



Trickster and the Chickadees

At this time where I am, there's no snow on the ground, so I'm not allowed as a nēhiyawak, a Cree person, to say his name, but I can call him Trickster. I won't say his Cree name because as Cree peoples, as nēhiyawak, we're never to say his name unless there's snow on the ground. In this legend, you'll only hear him called Trickster.

We are told by our kihtēhayahk, our Elders, that kayas, long ago, in a time when Trickster still walked this earth, he was going through all of these different adventures and different happenings and different mishaps that we still pass on in legend from generation to generation.

With this legend, we are told that one day Trickster was out hunting by himself, as he often did. On this particular day it was a quiet morning, and he was walking along one of his favorite hunting trails. All of a sudden, something caught his attention. He could hear this little laughing and giggling going on and he thought, "Sounds like somebody's having fun. What's going on?" He listened for a while. Nothing. He started walking again. Then again, he'd hear this laughing and giggling and it sounded like somebody was having lots of fun.

Finally, Trickster stopped and listened for a while to get a sense of where this laughter was coming from. And sure enough, he could hear all the laughter going on again and this giggling and then it would stop. But this time, he knew the direction it was coming from so he started walking in that direction. As he was walking again, he could hear the laughter break out. He could see what it was. He walked out into this little opening and on this one tree, there was a little group of chickadees and all of these little chickadees were sitting there and he hadn't seen what happened but still they were laughing and laughing.

Finally, they'd stopped laughing and he asked them, "Tanisi. What're you guys laughing at?" They looked a little worried and said, "Oh, Trickster, we didn't see you there."

He said, "I could hear you guys from way back on my hunting trail up there. It sounds like you guys are having lots of fun. You guys telling stories or what's happening? It sounds like lots of fun. I want to have some fun, too. I want to see what the fun is all about. I want to hear these funny stories or whatever you guys are doing."



Trickster and the Chickadees

Chickadees all sort of huddled and talked with each other and said, “Trickster, this is something just for chickadees. Nobody else is supposed to see this. This is just a chickadee thing.”

Trickster looked at them a little funny, mamaskac, it’s surprising, “What do you mean? There’s no such thing as just a chickadee thing. I’m Trickster. I can see what you guys are doing! I’m not a regular creature on this Mother Earth.”

The chickadees huddled up again and they said, “Okay. We’ve decided that you’re right. You’re Trickster so we’ll tell you what we’re doing. We were given a special gift as chickadees because we’re often in groups like this, but we get so busy doing all of our work, gathering food, making our nest, watching our little ones, we don’t really have time for play. So, Creator gave us a gift just for chickadees. And this gift is that we’re able to pop our eyes out.”

Trickster looked at them kind of funny, “Pop your eyes out! Why is that fun?”

They said, “Well, for chickadees, when we pop our eyes out and when we throw them in the air, it’s just like somebody’s tickling us all over and it makes us laugh and laugh and laugh.

It makes us feel good. So, that’s what we were doing when you could hear us.”

Trickster said, “I want to see this. Let’s see. I want to see what you’re talking about.”

The group spread apart a little bit and one of the little chickadees sure enough popped out his eyeballs and threw them in the air, but not very hard. And when they flew up in the air, the little chickadee just burst out in laughter and giggling and trying to hold his stomach and caught his eyes and put them back in.

Trickster looked surprised and said, “Well, that looks kind of silly, but it sure looked fun because he’s still not done laughing. That’s a strange trick but if it makes you feel that good, then great.” Trickster decided to go back to hunting and leave the chickadees. He said, “Well, thanks for showing me. I’ll leave you guys to have your fun and throw your eyeballs around.”

Trickster left, started walking alone and it was starting to be kind of a let down of a morning. The only thing interesting was when he ran into the chickadees and Trickster found himself starting to get a little down ‘cause the hunting wasn’t great and started not feeling very good and just a little bit depressed. And then it struck him. “Hey! I’m feeling kind of down. I wonder if I can do that trick the chickadees were doing. I should try.”



Trickster and the Chickadees

So he started digging around his eyes and to his surprise he was able to pull out one eyeball, and stuck it back in just to make sure everything was okay. He thought, "Hey, I can do this. Hey!" He pulled both his eyeballs out and stuck them back in. He could see; he found he could see fine.

He said, "I wonder how it'll feel if I toss them in the air?" First, he tossed them in the air just a tiny bit. As soon as they left his hands, it felt like somebody was tickling him all over, and he felt happy and he caught his eyes, put them back in, and he was still smiling to himself and feeling that feeling like laughing.

He thought, "I bet you if I throw them a little higher, I'll even feel more like laughing." He took them out again. This time he threw them higher. This time he just couldn't control himself. He was laughing and giggling and having the most fun he'd ever had. And again, he caught his eyes, and put them back in and he thought, "This is pretty cool. I wonder what'll happen if I throw them as high as I can?" So, again, he pulled out his eyeballs, got ready, and threw them up as high as he could. As soon as they left his hand, he fell on the ground, rolling around, laughing and laughing; biggest auntie laugh he could imagine. He was just laughing and laughing,

rolling around for the longest time. Finally, when he was done laughing, he started to get control of himself. Then he remembered! He'd forgotten to catch his eyes when they were falling to the ground. By now he knew they had to have hit the ground somewhere, but he was rolling around all over. He had no idea where they were. So he started reaching around all over the ground trying to find them, calling for somebody to help, "Tansi! Tansi! Anybody? Somebody come and help! Help!"

Nobody would answer back and finally he was getting worried. He was feeling all over the place trying to find his eyes but he just couldn't find them 'cause he couldn't see anything. As he was doing this, one of the other animals happened to be coming along and it was squirrel who happened to walk by and he could see Trickster crawling around on the ground with his eyes closed so he was really looking for something. And anikwacās, squirrel, was wondering, "What are you doing?" He called to Trickster, "Trickster! Tansi." Trickster stopped, "Who's that? Anikwacās! Is that you?"

Anikwacās said, "Yeah. What're you doing here just crawling around the ground and hollering? What's going on?"

Trickster said, "I lost my eyes!"



Trickster and the Chickadees

Squirrel looked confused and surprised.
“What? You lost your eyes? How can you lose your eyes? They’re in your head! How do you lose your eyes?”

Trickster looked at him, kind of annoyed.
“Never mind. I can’t tell you, but they’re lost. They’re gone. I can’t find them. Can you help me find them?”

Anikwacās said, “Okay, okay! I’ll help you find them. I don’t want to get you angry.” ‘Cause nobody wanted to get Trickster angry. So anikwacās started looking all over on the ground in the area where Trickster was crawling around, but he couldn’t find anything. As he looked and looked farther and farther away, he still couldn’t find anything. Finally he noticed that Trickster was starting to really get angry and nobody wants to get Trickster angry. Anikwacās was getting a little worried, thinking, “Oh no! What’s this? What’s going to happen if I don’t find these eyeballs? Trickster might do something bad to me.”

And Trickster was getting mad and said,
“Anikwacās! Where are they? Find them right now!”

Oh! Anikwacās was really getting worried. So what he finally decided – he noticed these sihta, spruce, beside him.

So he climbed up these spruce and could see where all the spruce gum was coming out of the tree. And he went up and he started grabbing it and he took all the spruce gum and he rolled it into a ball about the perfect size of an eyeball. He grabbed another handful and he made another. So, he had two balls of spruce gum that looked the shape of an eyeball. He thought, “Okay, I’m just going to hand these to him and tell Trickster that I found his eyeballs and give them to him and I’m going to get out of here.”

Anikwacās called Trickster, “Trickster! I found them. They’re behind the tree over here! Both of them!” Oh, Trickster was relieved. He felt his way over to where anikwacās was talking to him. He reached up. Anikwacās put the two balls of spruce gum in his hand and anikwacās told Trickster, “Ekosi! Ekosi maka! I got to get out of here. I got to get going right away.”

Without even trying them, Trickster thanked anikwacās, holding what he thought were his eyeballs in his hand and he started to shove them back in. He thought, “These things feel rough. They feel awful and they kind of hurt.” He thought they must have gotten dirty rolling around on the ground. “Yeah, that must be what it is.” To his surprise, he could barely see, just the tiniest bit; really blurry; but his vision started to clear out a little.



Trickster and the Chickadees

He kept wiping his eyes and looked at his hands and he noticed this spruce gum, the spruce pitch on his fingers and he thought, "Oh, it must have rolled by a spruce tree." He kept rubbing his eyes. Finally, he could see good but he had rubbed out a lot of spruce pitch from his eyes.

He could see and he thought everything was okay and started going back about his day, not thinking much about it. But after that, Trickster never tried the chickadees' trick again because he was scared he'd lose his eyes again.

We are told that even to this day, anikwacās was the only one who really knew what happened. But we are told that as a reminder of this, even we as nēhiyawak, we still get a reminder of this story every morning when we wake up and we feel just like there's spruce gum in our eyes and we wipe that out and we're told that's to remind us of the story of Trickster who was using a gift that wasn't meant for him and what happened to him. So, it's sort of a warning to all nēhiyawak.

Now you know the story of Trickster and the chickadees.

Ekosi maka.