

People of the Woodlands

Here is a simple narrative for you to base your own presentation on when giving your child a colorful and lively picture of the People of the Woodlands:

The People of the Woodlands lived over a vast, vast area. In the very northernmost parts of their lands, the winters were long and cold and dark. In the southern parts of their lands, the winters were mild and wet and snow fell very rarely. Throughout their lands, the People saw four distinct seasons every year – fall, winter, spring and summer – and they lived in harmony with the changes that each season brought.

The trees clearly heralded the change of seasons. While many pine trees grew in the People's lands, tall stately trees that bore their thick coats of needles all year round, the rest of the trees would change as the cycle of the year turned. In early spring, the sap would rise in the maple trees and the People would gently pierce the bark of these trees, collecting the sweet sap and boiling it down for sugar. The trees would form their leaf buds and as the snow melted and the first wild flowers would push up under the bare trees, the People would know it was time to plant their crops of corn, beans and squash.

Spring turned to summer, the days lengthened and grew hot and the trees would be in full leaf. The People spent their days tending their crops, making blankets and rugs and baskets; visiting other villages to trade; and attending to their affairs.

By the early fall, cool winds would begin to blow and the leaves on the trees would turn glorious shades of orange, yellow, red and brown. The People knew it was the time of the harvest, the time to hunt and the time to prepare for winter.

Winter's cold winds and snow would chase the leaves from the trees, blanketing the earth till spring. The hard times of winter would be upon the People and their survival depended on how well they had preserved their food from the fall and how often the men were able to go out and hunt.

And so the People lived in the deep, vast woods. They would clear small plots of land of trees, chopping and burning the trees and then setting fire to the stumps to remove them from the soil. They planted their crops carefully, knowing that the different plants could help each other grow. The Three Sisters were corn, beans and pumpkins. The corn grew straight and tall and provided support for the bean vines to climb. The beans added richness to the soil through their roots, thus feeding the corn and pumpkin plants. And the huge leaves of the pumpkins blocked the sun from any weeds which wanted to grow, thus protecting themselves and the beans and corn.

Aside from the plants they grew, the People also gathered roots, leaves, fruit and berries from plants growing wild in the woods. They found strawberries, blueberries and blackberries; mushrooms; hazelnuts, walnuts and acorns; and many leaves to eat as greens and roots similar to potatoes to bake in the ashes of their fire pits or to add to pots of stew. They also knew all about the healing qualities of plants and made medicine from them. They made water containers from birch bark lined with pitch, a sticky substance from pine trees. Well-made containers never leaked.