

Naniboujou and the Maple Trees

A long time ago, when the world was new, Gitchee Manitou made things so that life was very easy for the people. There was plenty of game and the weather was always good and the maple trees were filled with thick sweet syrup. Whenever anyone wanted to get maple syrup from the trees, all they had to do was break off a twig and collect it as it dripped out.

One day, Naniboujou went walking around. "I think I'll go see how my friends the Anishinabe are doing," he said. So he went to a village of Indian People. But there was no one around. So Naniboujou looked for the people. They were not fishing in the streams or the lake. They were not working in the fields hoeing their crops. They were not gathering berries. Finally he found them. They were all just lying on their backs with their mouths open, letting the maple syrup drip into their mouths.

"This will not do," Naniboujou said. "My people are all going to be fat and lazy if they keep on living this way."

So Naniboujou went down to the river. He took with him a big basket he had made of birch bark. With this basket he brought back many buckets of water. He went to the top of the maple trees and poured the water in so that it thinned out the syrup. Now thick syrup no longer dripped out of the broken twigs. Now what came out was thin and watery and just barely sweet to taste.

"This is how it will be from now on," Naniboujou said. "No longer will syrup drip from the maple trees. Now there will be only this watery sap. When people want to make maple syrup they will have to go gather many buckets full of the sap in a birch bark basket like mine. They will have to gather wood and make fires so they can heat stones to drop into the baskets. They will have to boil the water with the heated stones for a long time to make even a little drop of maple syrup. Then my people will no longer grow fat and lazy. Then they will appreciate this maple syrup Gitchee Manitou made available to them. Not only that, this sap will drip only from the tree at a certain time of the year. Then it will not keep people from hunting and fishing and gathering and hoeing in the fields. This is how it is to this day.