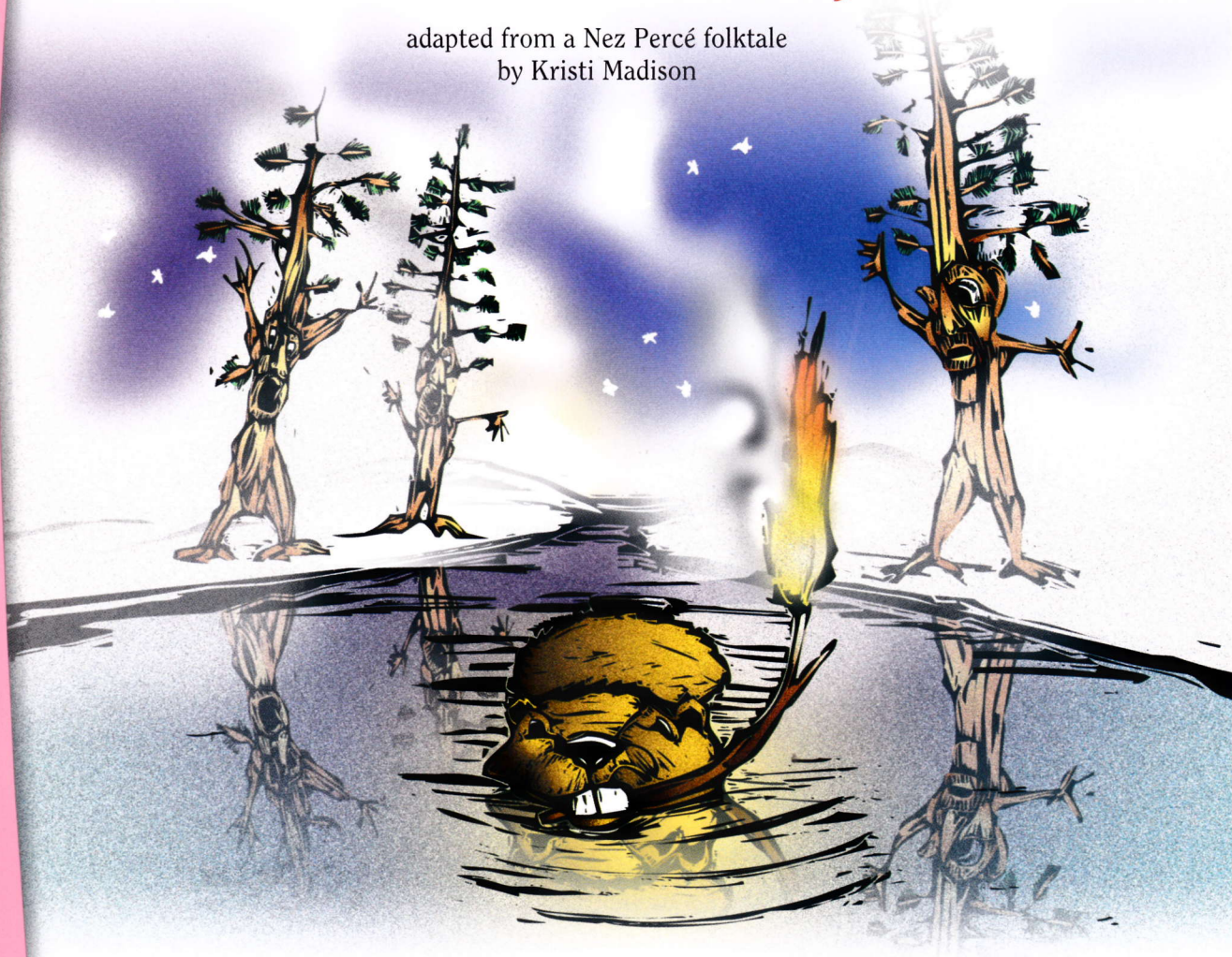


The Secret of Fire

adapted from a Nez Percé folktale
by Kristi Madison



¹ The Grande Ronde River flows through parts of Oregon and Washington. Near the point where it flows into the mighty Snake River, the Grande Ronde winds back and forth in great curves. It has many twists and turns. The Nez Percé people (pronounced Nez Pers), who live in the Pacific Northwest near Grande Ronde, tell this legend about the secret of fire.

² Long ago, before people came into the world, animals and trees were very different than they are today. They walked around and talked together just like

people. During that time, only pine trees had knowledge of how to make fire. However, the Pines were very selfish. They wouldn't tell anyone else what they knew. So the animals and other trees had no way to warm themselves when it was cold.

³ One very, very cold winter, the animals and trees were afraid that they would freeze to death. They asked the Pines to tell them how to make fire. The Pines would not answer. The animals and trees pleaded with the Pines to let them warm themselves at their fire. Still, the Pines refused.

- 4 Finally, Beaver said, "I think I know of a way to get fire from the pine trees."
- 5 The Pines were having a great meeting near the shore of the Grande Ronde River. A cold wind blew across the river. The Pines built a tremendous fire on the riverbank to warm themselves. The Pines assigned guards to keep all the animals and other trees away from the fire.
- 6 Beaver hid himself near the bank of the river. He waited and waited, sitting very still. At last, a burning branch from the fire came rolling down the bank toward Beaver. He seized the branch and held it under his arm. Then he jumped into the river and began to swim.
- 7 The Pines were furious. They began to chase Beaver. Beaver swam quickly from one side of the river to the other, trying to avoid the Pines. Sometimes, when the Pines slowed down, Beaver swam straight ahead. That is why, today, the Grande Ronde River winds back and forth in some places and flows straight in others.
- 8 After chasing Beaver a long way, the Pines became very tired. They were out of breath from running. Most of them had to stop the chase. They rested on the shore of the river. They still stand there today—a thick forest through which people can barely move.
- 9 A few Pines were sturdier than the others. They continued chasing Beaver. However, they too got so tired they had to stop. These Pines still stand where they stopped, scattered along the bank.
- 10 A cedar tree was with the group of Pines chasing Beaver. When the Pines stopped, Cedar was growing very tired as well.
- 11 "I know that I can't catch Beaver," Cedar told the Pines. "But I'll climb to the top of that hill and see where he goes."
- 12 When he reached the top of the hill, Cedar saw Beaver far down the river. He watched Beaver swim into the Snake River where the two rivers flow together. Cedar called down to the Pines and told them what he saw. Then, the Pines knew that the way to make fire would no longer be a secret.
- 13 "Beaver just stopped to talk to the Willows," Cedar shouted. "He's giving them some fire." The Pines just moaned.
- 14 Cedar watched Beaver swim across the river to the other trees. "Now Beaver is giving some fire to the birch trees," announced Cedar. "And now he's giving some fire to the Cottonwoods."
- 15 Cedar watched for a long time as Beaver continued to swim down the river. Beaver swam on, stopping from time to time to give fire to different kinds of trees.
- 16 Ever since that time, anyone who needs fire is able to get it from trees. The trees willingly give the fire to anyone who rubs pieces of their wood together in the right way.
- 17 The cedar tree still stands on top of the hill where he watched Beaver. He is a very old tree now. His trunk is twisted, and some of his branches are dead. When a family passes by, the father or mother might point to the tree. "There is old Cedar," the parent might say to the children. "He stands in the exact spot where he stopped chasing Beaver. And because of Beaver, our people have fire."

COMPREHENSION

- A** Choose the best ending for each sentence. Write *a*, *b*, or *c*.
- This story gives one explanation for
 - how people got fire.
 - how a river got its shape.
 - Both **a** and **b**
 - The Pines kept the others away from the fire because they
 - wanted to keep it a secret.
 - didn't have enough fire.
 - thought the animals would get burned.
 - The Pines knew that their secret was lost when
 - Beaver hid from them.
 - Beaver swam too far away to catch.
 - Neither **a** nor **b**
 - Cedar climbed the hill so that
 - he could see what Beaver was doing.
 - he could tell the Pines what was happening.
 - Both **a** and **b**
 - The Nez Percé tell this folktale as a way to
 - pass along their traditions.
 - teach their children about nature.
 - Both **a** and **b**

LEARN ABOUT WORDS

- B** Often you can find out the meaning of a word by seeing how it is used in a story. The other words in the story give you clues.
- Find the word in the story that best fits each meaning. (A paragraph number tells you where to look.) Write the word.
- asked; begged (3)
 - gave a job to; set in place (5)
 - grabbed; snatched (6)
 - angry; mad (7)
 - hardly; almost not (8)
 - stronger; tougher (9)
 - cried; groaned (13)
- C** Homographs are two (or more) words that are spelled the same but have different meanings and origins. A word's meaning will depend on how it is used.
- My dad is a football *fan*.
He keeps cool with an electric *fan*.
- Look at each word in **bold type** below. Note the paragraph number. Look back at the paragraph. Which meaning does the word have there? Write *a* or *b*.
- still** (6)
 - not moving
 - continuing
 - growing** (10)
 - getting bigger
 - becoming
 - reached** (12)
 - got to
 - stretched for

THINK ABOUT IT

- D** A pronoun can take the place of many words.

Read the sentences. Which pronoun in parentheses () makes sense in each sentence? Write the pronoun.

- 1 The Pines knew how to make fire. That was (their, his) secret.
- 2 Beaver offered to get fire from the Pines. The other animals asked (them, him) how he would do it.
- 3 Beaver said he would hide along the riverbanks. "(I, They) will swim away with the fire," he said.
- 4 Cedar watched Beaver. "(He, I) is giving fire to the Willows," he called.
- 5 Beaver was both strong and intelligent. People still remember (your, his) wonderful deed.

- E** Writers try to make stories more interesting by using colorful or funny language that doesn't mean exactly what the words say.

The man was *scared to death*.

This sentence means that the man was very scared. It doesn't mean that the man died.

Read the sentences. What does each sentence really mean? Write *a*, *b*, or *c*.

- 6 "The animals were beside themselves about the cold" is another way of saying
 - a the animals were very worried about the cold.
 - b the animals were trying to stand next to something that was cold.
 - c the animals stood together.
- 7 "Beaver had a brainstorm" is an interesting way of saying
 - a Beaver got rained on.
 - b Beaver had a storm in his head.
 - c Beaver had an idea.
- 8 "Beaver made a mad dash for the river" is a funny way of saying that

- a Beaver leapt into the river.
- b Beaver rushed quickly toward the river.
- c Beaver played in the water.

- 9 "Beaver tried every trick in the book to keep from getting caught" is an interesting way of saying that

- a Beaver followed an instruction book.
- b Beaver wrote notes about his escape.
- c Beaver did anything he could think of.

- 10 "Cedar kept an eagle eye on Beaver" is a lively way of saying that

- a Cedar asked an eagle to watch Beaver.
- b Cedar kept a close watch on Beaver.
- c Cedar borrowed an eagle's eye.

- F** sadly = sad + **ly**
sadness = sad + **ness**

The letters *-ly* and *-ness* are called suffixes. A suffix is added to the end of a word. It changes the word's meaning. Adding the suffix *-ly* to a word makes the new word tell *how*. Adding the suffix *-ness* to a word makes the new word tell *what*.

Read each sentence. Which word in parentheses () makes sense? Write the word.

- 11 The (selfishly, selfishness) of the Pines caused many problems.
- 12 Beaver (cleverly, cleverness) thought of a way to get fire from the Pines.
- 13 Beaver's (swiftly, swiftness) helped him escape from the Pines.
- 14 The trees (willingly, willingness) give fire to others.
- 15 Cedar still stands (calmly, calmness) at the top of the hill.