



Isaac Treuer (left) shows a rabbit he caught in a snare. The killing of a rabbit by a boy or girl is an introduction to the basic Ojibwe teachings of food and survival.

winter Snaring Rabbits

Ojibwe families came together for the wild rice harvest and ceremonies in the fall. But in the winter, they spread out again to make it easier to get food during the cold, hard months. Ojibwe people fished through the ice, trapped beaver for both meat and pelts, and used their stored wild rice, berries, and maple sugar to survive. They invented many techniques for hunting, trapping, and snaring wild game.

A favorite food of the Ojibwe was the snowshoe hare. Although they were happy to shoot rabbits, it could be hard to do with a bow and arrow, or even with a gun. Because snowshoe hares are predictable creatures and their tracks are easy to see in the snow, the Ojibwe found the best way to capture them was snaring. A small fiber

rope was made into a noose about the size of a human fist and placed on the rabbit trail. When a rabbit came down the trail, its head would go through the noose and it would become trapped. Today, Ojibwe people often use wire snares rather than rope made from natural fibers.


When Ojibwe people killed a rabbit, they offered tobacco to the animal, thanking it for giving its life to provide food. They used all parts of the rabbit. The meat was eaten along with the heart and liver. The stomach contents were saved and used for medicine. The hide could be used for lining moccasins. Or they might cut the rabbit skin in spirals, so the long, thin strips curled into fur “tubes” that they wove together to make double-sided fur blankets.

When an Ojibwe boy or girl kills his or her first rabbit, family and friends hold an elaborate feast. The rabbit is roasted or boiled, and the hunter is offered a spoonful of the meat. But the hunter has to refuse the first bite, saying, “No. I am thinking of the children who have nobody to provide for them.” Then a second bite is offered and again refused, as the hunter says, “No. I am thinking of the elders who cannot get into the woods to hunt for themselves.” A third bite is offered, but again the hunter refuses, saying, “No. I am thinking of my family, my community, and the people who came here today to support me.” The hunter is offered a fourth bite and then he or she can eat.

The killing of a rabbit marks the first transition from childhood to adulthood, from someone who only eats food to one who also provides it. It’s an introduction to the basic Ojibwe teachings of food and survival.

The Ojibwe survived in the Minnesota woods for countless generations because they developed a very special knowledge, culture, and respect for the natural world. And in spite of many changes in our modern society, a lot of Ojibwe people still carry on those teachings.

If you want to learn more about Ojibwe

culture and history, you can look for books like *Ojibwe in Minnesota* or *Everything You Wanted to Know About Indians But Were Afraid to Ask*. You can also attend a traditional skills workshop at your local community education program, tribal college, or university, or visit any of the great displays at Minnesota’s historic sites or your local historical society. 



During downtime between harvests, Caleb, Elias, Robert, Evan, and Isaac Treuer (clockwise from top left) love to play moccasin games. The members of one team sing while their opponents search under moccasins for hidden musketballs or marbles. The sticks are used for keeping score.

NOTE TO TEACHERS

Find links to teachers guides for this and other stories at www.mndnr.gov/young_naturalists.