

## Student Page: Trees (Mitigoog)<sup>iii</sup>

As told by Nancy Jones (published in *Dibaajimowinan*<sup>iv</sup>, by the Great Lakes Indigenous Fish and Wildlife Council. (oral story)

There are many trees here where we live. Perhaps you call them differently; everybody has different teachings, the way they were raised. First I need to talk about this. All these trees in the bush have Indian names. Nanibosh<sup>v</sup> gave them all Indian names when he made the earth. The spirit gave us these names so that we can carry them in a sacred manner. If you think about those trees, they all have spirit names. This is what Nanaboozhoo did, he gave all trees names.

That is the white spruce that was named. There are a lot of uses for the white spruce. So he (the white spruce) was asked, "How are you going to help the Anishinaabe when they get here?" "Oh there is a lot they can use me for," he said. "They might even make medicine out of me; they can use my tree-ness and my needles." "Spruce" is apparently what he is called in English.

The cedar tree, that was another one that was asked; "How will you help the Anishinaabe," Nanabosh asked. "Oh there are lots of ways I can help the Anishinaabe," he said. "When somebody has a child, they will use my wood to make a cradleboard. I have many uses that I can give them, when they want to made medicine from my being a tree. When someone is making a canoe, that is one use that will be used to make the strips of cedar on the bottom." And also these trees they will make other things like rice knockers, how it was said.

Next I will talk about the jack pine. "I will also help. I have medicine that the Anishinaabe could use." It is these boughs that these spruce hens eat. That is where the Anishinaabe looked for them to go get when he wanted to eat the spruce hen. "And that is the way I will try to help the Anishinaabe."

Then next the balsam tree arrived. "Oh me too, I shall help in many ways. For instance, when the Anishinaabe makes camp. They will use my boughs as a floor when they need something to lie on. If someone pokes at the lumpy pitch, the blister part of that tree, from there they will get medicine."

Then another one spoke up. "Me too! I carry medicine," the tree said. And now that white birch tree has many uses. My late father would make snowshoes by bending that birch tree. He also made a toboggan. And when he used the bark, he made many things with it. That is what one would use for roofing material long ago.

And now for the poplar<sup>2</sup> tree. "I too have many gifts to help the Anishinaabe." We would eat sap from the bark of the poplar tree. It almost tastes like sugar. My grandmother told me "You are medicating yourselves when you eat that sap. That is medicine that you are eating."

The basswood, that is yet another one. There are many uses for the basswood when one peels the bark of the tree. After you peel the top bark, then you peel the layers off in strips. It was very light when it got dried.

Red willow, red willow. This is yet another one, a great medicine tree. Apparently the red willow said, "The Anishinaabe that are going to arrive will have many uses for me." This red willow I use when I make little birch bark baskets. I use them to sew on the trimmings, so that it can secure/reinforce around the

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<sup>2</sup> Poplar is the local word for trees in the poplar family: aspens and cottonwoods.

birch bark basket, also when one makes a winnowing basket. It bends nicely, it bends very well when one uses it.

We know what to do when we are doing these things. No one should cut down a tree for no reason. Only if one has a purpose for it. That is what I was told not to do. Do not cut down a tree without a purpose. Only if you have a reason to use it like making a medicine or if one were to make a pipe stem. Even though the tree is rotten or falling, you should do something for the tree. You should also honor the tree and tell it why you are cutting it down. All the trees that you see standing, all of them are someone. That is someone that is standing. It also has a name. That is why you show respect to it. You do not cut it down for no reason. That is what I was told; that you should have respect for all things.