



A Perspective of Indigenous Concerns and Issues

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The Creation of the World

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/movementtowardsreconciliation/chapter/the-creation-story>

Prior to the arrival of Europeans on Turtle Island, Indigenous Nations had their own complex system of spiritual beliefs, the breadth and depth of which the Europeans colonizers did not fully comprehend. Aboriginal worldview is grounded in the Creation story and expressed through the symbol of the circle—the first design the Creator. Aboriginal people view the earth as their Mother and the animals as their spiritual kin. There is an interconnectedness between all living things and all are part of a greater whole which is called life. All life is cyclical rather than linear like that of the Europeans. Time was marked by the changing seasons and the rising and setting of the sun. Aboriginal philosophy is holistic, not lending itself to dichotomies or categories seen in European philosophy. Indigenous rights were—and still are—seen in broad, conceptual terms.

Creation legends of most Indigenous societies are orally handed down from the Creator across many generations and considered sacred. Some of these legends share common themes with our Judeo/Christian traditions: a flood, mankind being ‘in sin’ and needing transformation, an underworld, animals, a Creator (Spiritual Being). Haudenosaunee versions of the tale start in the Sky World — a land in the heavens where supernatural beings existed. In many Northwest Coast Indigenous cultures, the Raven features prominently in origin tales. For some Innu peoples, it is Kuekuatsheu (Wolverine) that made land out of rocks and mud.

Many Indigenous societies in our Algonquian/Iroquois region of the Northeast believe their natural homeland (North America as we know it) is the earth formed on a turtle’s back, hence is known as Turtle Island. Various traditions have different interpretations as to the creation of Turtle Island, but the main themes are similar. The turtle becomes an icon of life and the known world, hence the story reflects many spiritual and cultural beliefs. Some use descriptive imagery with women as the human medium (Sky-Woman’ hints at our ‘Mother Earth’ & may replace Wisakedjāk).

<http://www.anishinabestation.ca>

According to the Anishinabeg this is how the world was created: At the beginning, animals were masters of the world and all lived in harmony. But in time, the animals began to fight against each other. This angered the Creator, Kichi Manito [var.], who decided to flood the earth into a rebirth. Following the flood, the Earth almost virtually disappeared. There was only one group left. However, Kichi Manito warned Wisakedjāk (Nanabush; a shape-shifter, trickster), whom he considered as his son, of his intention and advised him to put representatives from the animals into his canoe to save them from drowning. The rain fell and only Wisakedjāk and the animals aboard his canoe escaped the flood.

After many days, Wisakedjāk announced to the animals that one of them had to bring a handful of soil to the surface for the rebirth of the plants, trees and grass. The first to try was the loon who was considered the best diver. He dived and remained under water for a full sun and rose to the surface out of breath, almost dead, but held no soil from the bottom. The duck then decided to try his luck, but he was less successful than the loon. The otter then dove, and then the mink and then the beaver, but none of them could bring up soil. Finally, the muskrat spoke, he was not easily discouraged, and said that sometimes he had to dive several times to find something to eat. So he plunged, hoping to save the world.

He was under water for three days and everyone thought he was dead. However, at the end of the third day he reappeared. He looked dead, but he opened one eye, smiled and opened his paw to reveal the soil. Wisakedjāk took it and put it on the back of the turtle and then the new world took form. This legend explains why North America in the Algonquian perspective is associated with the turtle shape and is often referred to as the Great Turtle (Mikinàk).