions vary greatly by people and place.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A dry wash winding between low hills can look like Coyote slipping off after another bad idea.



Coyote keeps moving and plotting.

THE TWO BEST FIRST TARGETS

Start with Sleeping Ute Mountain and Mato Tipila. Sleeping Ute Mountain is an easy first target because the reclining form is visible at a glance and shows how place and story can be associated without forcing detail. Mato Tipila is equally strong because its vertical columns and striking isolation make it memorable, while also teaching an important lesson: different nations tell different public stories about the same landmark.



I · ORIGINS

I Creation and Cosmos

Creation stories on Turtle Island are many, local, and still meaningful to the peoples who tell them. Even widely shared themes vary by nation and storyteller. This section keeps to well-published public versions and notes where they differ, while treating landscape cues as imaginative ways to notice shapes in land and sky, not as history.

Above: The world begins in falling and help.



Sky Woman descends toward the waters.

Sky Woman

woman from the upper world, falling ancestor, life-bringer, seed carrier, first mother figure

In widely published Haudenosaunee tellings, Sky Woman falls from the upper world toward a water-covered earth. Birds or other beings help catch her, and water animals try to bring up mud. Earth is placed on a turtle's back so land can grow. Versions differ on which animals help, why she falls, and what she carries with her.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A broad lake with a low island can suggest a back rising from water beneath a descending figure.

Turtle Island

earth on a turtle's back, world-bearing animal, northeastern creation image, homeland image, living world

Turtle Island is a widely known name in several northeastern Indigenous traditions for the earth borne on a turtle's back. In published tellings, the world begins small and grows from mud placed on the turtle. Details differ by nation and storyteller, and

many Indigenous peoples do not use this image for the earth.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A rounded hill in a marsh, with a smaller rise for a head, can read as a turtle surfacing.

Changing Woman

Asdząá Nádlééhé

Diné life-giving holy person, seasonal renewal, growth, kinship, beauty, maturity, fertility, order

In Diné stories, Changing Woman is a central life-giving figure linked with the turning seasons, growth, and proper relations. Published versions differ on her origins: some say she was formed in connection with sunlight, others place more emphasis on earlier Holy People. Versions also differ in details about her sons, often called Monster Slayer and Born-for-Water.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A mountain with slopes that change color through the day suits a figure of renewal, age, and return.

Earth Diver

water-covered world, diving animal, small helper, mud-bringer, beginning of land, creation pattern

In many northern and northeastern traditions, the world begins with water everywhere. Animals dive to the depths seeking a little mud, and a small creature often succeeds where stronger ones fail. The diver varies by tradition, often muskrat but sometimes another helper, and the mud may be spread on a turtle or otherwise enlarged into earth.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A dark pond edged by reeds invites the image of a small diver vanishing below for a scrap of earth.

The Pleiades

star cluster, seasonal marker, children or dancers, transformed beings, many local stories, night guide

Many Indigenous nations have stories for the Pleiades, often involving children, dancers, or beings transformed into stars. There is no single pan-Indigenous tale: published versions are

local and distinct. In some stories the cluster marks absence or loss; in others it marks protection, timing, or a continuing bond between earth and sky.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

*A notch above a dark ridge at first nightfall echoes a tight
little cluster lifting together into the cold sky.*



II · POWERS

II Powers and World-Shapers

Across Turtle Island, many stories speak of beings whose actions set patterns for weather, light, luck, law and human conduct. Published versions differ a great deal by nation, language and storyteller. What follows gives only broad, public outlines, with care not to repeat restricted teachings or flatten distinct traditions into one.

Above: Storm powers gather over the land.



Thunderbird arrives with storm and force.

Thunderbird

storm power, sky being, protector, lightning bearer, awe-inspiring presence, enemy of underwater beings

In many Native traditions, Thunderbird is a mighty being of the upper world whose wingbeats bring thunder and whose flashing eyes or beak bring lightning. Some published accounts describe Thunderbird as a protector, sometimes in struggle with powerful underwater beings. Names, forms and stories differ widely, and some traditions speak of Thunderbirds in the plural rather than one figure.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A broad anvil cloud above a ridge can resemble huge wings spread over the land before rain.

White Buffalo Calf Woman

holy visitor, bearer of the sacred pipe, teacher of right living, renewal, prayer, kinship obligation

In Lakota tradition, White Buffalo Calf Woman appears to the people in a time of need and brings the sacred pipe together with teachings for living in a good way. Publicly shared summaries say she instructs the people in prayer and right relations, then departs in a miraculous form. Ceremonial details belong within Lakota practice and are not repeated here.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A pale rise in prairie grass under a storm-cleared sky can call to mind a white buffalo approaching from distance.

Horned Serpent

underwater power, horned snake being, danger, medicine power, guardian force, rival to thunder beings

Many eastern and southeastern traditions tell of a great horned serpent or underwater panther-like being linked with deep water, danger and power. In some published versions it opposes thunder beings; in others it guards places or carries strong medicine associations. The being's name, shape and role vary from nation to nation, so no single account fits all.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A dark oxbow lake with a snag rising like a horn can suggest a serpent waiting below still water.



III · HEROES

III Heroes and Great Journeys

Across Turtle Island, hero stories often follow long journeys: into the sky, under the sea, or across dangerous country. The versions most widely published today come from many nations and language communities, so details can differ from one telling to another. What stays constant is courage, kinship, and the work of making life more livable.

Above: The twins go out to face monsters.



Monster Slayer faces danger in open country.

Monster Slayer

Naayéé' Neizghání

Diné hero twin, monster fighter, protector of people, disciplined warrior, restorer of safer order

In widely published Diné tellings, Monster Slayer is one of the Hero Twins, born to Changing Woman and Sun. With his twin Born-for-Water, he travels to their father, survives tests, receives weapons, and defeats powerful monsters that endanger human life. Published versions differ in which monsters are named and the order of the battles.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A sharp volcanic neck or isolated cliff line, like a watchful fighter standing above open country.

Born-for-Water

Tóbájishchíní

Diné hero twin, companion and counselor, endurance, prayer, tactical help, steady support in danger

Born-for-Water is Monster Slayer's twin and constant companion in Diné tradition. In published versions, he joins the journey to Sun, helps endure difficult trials, and supports the

monster fights with counsel, prayer, and resourcefulness. He is often less prominent in the final blows, but he is essential to the twins' success.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A paired ridge beside a higher summit, suggesting a steadfast companion keeping pace through a hard journey.

Gluskabe

Kluskap

Wabanaki culture hero, transformer, teacher, traveler, negotiator between people, animals, and place

Among Wabanaki peoples, Gluskabe is a great traveler and transformer whose stories explain how people should live with animals, waters, winds, and one another. Widely published episodes tell of contests, teachings, and acts that leave the world more usable for human life. Spellings, place references, and episodes differ across communities and publications.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A long headland above tidal water, as if a traveler has paused to study the coast and weather.

Sedna

Inuit sea being, keeper of marine animals, transformed woman, power beneath the ocean, source of abundance

In many Inuit tellings, a young woman undergoes a terrible separation and becomes a powerful being associated with the sea and the animals people depend on. Her name, family story, and the events of her transformation vary by region. Many published versions were written down by outsiders after hearing oral accounts, so wording and emphasis differ.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A dark bay under steep cliffs, where deep water and cold surf suggest a presence below.

Star Boy

Niitsitapi hero, child of human mother and Morning Star, sky traveler, returning benefactor, healer

In well-known Blackfoot (Niitsitapi) tellings, Star Boy is born from a union between a human woman and Morning Star. After hardship, he journeys between earth and the sky world,

gains help and knowledge, and returns with blessings for his people. Published versions differ in the cause of his exile, the helpers he meets, and the gifts he brings back.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A broad prairie horizon beneath the morning sky, with one bright star lingering over the grasslands.



IV · LANDMARKS

IV Sacred Places, Beings and Landmarks

This section gathers a mountain, a rock tower, a mesa-like formation, a powerful serpent being, and a traveling culture hero. Some are places where story and prayer meet; others are beings tied to particular landscapes. Public tellings are often brief versions of much larger traditions, and details can differ from nation to nation or from one printed source to another.

Above: Landmarks invite remembered stories.



Mato Tipila stands above the trees.

Mato Tipila

rock tower, prayer place, bear story, claw-mark imagery, prominent landmark, Plains nations connections

Mato Tipila is a place of story and prayer for several Indigenous nations. In widely published public tellings, children or young girls are pursued by a great bear. They pray for help, the rock rises beneath them, and the bear's claws score the stone. Versions differ on how many children there are and what becomes of them afterward.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A sheer stone tower above rolling country, with long vertical grooves that invite the eye to read claw marks.

Tsé Bit'a'í

Winged Rock

great rock formation, Diné tradition, giant bird, refuge, travel, sacred landscape

In public Diné tellings, Tsé Bit'a'í is linked with a great bird that carried the people to safety on its back. After it landed, it became stone. Published versions vary in why the journey was needed and what dangers followed. These public accounts are only a

selective glimpse, not the full ceremonial tradition.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A broad rock mass with outstretched flanks, as if a huge bird had folded itself down onto the earth.



The mountain suggests a sleeping figure.

Sleeping Ute Mountain

mountain profile, Ute public storytelling, resting warrior, landmark silhouette, cultural memory, regional landmark

In Ute public storytelling, the mountain profile is often read as a warrior lying on his back. Different retellings identify the figure with slightly different details, but the central image is of a powerful being at rest across the horizon. The mountain's long outline invites this story-centered way of seeing the land.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A long mountain ridge on the horizon, with head, chest, and bent knees suggested by the skyline.

Uktena

horned serpent, Cherokee tradition, dangerous power, brilliant markings, guardian presence, river and mountain associations

In Cherokee public tradition, Uktena is a great horned serpent, feared for its power. Printed stories differ in important details: some describe a blazing crest or jewel, some emphasize deadly gaze or poison, and some place Uktena in deep waters while others link it with remote mountains and caves. Across versions, it is not approached lightly.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A dark pool below broken rock, or a winding ridge with a horn-like spur at one end.

Nanabozho

Anishinaabe culture hero, trickster, traveler, teacher, transformer, comic mishap, world-ordering deeds

Among Anishinaabe peoples, Nanabozho appears in many printed stories as a traveler, teacher, and trickster whose actions can be generous, foolish, or world-shaping. There is no single authoritative plotline in public sources. Some stories stress making and naming; others focus on lessons learned through mistakes, animals, weather, and journeys across the land.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A winding river path through mixed woods, with one unexpected bend after another, suggesting a restless traveler's route.

SOURCES

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4. Vine Deloria Jr.. *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion*. Fulcrum Publishing, 1994
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7. Bernard Saladin d'Anglure. *Inuit Stories of Being and Rebirth: Gender, Shamanism, and the Third Sex*. University of Manitoba Press, 2018

Imagery and "Look for in the land" cues are artistic interpretation, not historical or scientific claims.

A NOTE ON RESPECT

Names, spellings and story details vary by nation, language, translator and community preference. In a guide with continental scope, English labels can be useful, but they should never erase the people to whom a story belongs. Where a public version is especially associated with a people, this guide uses that people's own name where possible, such as Diné, Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe and Inuit. This guide is an outsider's introduction. For depth and correction, consult the tradition's own voices: its elders, teachers, cultural centres and community publications.

The plates in this issue are interpretive illustrations, not historical artefacts.



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