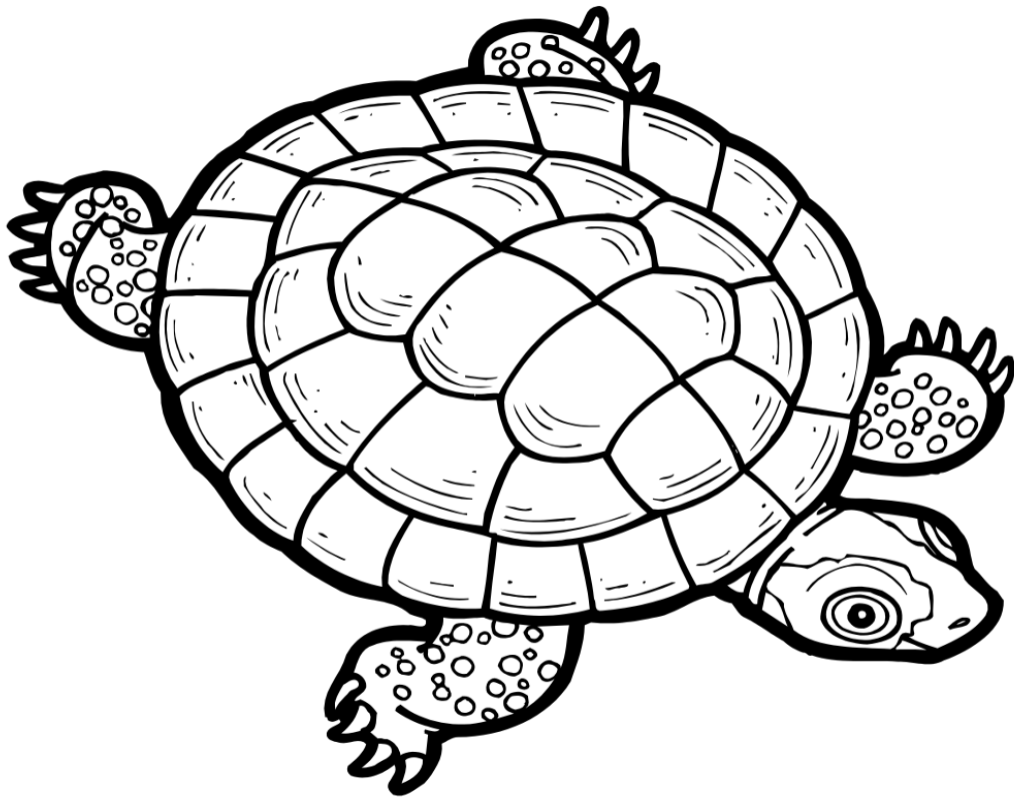


Many Snows Ago

A One Act Play for Children and Families

By Midge Guerrero



MANY SNOWS AGO

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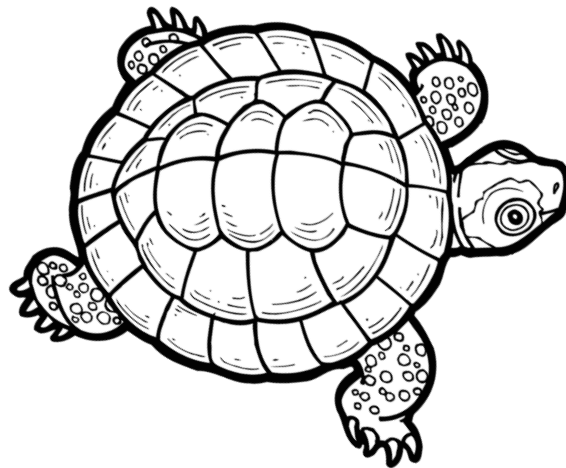
MANY SNOWS AGO

Many Snows Ago was first produced as *Lenape Legends* by Lively Learning a subsidiary of Guerrera Huber Group, Inc. It was performed in over 100 schools and facilities throughout New Jersey. Between 1998 and 2010 an adult cast of two came into a space and set the show on a group of fourth or fifth grade students.

Original Storytellers:

Regina Hayes

Janet Cantore Watson



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A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Many snows ago, I was the host of New Jersey Network's electronic field trip, *Around and About New Jersey*. The Emmy Award winning television series included a segment on Waterloo Village in Northern New Jersey and a discussion of the Lenape. At that time, I was also researching the genealogy of my Italian family. The older relatives that I interviewed both here and in Italy regaled me with tales of their village life. I began to realize that a discussion of ancestors meant more than a family tree. It meant the elders letting youth know how people lived, worked, played and learned. Exactly the type of wisdom that the Lenape Storytellers imparted on the families that gathered during winter months to hear the passed-on tales. After our filming at Waterloo Village, I was hooked and wanted to know more about Eastern Woodland Peoples, the people who first lived where I lived and to learn through their tales.

Growing up and teaching in New Jersey, traditional lands of the Lenape Nation, I was painfully away of the history of genocide and forced removal of those people from the Eastern Woodlands. This work celebrates the many Native Peoples who lived, worked and created art. We honor the first inhabitants and pay our humble respects to the many diverse indigenous peoples still connected to this land.

Midge Guerrero

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Many Snows Ago is based on the extremely short tales of the Lenape and other Eastern Woodland People. The dramatization and embellishment of these tales was done to engage today's young audience while still imparting the wisdom of this noble group of people. In the addendum you will find more background, a bibliography that credits the sources for these stories, pre-show warmup that introduces the Eastern Woodland people, and choreography for the Doll Dance.

Setting: The myths of the Eastern Woodland Indians transcend time and place.

Characters: The work may be produced with a cast as small as six portraying all the characters or as large as the director wishes. The role of the Storyteller may be shared.

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Character Breakdown in Story Order Appearance

28 Gender Neutral Roles 4 Male & 5 Female Specific Roles

Storyteller

1. Beginning of all Stories

Hunter

Hole

Band Leader

Band Members

Smart One

2. Beginning of the World

Turtle

Tree

Man

Woman

3. Turtles are the Best

Turtle

Turkey

Wolf

4. Wolves and Dogs

Old Wolf

Dog

Child

5. Vision Quest

Elder & Elders

Hunter Boy

Warrior Boy

Lover Boy

Mani'to

Women

6. Doll Being

Child 2

Child 3

Walks-Among-Trees

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Doll
Granny
Mother

7. Coming of Europeans

Explorer
Delaware
Band Member

8. Wall Street

Dutch
Delaware 2
Band Member
Ensemble

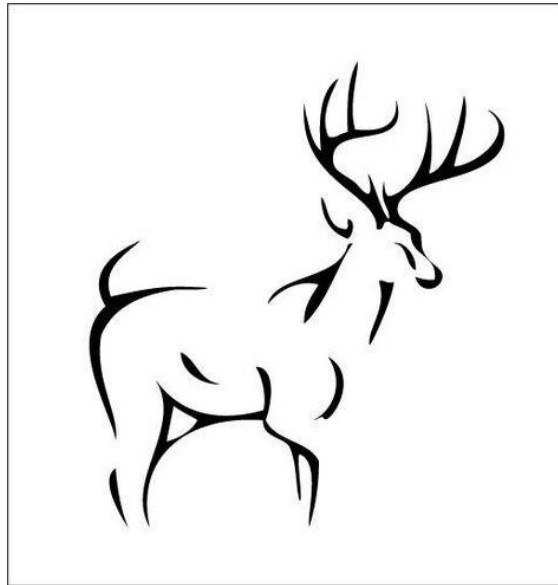
9. Crazy Jack

Crazy Jack
Headman
Hunter 1
Hunter 2
Bear
Bear 2

Running Time: 45 to 60 minutes

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Costumes: The designer must be sensitive to our indigenous peoples. These are Eastern not Western Plains Native Americans. Deerskin pants and dresses were worn. Accessories could include necklaces made from bone, shell or large seeds. Some necklaces had stone or shell pendants. Small pendants or beads were also worn as ear ornaments. Deer hoof toes were dried and sewn to a piece of leather. A dancer would tie this percussive instrument around their leg. Story tellers entertained bands during the winter; hence, heavy fur-like wraps should be available.



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SCENE ONE

SFX: Sounds of nature and drumming.

As the ENSEMBLE enters, *STORYTELLER* is speaking from their seat on a raised platform. Music fills the area as the cast walks with great honor to the story circle and unloads their bundles containing the various props of the tales.

STORYTELLER. For over a thousand years, the Lenape walked the rolling green hills, sandy beaches, forests and grassy fields of their homeland – Lenapehoking. We Eastern Woodland people lived as one with nature and thanked the spirits within all the universe’s creations for what they shared with us. Many snows ago, as white as the sea foam, came the first Europeans. Led by Giovanni Da Verrazano, they came in peace. Later more and more white men would explore the wonder of Lenapehoking. The English called my people the Delaware. The Dutch – Wilden or wild-men. White man called the lands of the Eastern Woodland Nations - New Jersey, New York State, Pennsylvania, Delaware and Connecticut.

(Ensemble will soon become the actors in every story. As a stone is drawn from the story bag, the actors who play the roles in that story move to their places.)

As the winter winds howled outside, my people filled the cold months in the long house with conversation and stories. *(He holds up the deer skin story bag, jiggles it, reaches in, pulls out a stone, holds it up for all to see and peers deeply into the stone.)* For every stone in the bag there is a tale to be told. Ahhh, the story of the beginning of all stories...

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STORYTELLER/ENSEMBLE. Many snows ago

Members of the Ensemble make a tight circle. They become the voice and body of a huge HOLE. Enter HUNTER.

STORYTELLER. A hunter returning from a successful hunt found a curious hole in the ground. The hunter looks at it, walks around it, peers into it and says -

HUNTER. Hmm...that hole in the ground is very curious.

STORYTELLER. Hunter looks deeper and deeper into the hole. He doesn't see anything, shrugs and walks away.

HOLE. He!¹

STORYTELLER. Confused, Hunter looks up down and all around to see where the greeting came from. Sadly, he looks everywhere but in the hole!

HUNTER. *(Looking everywhere but in the hole.)* Who said that? I don't believe a hole can talk. Who else is here?

HOLE. *(Louder.)* He!

HUNTER. *(Scared.)* Stop playing games! Who greeted me?

HOLE. Yu'tali². Right here!

HUNTER. *(Improvises and ask audience where the sound is coming from. Roams the space.)* Taane³? Where? Does anyone know where this sound is coming from? Where? Did you hear something?

HOLE. *(Repeats and repeats the line until he is screaming.)*

Yu'tali! Right Here! Yu'tali! Right Here! Yu'tali! Right Here!

STORYTELLER. Terrified – but embarrassed to show it, Hunter races back towards the hole, slams to a stop and then slowly creeps forward to look. Once again, Hunter skeptically peeks in the hole and mumbles -

HUNTER. Who is it?

¹ Hey - hello.

² Yoo' ta-lee – right here

³ Ta-a'ne – where

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HOLE. (*Deep and mysterious.*) I am a grandfather, the keeper of all stories. Bring me a gift of tobacco or beads and I will share all of the stories that ever were.

STORYTELLER. The knowledge hungry Hunter couldn't believe his luck. He races back to his band.

HUNTER. (*Moves to talk to the members of the ENSEMBLE who play members of the band and blurts.*) I have found the most curious hole in the ground.

STORYTELLER. They all stared at him. As he said -

HUNTER. If we roll in gifts, the spirit of the hole promises to roll out all of the stories that ever were. Think of it! Every single story ever told.

BAND Leader. Ma'ta, ma'ta!⁴ No!

HUNTER. Pi'shi!⁵ There is so much for us to learn! Imagine - all the stories that ever were. Come with me and please bring a gift of tobacco or a bead.

STORYTELLER. The members of the band looked at the leader for guidance.

BAND Leader. (*Leader shrugs and nods yes.*) Pi'shi!⁶ Bring your gifts.

STORYTELLER. The band returns to the hole bearing their gifts.

HUNTER. (*Bends over and speaks into the hole.*) Grandfather, I came back and brought my friends. We brought you gifts.

BAND LEADER. Where are the stories?

STORYTELLER. They knelt around the hole and were sheepish when they heard the Hole gratefully say,

HOLE. You honor me with your gifts.

STORYTELLER. The group rolls their gifts into the hole.

HOLE. Wani'shi.⁷ Thank you!

⁴ Mah tah - No.

⁵ Pee'shih - yes.

⁶ Pee-shih - yes.

⁷ Wa-nee'shih - thank you.

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STORYTELLER. As the band sat around the hole, all the stories that ever were began to rapidly roll out. The people could not believe all that they were hearing!

BAND emotionally responds to each type of story.

HOLE. Wonderful stories.

BAND LEADER. Those are so very, very wonderful.

HOLE. Funny stories.

HUNTER. (*Laughing and giggling.*) So funny – I can't wait to tell my family.

HOLE. Magical stories.

ALL. Ho! Ho!⁸

HOLE. And of course, stories to learn from. Tales of our beginnings, tales of prophecy, tales of heroic children, tales that entertained us, tales that would fill many cold days and nights.

STORYTELLER. The band sat and stared at the hole. The stories were all so amazing that no one wanted to leave. But leave they must. They started to get up when the hole said –

HOLE. Know this – never tell stories after Elder Brother Sun moves closer to the earth. Warm days are working days! Planting, fishing, hunting, and providing for our people. When it is cold outside many creatures are asleep. If you tell tales in the summer the snakes, bugs and all kinds of creatures will chase you. If in the heat of the day, you must share a story – protect yourself from the creepy creatures by saying, I am sitting on twelve skunk skins. Do not forget – it is twelve skunk skins!

BAND MEMBER. How many?

HOLE. Twelve – twelve skunk skins!

ENSEMBLE. Wani'shi grandfather. Wani'shi for all you have given us.

STORYTELLER. That is the beginning of the stories which we do not know are true or not.

⁸ Hoh! - exclamation

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STORYTELLER/ENSEMBLE. This is my story, an ancient one.

STORYTELLER. *(Reaches into his/her bag and starts to pull out a stone and wipes his/her brow.)* What story shall this stone tell us? Whew, I am hot. Did it just get hot? Elder Brother Sun must be very near.

SMART ONE. *(Jumps up and stops the Storyteller.)* Don't start! Elder Brother Sun is near. I do not see the buds on the trees, yet it feels like spring in here.

STORYTELLER. AHHH – the warning. Never tell stories in the spring or summer. Snakes and bugs will crawl all over me. Unless,

SMART ONE. ...unless you sit on 12 skunk skins!

STORYTELLER. Of course, we have just heard that. Do we have skunk skins?

Ensemble scurries looking for skunk skins. Finds them but hates to touch the stinky things. They toss them in a pile.

SMART ONE. *(Picks up skins, passes them to others until the STORYTELLER has them. They stink.)* I hope we have enough.

STORYTELLER And ENSEMBLE. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve.

Storyteller sits on the skins with pomp and concern for the smell. Pulls a stone out of the story bag.

STORYTELLER. Ah, the turtle – there at the very beginning.

SCENE 2: *Beginning of the World*

TURTLE takes its place.

STORYTELLER/ENSEMBLE. *Many snows ago,*

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STORYTELLER. According to Lenape tradition, the world began on the back of a great –Turtle – who was swimming on the bottom of a deep, deep ocean. The turtle with some of the ocean floor on its back swam towards the surface, raised its back and let the water run-off. Elder Brother Sun sent down strong hot rays and Turtle said-

TURTLE. Hu!⁹ Elder brother sun feels good.

Members of the ensemble become the TREE, MAN and WOMAN.

STORYTELLER. The earth on Turtle’s back was soon dry and a tree began to slowly grow. It got -

TREE. - taller and taller until it started to sway. The tree bent over to touch the earth. Suddenly, the first man sprouted from the tree’s root. The man looked around –

MAN. I am so alone here. So, Turtle, how’s the water?

TREE. Then the tip of the tree bent over again and touched the earth. Another root took hold and from that root came –

WOMAN. The first woman. (*Looks at the Man.*)

You can call me In-the Forest. Who are you?

MAN. (*He shyly stammers.*) I’m really new...

WOMAN. (*She smiles at him.*)

I’ll call you Thunder Arrow. We will be a family.

STORYTELLER. (*Aside*) Thunder Arrow?

Woman. So, what are you doing just standing under a tree?

SHOULDN’T you be hunting or fishing? Elder Brother Sun is close – there are leaves on the tree...

STORYTELLER. That is the beginning of all people.

STORYTELLER/ENSEMBLE. This is my story, an ancient one.

STORYTELLER. (*Takes a pebble out of the story bag, looks at it and smiles.*) A tale we know well – a feud between the three clans.

⁹ Hoo – exclamation of joy

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SCENE 3: *Turtles Are the Best!*

STORYTELLER/ENSEMBLE. Many snows ago –

STORYTELLER. It is said that the three persons who started the clans were walking near the river and had a huge argument about which clan was the best.

TURKEY, WOLF and TURTLE walk near the river.

TURKEY. I am a turkey, and I am the best. I can fly.

TURTLE. I am a turtle, and I am the best. I can swim.

TURKEY. A little slow aren't ya?

STORYTELLER. And of course, the wolf just had to howl.

WOLF. Aoooooooooooo. Why everyone knows the wolf is the best. I am fast and ferocious. Grrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr.

TURKEY. *(In great pain Turkey flaps his wings and sticks them over his ears.)* And loud.

STORYTELLER. Turkey standing on the riverbank suddenly looked across.

TURKEY. *(Turkey moves to the riverbank and strains to see.)* Gobbble gobble gobble – look, look, look – on the other side of the river.

STORYTELLER. All the clans raced to see what Turkey saw – well, Turtle didn't really race.

Wolf races to Turkey and Turtle slowly joins them.

TURKEY/WOLF. Enough food for my clan!

TURTLE. *(Out of breath)* Enough food for my clan!

STORYTELLER. All three wanted to be the first to get to the food. Turtle sloooooowly walked into the water and began to swim. Turkey jumped up into the sky and began to fly. Wolf – never fond of water - could do nothing but run back and forth on the

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bank howling. (*Wolf runs back and forth howling! Turkey attempts to fly. Turtle slowly swims across the water.*) Suddenly, Turkey begins to flounder! As frantically as the flapping wings flapped they didn't seem to keep Turkey in the air.

ENSEMBLE. Oh no!

TURKEY. (*Turkey frantically flaps, flaps and falls.*)

Gobbbble gobbbble gobbbble flap, flap, flap

STORYTELLER. The faster Turkey flaps the faster he falls.

ENSEMBLE. Splat!

STORYTELLER. Turkey falls in the water – sputters and manages to get ashore on the original side.

(*Turkey makes drowning sounds and swims. Wolf runs around howling. And Turtle keeps swimming to the other side.*)

Wolf growling and howling races back and forth along the bank.

And Turtle? Why Turtle keeps on sloooowly swimming until they reach the other side. Turtle climbs and climbs and climbs onto the bank.

TURTLE. (*Tired but happy*) Ju!¹⁰ I am finally here. Look there is enough food for all the clans.

ENSEMBLE. Ju! Ju!

STORYTELLER. Even though Turtle was willing to share the food with all the clans Turkey still sputtered.

TURKEY. Gobbbble, gobble, gobbbbbble.

STORYTELLER. Wolf wasn't too happy either and just growled.

WOLF. GRRRRR, AAAAOOOOOOOO!

STORYTELLER. That is why the persons who started the clans decided that –

ENSEMBLE. The turtle clan is the best!

TURTLE/WOLF/TURKEY. The turtle clan is the best.

STORYTELLER/ENSEMBLE. This is my story an ancient one. *The Storyteller reaches into the bag and pulls out another pebble.*

¹⁰ Joo – exclamation of joy

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SCENE 4: *Wolves and Dogs*

STORYTELLER. Oho! – The Wolves and the Dogs! Long, long ago dogs were a part of every family. The day a child was born it was given its very own pet dog – it is said that dogs steal illness from a child. The dog is very special to us – and is related to the wolf.

STORYTELLER/ENSEMBLE. Many snows ago,

STORYTELLER. When this world was new, wolves and dogs were one big family. They all used to live together. But one act of forgetfulness changed things. It was winter. The snow was so deep that no one wanted to go outside. The air was very, very cold and trees were full of ice. Old Wolf and some dogs were huddled together in a cave.

OLD WOLF. Brrrrrrrr, I am so very, very cold and so hungry I could faint. Who will go get a firebrand, so we can make a warm fire?

STORYTELLER. A tiny little puppy said-

DOG. Woof, woof, my friend, I will go get the firebrand. I will help you get warm and then I will help you find food to eat.

OLD WOLF. You are so very little - it might be too much –

DOG. Hey, watch it! I'm a rough tough pup. I want to help you and I will help you.

OLD WOLF. All right, so be it. Wani'shi.

STORYTELLER. The little dog went to get the firebrand – a hot coal to light another fire. He stumbled through the snow. His little feet sinking with every step. He walked and walked and soon came to one of our camps. He was sniffing around a wigwam looking for a hot coal.

DOG. (*Cautiously sniffs around a wigwam.*) Sniff, sniff. If I keep sniffing around wigwams, I'll smell food. Food is cooked over fire and I can find a hot coal! Sniff. Sniff. Smells good – how do I carry a hot coal?

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STORYTELLER. Suddenly a little child came out of the wigwam saw the dog.

CHILD. OOOOOO – how very cute! I want to play with this cute little pup.

STORYTELLER. Soon the dog and the girl were happily playing together – (*Dog and Child play fetch with a stick.*)

DOG. I’m shivering. It is too cold to play outside now.

CHILD. Poor puppy, you are so very cold. Come into our wigwam. I will feed you and keep you warm.

STORYTELLER. The little pup leaped into the air with joy, gave a little yelp and went into the bark house. H’mm – it looks like Dog forgot all about bringing the firebrand to his cold and hungry friend – Old Wolf. Actually, he forgot all about the wolf. The wolf waited and waited and waited. Finally, the wolf gave up.

OLD WOLF. “I want to help you and I will help you.” That little puppy is a big liar! If I do not die of hunger or freeze to death, I’ll chase him and knock him in the head. I want to live long enough to ignore him. Growl. Cough. Cough. Brrrrr.

STORYTELLER. For this reason, wolves and dogs are afraid of each other to this day. This is my story an

ENSEMBLE. Ancient one (*The Storyteller settles back on the bench and slowly pulls another pebble out of the bag.*)

SCENE 5: *Vision Quest*

SFX: animal sounds and nature.

STORYTELLER. Ah, an important stone, Three Boys on a Vision Quest. For my people a vision quest is a very special time. It marks a boy’s arrival at adulthood. Boys must leave their games behind and become men. At a certain age, boys are rejected by the band. It is time for them to leave their comfortable homes. Many boys think, “No one is tossing me out – and I’m almost a man.” I

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say listen, you foolish boys. I am a Storyteller. Even my parents chased me from the village.

STORYTELLER/ENSEMBLE. Many snows ago –

STORYTELLER. It was time for three Lenape boys to be sent on a vision quest. The Elders of the village captured the boys in a circle and began to throw things at them while screaming the nastiest of things.

ELDERS circle HUNTER BOY, WARRIOR BOY and LOVER BOY taunt them, throw sticks at them and chase them from the village.

NUMEROUS ELDERS. (*Yelling out improvised nastiness.*) You don't do anything right! He's so stupid! I can't stand the sight of you! Leave – leave we can't stand you near us.

STORYTELLER. The Elders then turn their backs on the three forlorn boys. The young men, looking back wistfully, and with tears in their eyes walk out to the forest. Friendless wanderers – will a spirit force take you all under its protection? Or will you wander the forest until you die?

Hunter Boy, Warrior Boy and Lover Boy warily walk through the forest.

STORYTELLER. The three boys lost sight of each other and not knowing what to do -

WARRIOR BOY. - each sat -

HUNTER BOY. - beneath -

LOVER BOY. - a tree.

STORYTELLER. They were more than a little nervous. Alone with nature and their thoughts, each made offerings to the spirits and waited for a vision. The boys were very brave. Nothing scared them. Not the growling sounds of the animals.

ENSEMBLE. (*Make loud and various growls under the next dialogue.*) Growl, grrrrrr, ahooooo.

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WARRIOR BOY. (*Taking deep breaths.*) I am not nervous. I am very brave.

HUNTER BOY. (*Shaking.*) Nothing scares me. What's that???

LOVER BOY. (*Eyes open wide with fear.*) Is that the whistling wind?

ENSEMBLE. (*Make various wind noises.*) Whhissssssssh

HUNTER BOY. (*Breathing deeply.*) I will be fine. I will be fine. I will be fine and a vision will come.

WARRIOR BOY. (*Praying.*) Please spirits of the forest, may each of us receive a guardian spirit.

LOVER BOY. (*Plops on the ground.*) I can't walk another step.

STORYTELLER. The boys, hungry, tired and thirsty, fell deeply asleep.

LOVER BOY. ZZZZZ Snores filled the woods.

STORYTELLER. A Manëtu ¹¹ whirled into each boy's dreams and asked each boy the same very important question.

MANËTU. (*Shakes a rattle over Hunter Boy.*)

What would you like to be when you are a man?

HUNTER BOY. I would like to be a great hunter.

MANËTU. (*Shakes a rattle magically over the Hunter Boy.*) So, it shall be.

STORYTELLER. The Manëtu glides through the forest and appeared before the second boy.

MANËTU. (*Shakes a rattle over Warrior Boy.*) What would you like to be when you are a man?

WARRIOR BOY. I would like to be a great warrior.

MANËTU. (*Shakes a rattle mystically over Warrior Boy.*) So, it shall be.

STORYTELLER. Looking to the heavens, the Manëtu floated towards the third boy and repeated his question.

MANËTU. (*Shakes a rattle over Lover Boy.*) What would you like to be when you are a man?

LOVER BOY. I would like all the girls in the world to love me.

¹¹ Man-eh-too – spirit

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Manëtu stares, sighs, rattles over the boy's head and disappears.

STORYTELLER. Time past and the boys grew into men. The Manëtu granted each request. The boys now men, demonstrate their prowess every day. The first boy was -

HUNTER BOY. (*Leaps around with a bow and arrow.*)

- a wonderful hunter. The spirits guide my arrows and they always hit their mark.

ENSEMBLE. (*Assorted cries.*) Yo!¹² Ju!¹³

STORYTELLER. The second boy was a -

WARRIOR Boy. (*Holds up a club.*) - great warrior. Humbled by my success, I say -the wisdom of the elders helped me lead the tribe to victories.

ENSEMBLE. (*Assorted yelps and cheers.*) Wooo! Yo! Ju!

STORYTELLER. But the third boy, who wanted all the women to love him - - Well, as -

WOMEN. - any girl will tell you. All the women did.

SFX. Dance drumming. Tempo escalates as band dances.

STORYTELLER. At a big gathering a bunch of women started fighting over who would dance with the handsome young man. Each begged louder than the next.

Women encircle Lover Boy and beg him to dance with them. They push each other away, tear at his clothes and pull on his arms.

WOMEN. (*Ad lib pleadings.*) Dance with me. No dance with me. Not her! With me.

STORYTELLER. They pulled and begged and pulled and screamed and pulled. Pulling on him until he was torn apart!

¹² Yoh - all right!

¹³ Joo - exclamation of joy

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Crash of drums as Lover Boy falls to the ground. The horrified Women begin to wail.

STORYTELLER. He should have asked for only one woman to love him. There are two corrections – morals – to this story. One is to not be greedy when you ask for something, and the other is to not ask to be more than you can be. This is my story,

STORYTELLER/ENSEMBLE. an ancient one.

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