

How Kischelemukong Made the People and the Seasons

Lenni Lenape – Eastern Woodland

Story from *Keepers of Life: Discovering Plants Through Native American Stories and Earth Activities for Children* by Michael Caduto and Joseph Bruchac.

Long ago, Kischelemukong, the Great Mystery, built the world. First Kischelemukong caused a great turtle to rise up from the depths of the water and float on the surface. Then Kischelemukong took moist earth and placed it on the back of the giant turtle as the turtle floated in the endless ocean. The ridges of Turtle's back turned into mountains, and grass and shrubs and trees of all kinds began to grow from the soil.

It went on this way for some time, but Kischelemukong felt that something was yet to be made. There were birds and animals and living things of all kinds, but there was something yet to be made. Kischelemukong considered shaping beings from the stones of Earth. But such beings would be heavy-footed and they would crush the plants beneath them.

Instead, Kischelemukong made a straight ash tree grow up tall. From its branches the first men and the first women sprouted.

Then Kischelemukong placed the sun in the day sky and the moon in the night sky. And so that all would grow and rest in its proper time, Kischelemukong created the four directions and the seasons which would come from each of those directions. West and North and East were Grandfathers, governing the times of Fall and Winter and Spring. South was a Grandmother, bringing the warmth and new life of Summer. Like the trees and the plants, human beings grew to love that time of the year and their Grandmother South the best of all.

Then Kischelemukong decided to make sure the divisions between the seasons were fair and acceptable.

“It will be this way,” Kischelemukong said. “Each year there will be a contest between Grandfather North and Grandmother South. They will play the hand game. One will take a bead and hide it in one hand or the other so that the opponent must guess which hand it is held in. Each will have 12 sticks and each time a winning guess is made, one stick will be taken. Whenever Grandmother South begins to win more sticks, the weather will begin to turn warm and Spring will come. But when her luck begins to change, Autumn will be a signal that Grandfather North is winning his sticks back again.”

And so it is to this day. Because the game between Grandmother South and Grandfather North is so evenly matched, the seasons are always about the same length, but as in every game, sometimes one of them has better luck than the other and so we never know for sure when each season will end or begin.