



Origin of the Big Dipper

One day, Wesahkecak was walking along a usual hunting trail. On this particular day he noticed a bird's nest with two birds sitting near it. He thought nothing of it and continued walking. The next day, Wesahkecak was once again walking down his hunting trail and passed near the bird nest. This time there were three little heads poking out of the nest, cheeping loudly as the parents sat nearby. Wesahkecak was fascinated by this as he'd never seen babies of any kind before. He stared at the babies in fascination as he passed.

The next day, Wesahkecak was walking down the trail with Mahikan, the wolf. He stopped the wolf at the nest and pointed to the birds with their babies.

"Isn't that the neatest thing Mahikan? What are those cute little things? Wouldn't it be nice to have a mate and cute little things like that? Wow that's neat!" said Wesahkecak.

Mahikan thought about this a lot as he walked home. He thought it would be nice to have a family of his own. Although Mahikan had promised to take care of the "two-legged," he had grown tired of having to always accompany him everywhere and of helping the "two-legged" keep safe.

Mahikan wanted his own mate and babies to share his life with. That night Mahikan prayed hard to the Creator and was granted a mate. Soon after, he and his mate had a litter of pups. Mahikan was full of joy and spent most of his time enjoying his new family.

Wesahkecak, meanwhile, was aware of what was happening with Mahikan and was happy for his friend. Wesahkecak continued to keep himself busy hunting and gathering on his own. It wasn't long before Wesahkecak began to get lonely, constantly checking in on his friend Mahikan and his family. He could see how happy Mahikan was with his new family and he began to long for a family of his own. That night he prayed hard for a companion.

The next day Wesahkecak was beaming with happiness as his wish had been granted and he was provided with a companion. He greatly loved his new wife and it wasn't long before they bore a child. Wesahkecak spent a great deal of his time hunting and gathering for his new family.

It wasn't long before winter hit and Wesahkecak found that he was ill prepared for winter. He hadn't gathered enough food to last his whole family as he had become so accustomed to gathering enough just for himself.



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It wasn't long before they ran out of food. His wife had become skinny and could no longer feed their baby properly and their baby cried nonstop in hunger. Wesahkecak tried hunting desperately but found he couldn't hit anything with his bow and arrow so they went hungry for days.

Mahikan heard what was happening with Wesahkecak and his family. He remembered his promise to look after the "two-legged" and felt he needed to help somehow, even though he had his own family to look after. Mahikan took his bow and arrow and headed to Wesahkecak's tipi.

"Wesahkecak! Astam!" Mahikan called.

Wesahkecak emerged from his tipi, grateful to see his old friend. "I've come to help you as I promised. I will take you hunting. There's a herd of Paskwowimostos, the buffalo, nearby. I will take you to gather a couple but you must promise to use my bow. It's a special bow and will bring you luck." Wesahkecak was very happy and eagerly grabbed Mahikan's bow.

Together they walked not too far to where the buffalo were grazing. Wesahkecak quickly picked out two fat bulls and began stalking them.

He hadn't waited long before one of the bulls presented a good shot and Wesahkecak pulled back on Mahikan's bow and let an arrow fly.

The arrow found its mark and the bull fell in one shot. Feeling confident, Wesahkecak grabbed his own bow and lined up on the second bull. He drew back on the bow and hit the bull in the foot! He drew back a second time and hit the bull in the tail! Seeing what was happening, Mahikan grabbed his own bow from Wesahkecak and dropped the bull with one shot, preventing it from suffering further.

"What were you thinking? I told you to use my bow! Look what you did, Wesahkecak! The bull could have got away wounded! Next time you are told to do something follow the instructions!" shouted Mahikan, annoyed.

Regardless, they had two nice bulls and Wesahkecak was now well stocked for the winter. He thanked Mahikan for his help and Mahikan quickly returned to his family. Wesahkecak got to work butchering the bulls and loading them on his sled. Once they were all butchered and loaded, he headed for home with a smile on his face.

Once home, Wesahkecak said to his wife, "I need to show my gratitude to Mahikan. I will take the tender loins, the fattest steaks, and the hearts to Mahikan and his family to show how thankful we are."

Wesahkecak quickly packed them up and headed to Mahikan's home. Once there, he presented them to Mahikan. Tears filled Mahikan's eyes as he accepted the offering.



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He was touched that Wesahkecak would choose the best cuts to give to him and his family. Mahikan felt guilty for not fully honouring his promise to take care of the two-legged and decided he needed to do something.

Mahikan called a meeting with Miscakanis, the coyote, and Mahkisis, the fox. The coyote and fox quickly came to meet with Mahikan. Mahikan spoke.

“My brothers. Long ago I made a promise to watch over and care for the two-leggeds. Now I have a family and have little time to watch over them. I don’t want to give up on my promise as the two-leggeds need someone to walk with them and watch over them. I ask that each of us give up one of our pups and send them to the four directions to watch over the two-leggeds for all time. To walk with them, be their guides, protectors, and companions.”

Mahikan knew he was asking a lot but Miscakanis and Mahkisis agreed to help Mahikan and offered up their pups. Those pups were sent to the four directions and were bound to the two-leggeds for all time. Those pups were named Atim, to identify their honourable status and the task they were given.

The Creator was so touched by the sacrifice that Mahikan, Miscakanis, and Mahkisis had made, that he made it so their meeting and sacrifice would forever be marked in the night sky so it would never be forgotten. Seven acakosak were placed in the night sky as a reminder. One for each of Mahikan, Miscakanis, Mahkisis and one for each of the four directions that the Atimwak were sent to be companions of the two-leggeds, man.

Today we know those stars, acakosak, as the Big Dipper. The three bright stars on the handle of the Big Dipper mark the wolf, the coyote, and the fox. The four stars that make up the bowl of the Big Dipper mark the four directions the pups were sent in. The pups we now know as Atimwak, dogs. Every time we look up at the night sky, we need to remember this story and remember that Atimwak were given to us to act as our companions, guides, protectors, and best friends for as long as the stars are in the sky.

Ekosi Maka