# Readygen Seat Collection



#### **PEARSON**

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### from AMERICAN TALL TALES by Mary Pope Osborne

## PECOS BILL



#### NOTES ON THE STORY

Yarns about Pecos Bill, "the greatest cowpuncher ever known on either side of the Rockies, from Texas through Montana and on into Canada," first appeared in a 1923 *Century Magazine*. The author of the piece, Edward O'Reilly, wrote the "saga" of Pecos Bill by combining a number of western folklore episodes with the boastful, comic tall-tale language of heroes such as Davy Crockett and Paul Bunyan.

After O'Reilly invented the character of Pecos Bill, many others revised and expanded upon the yarns in dozens of books, articles, poems, recordings, and plays. Pecos Bill seemed to capture the spirit of an earlier America—wild, untamed, and unsocialized. He even added an occasional note of his own brand of recklessness to stories about other tall-tale characters as well. In an original Febold Feboldson story, Febold and Pecos Bill have a shoot-out. And in a Paul Bunyan anthology, Pecos Bill teaches Paul how to ride a streak of lightning. This tale about Pecos Bill was derived from the O'Reilly saga as well as a number of other retellings.





Ask any coyote near the Pecos River in western Texas who was the best cowboy who ever lived, and he'll throw back his head and howl, "Ah-hooo!" If you didn't know already, that's coyote language for *Pecos Bill*.

When Pecos Bill was a little baby, he was as tough as a pine knot. He teethed on horseshoes instead of teething rings and played with grizzly bears instead of teddy bears. He could have grown up just fine in the untamed land of eastern Texas. But one day his pappy ran in from the fields, hollering, "Pack up, Ma! Neighbors movin' in fifty miles away! It's gettin' too crowded!"

Before sundown Bill's folks loaded their fifteen kids and all their belongings into their covered wagon and started west. As they clattered across the desolate land of western Texas, the crushing heat nearly drove them all crazy. Baby Bill got so hot and cross that he began to wallop his big brothers. Pretty soon all fifteen kids were going at one another tooth and nail. Before they turned each other into catfish bait, Bill fell out of the wagon and landed *kerplop* on the sun-scorched desert.

The others were so busy fighting that they didn't even notice the baby was missing until it was too late to do anything about it.

Well, tough little Bill just sat there in the dirt, watching his family rattle off in a cloud of dust, until an old coyote walked over and sniffed him.

"Goo-goo!" Bill said.

Now it's an amazing coincidence, but "Goo-goo" happens to mean something similar to "Glad to meet you" in coyote language. Naturally the old coyote figured he'd come across one of his own kind. He gave Bill a big lick and picked him up by the scruff of the neck and carried him home to his den.

Bill soon discovered the coyote's kinfolk were about the wildest, roughest bunch you could imagine. Before he knew it, he was roaming the prairies with the pack. He howled at the moon, sniffed the brush, and chased lizards across the sand. He was having such a good time, scuttling about naked and dirty on all fours, that he completely forgot what it was like to be a human.

Pecos Bill's coyote days came to an end about seventeen years later. One evening as he was sniffing the sagebrush, a cowpoke came loping by on a big horse. "Hey, you!" he shouted. "What in the world are you?"

Bill sat on his haunches and stared at the feller.

"What are you?" asked the cowpoke again.

"Varmint," said Bill hoarsely, for he hadn't used his human voice in seventeen years. "No, you ain't!"

"Yeah, I am. I got fleas, don't I?"

"Well, that don't mean nothing. A lot of Texans got fleas. The thing varmints got that you ain't got is a tail."

"Oh, yes, I do have a tail," said Pecos Bill.

"Lemme see it then," said the cowpoke.

Bill turned around to look at his rear end, and for the first time in his life he realized he didn't have a tail.

"Dang," he said. "But if I'm not a varmint, what am I?"

"You're a cowboy! So start acting like one!"

Bill just growled at the feller like any coyote worth his salt would. But deep down in his heart of hearts he knew the cowpoke was right. For the last seventeen years he'd had a sneaking suspicion that he was different from the pack of coyotes. For one thing, none of them seemed to smell quite as bad as he did.

So with a heavy heart he said good-bye to his fourlegged friends and took off with the cowpoke for the nearest ranch.

Acting like a human wasn't all that easy for Pecos Bill. Even though he soon started dressing right, he never bothered to shave or comb his hair. He'd just throw some water on his face in the morning and go around the rest of the day looking like a wet dog. Ignorant cowpokes claimed Bill wasn't too smart. Some of the meaner ones liked to joke that he wore a ten-dollar hat on a five-cent head.

The truth was Pecos Bill would soon prove to be one of the greatest cowboys who ever lived. He just needed to find the kind of folks who'd appreciate him. One night when he was licking his dinner plate, his ears perked up. A couple of ranch hands were going on about a gang of wild cowboys.



"Yep. Those fellas are more animal than human," one ranch hand was saying.

"Yep. Them's the toughest bunch I ever come across. Heck, they're so tough, they can kick fire out of flint rock with their bare toes!"

"Yep. 'N' they like to bite nails in half for fun!"

"Who are these fellers?" asked Bill.

"The Hell's Gate Gang," said the ranch hand. "The mangiest, meanest, most low-down bunch of low-life varmints that ever grew hair."

"Sounds like my kind of folks." said Bill, and before anyone could holler whoa, he jumped on his horse and took off for Hell's Gate Canyon. Bill hadn't gone far when disaster struck. His horse stepped in a hole and broke his ankle.

"Dang!" said Bill as he stumbled up from the spill. He draped the lame critter around his neck and hurried on.

After he'd walked about a hundred more miles, Bill heard some mean rattling. Then a fifty-foot rattlesnake reared up its ugly head and stuck out its long, forked tongue, ready to fight.

"Knock it off, you scaly-hided fool. I'm in a hurry," Bill said.

The snake didn't give a spit for Bill's plans. He just rattled on.

Before the cussed varmint could strike, Bill had no choice but to knock him cross-eyed. "Hey, feller," he said, holding up the dazed snake. "I like your spunk. Come go with us." Then he wrapped the rattler around his arm and continued on his way.

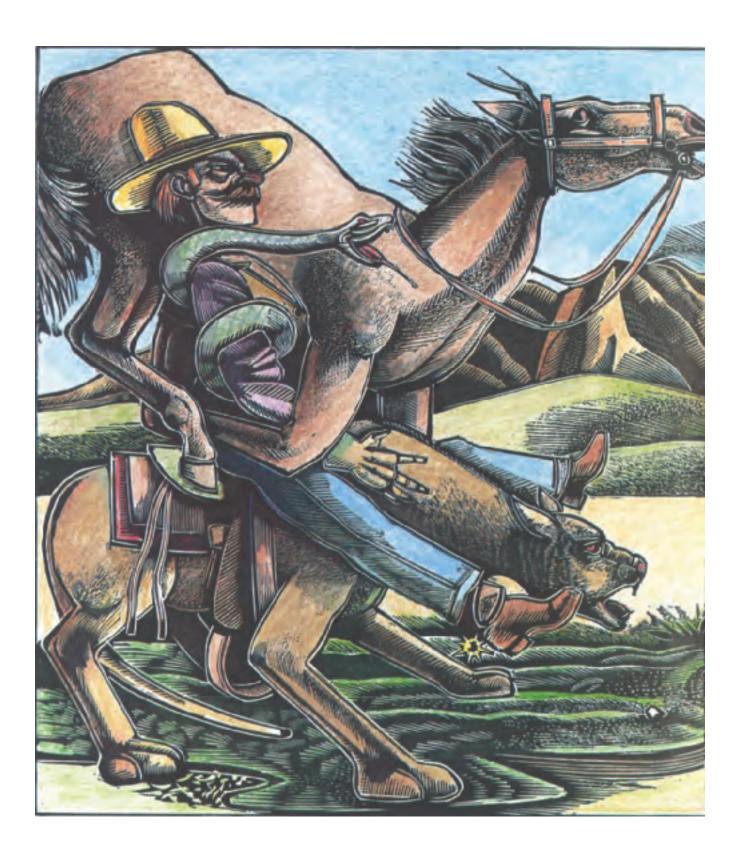
After Bill had hiked another hundred miles with his horse around his neck and his snake around his arm, he heard a terrible growl. A huge mountain lion was crouching on a cliff, getting ready to leap on top of him.

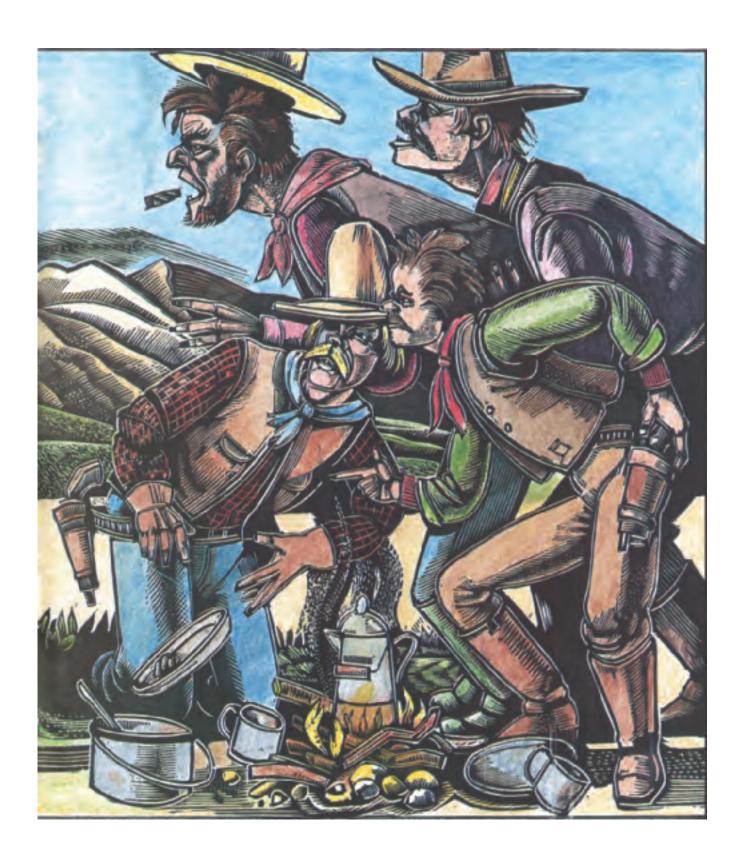
"Don't jump, you mangy bobtailed fleabag!" Bill said.

Well, call any mountain lion a mangy bobtailed fleabag, and he'll jump on your back for sure. After this one leaped onto Bill, so much fur began to fly that it darkened the sky. Bill wrestled that mountain lion into a headlock, then squeezed him so tight that the big cat had to cry uncle.

When the embarrassed old critter started to slink off, Bill felt sorry for him. "Aw, c'mon, you big silly," he said. "You're more like me than most humans I meet."

He saddled up the cat, jumped on his back, and the four of them headed for the canyon, with the mountain lion screeching, the horse neighing, the rattler rattling, and Pecos Bill hollering a wild war whoop.





When the Hell's Gate Gang heard those noises coming from the prairie, they nearly fainted. They dropped their dinner plates, and their faces turned as white as bleached desert bones. Their knees knocked and their six-guns shook.

"Hey, there!" Bill said as he sidled up to their campfire, grinning. "Who's the boss around here?"

A nine-foot feller with ten pistols at his sides stepped forward and in a shaky voice said, "Stranger, I was. But from now on, it'll be you."

"Well, thanky, pardner," said Bill. "Get on with your dinner, boys. Don't let me interrupt."

Once Bill settled down with the Hell's Gate Gang, his true genius revealed itself. With his gang's help, he put together the biggest ranch in the southwest. He used New Mexico as a corral and Arizona as a pasture. He invented tarantulas and scorpions as practical jokes. He also invented roping. Some say his rope was exactly as long as the equator; other argue it was two feet shorter.

Things were going fine for Bill until Texas began to suffer the worst drought in its history. It was so dry that all the rivers turned as powdery as biscuit flour. The parched grass was catching fire everywhere. For a while Bill and his gang managed to lasso water from the Rio Grande. When that river dried up, they lassoed water from the Gulf of Mexico.

No matter what he did, though, Bill couldn't get enough water to stay ahead of the drought. All his horses and cows were starting to dry up and blow away like balls of tumbleweed. It was horrible. Just when the end seemed near, the sky turned a deep shade of purple. From the distant mountains came a terrible roar. The cattle began to stampede, and a huge black funnel of a cyclone appeared, heading straight for Bill's ranch.

The rest of the Hell's Gate Gang shouted, "Help!" and ran.

But Pecos Bill wasn't scared in the least. "Yahoo!" he hollered, and he swung his lariat and lassoed that cyclone around its neck.

Bill held on tight as he got sucked up into the middle of the swirling cloud. He grabbed the cyclone by the ears and pulled himself onto her back. Then he let out a whoop and headed that twister across Texas.

The mighty cyclone bucked, arched, and screamed like a wild bronco. But Pecos Bill just held on with his legs and used his strong hands to wring the rain out of her wind. He wrung out rain that flooded Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, until finally he slid off the shriveled-up funnel and fell into California. The earth sank about two hundred feet below sea level in the spot where Bill landed, creating the area known today as Death Valley.

"There. That little waterin' should hold things for a while," he said, brushing himself off.

After his cyclone ride, no horse was too wild for Pecos Bill. He soon found a young colt that was as tough as a tiger and as crazy as a streak of lightning. He named the colt Widow Maker and raised him on barbed wire and dynamite. Whenever the two rode together, they backflipped and somersaulted all over Texas, loving every minute of it.



One day when Bill and Widow Maker were bouncing around the Pecos River, they came across an awesome sight: a wild-looking, red-haired woman riding on the back of the biggest catfish Bill had ever seen. The woman looked like she was having a ball, screeching, "Ride 'em, cowgirl!" as the catfish whipped her around in the air.

"What's your name?" Bill shouted.

"Slue-foot Sue! What's it to you?" she said. Then she war-whooped away over the windy water.

Thereafter all Pecos Bill could think of was Slue-foot Sue. He spent more and more time away from the Hell's Gate Gang as he wandered the barren cattle-lands, looking for her. When he finally found her lonely little cabin, he was so love-struck he reverted to some of his old coyote ways. He sat on his haunches in the moonlight and began a-howling and ah-hooing.

Well, the good news was that Sue had a bit of coyote in her too, so she completely understood Bill's language. She stuck her head out her window and ah-hooed back to him that she loved him, too. Consequently Bill and Sue decided to get married.

On the day of the wedding Sue wore a beautiful white dress with steel-spring bustle, and Bill appeared in an elegant buckskin suit.

But after a lovely ceremony, a terrible catastrophe occurred. Slue-foot Sue got it into her head that she just had to have a ride on Bill's wild bronco, Widow Maker.

"You can't do that, honey," Bill said. "He won't let any human toss a leg over him but me."

"Don't worry," said Sue. "You know I can ride anything on four legs, not to mention what flies or swims."

Bill tried his best to talk Sue out of it, but she wouldn't listen. She was dying to buck on the back of that bronco. Wearing her white wedding dress with the bustle, she jumped on Widow Maker and kicked him with her spurs.

Well, that bronco didn't need any thorns in his side to start bucking to beat the band. He bounded up in the air with such amazing force that suddenly Sue was flying high into the Texas sky. She flew over plains and mesas, over canyons, deserts, and prairies. She flew so high that she looped over the new moon and fell back to earth.

But when Sue landed on her steel-spring bustle, she rebounded right back into the heavens! As she bounced back and forth, between heaven and earth, Bill whirled his lariat above his head, then lassoed her. But instead of bringing Sue back down to earth, he got yanked into the

night sky alongside her!

Together Pecos Bill and Slue-foot Sue bounced off the earth and went flying to the moon. And at that point Bill must have gotten some sort of foothold in a moon crater-because neither he nor Sue returned to earth. Not ever.

Folks figure those two must have dug their boot heels into some moon cheese and raised a pack of wild coyotes just like themselves. Texans'll tell you that every time you hear thunder rolling over the desolate land near the Pecos River, it's just Bill's family having a good laugh upstairs. When you hear a strange ah-hooing in the dark night, don't be fooled---that's the sound of Bill howling *on* the moon instead of *at* it. And when lights flash across the midnight sky, you can bet it's Bill and Sue riding the backs of some white-hot shooting stars.



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## JOHN HENRY

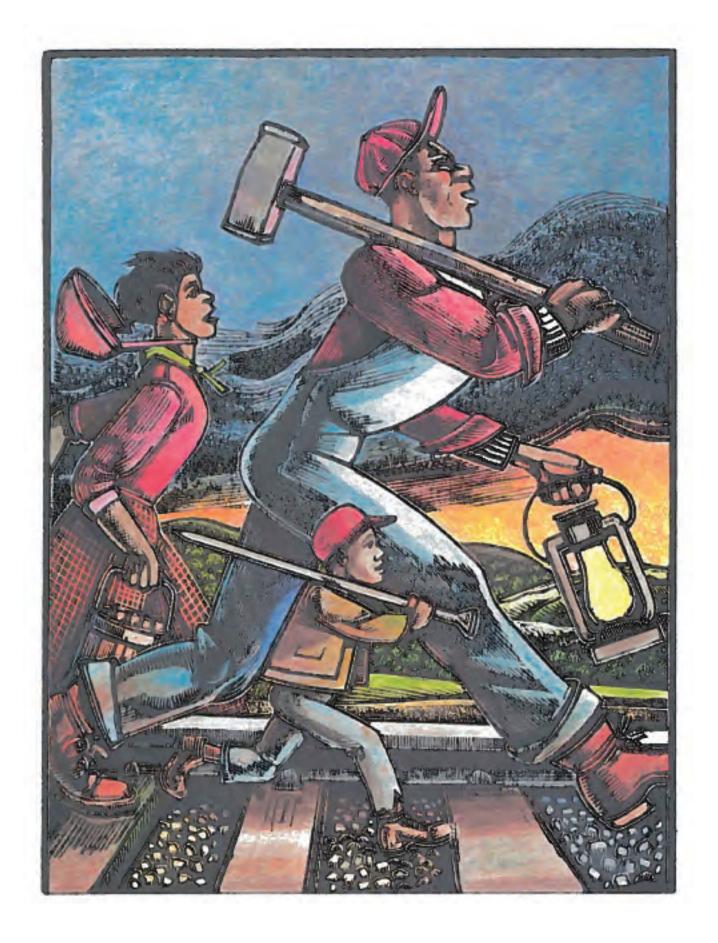


#### NOTES ON THE STORY

After the civil war, the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad Company laid hundreds of miles of railroad track through West Virginia. These new railroad routes opened up timber and coal lands and created new towns. When the tracks reached the Alleghenies, the railroad company hired more than a thousand laborers to build tunnels through the mountains. The tunnels were created by blasting through the mountain shale. This work was done by "steel drivers," men who drilled steel spikes into the solid rock. Once the holes were drilled, they were packed with dynamite. Since the early West Virginia tunnels had no safety regulations, these tunnel workers were exposed to an early death from the dynamite explosions, falling rock, and lethal dust created by the blasts.

Starting in the 1870s, a black steel driver named John Henry became the subject of many of the work songs sung by railroad-tunnel gangs. Like most work songs, the John Henry songs consisted of a few short lines repeated several times with pauses in between for the stroke of a pick or hammer. Historians disagree about whether John Henry was based on a real man or not. Some believe that he can be traced to John Hardy, a truelife subject of popular ballads who was also a superior steel driver; others believe that a man named John Henry actually worked on the Big Bend tunnel in the Alleghenies.

Whether John Henry was real or mythical, he was a strong, enduring character to many southern black laborers. Later, when songs about him were recorded and played on the radio, he became known to the general public as well.





he night John Henry was born the sky was as black as coal, thunder rolled through the heavens, and the earth trembled.

"This boy is special," the preacher said as folks gathered in the cabin by the river to see the new baby.

In the dim lantern light, John Henry was the most powerful-looking baby folks had ever seen. His arms were as thick as stovepipes. He had great broad shoulders and strong muscles. And as folks stared at him, he opened his eyes and smiled a smile that lit up the southern night.

When John Henry raised his arm, folks gasped and brought their hands to their faces, for they saw that the mighty baby had been born with a hammer in his hand. Then they all began to laugh and felt happier than they had in a long, long time.

John Henry grew up fast in a world that didn't let children stay children for long. Before he was six, he was carrying stones for the railroad gangs that were building tracks through the land of West Virginia. By the time he was ten, he was hammering steel from dawn till dark. No train whistle in America sang as loud as John Henry's mighty hammer. It rang like silver and shone like gold. It flashed up through the air, making a wide arc more than nineteen feet, then crashed down, driving a steel spike six inches into solid rock.

By the time he was a young man, John Henry was the best steel driver in the whole country. He could hammer for hours without missing a beat, so fast that his hammer moved like lightning. He had to keep a pail of water nearby to cool it down, and he wore out two handles a day. All the railroad bosses wanted John Henry to work for them. When the Chesapeake and Ohio started making a tunnel in the Allegheny Mountains, they asked him to lead their force of steel-driving men.

Soon John Henry was whistling and singing in the early summer light as he walked to work in the mountain tunnel. Beside him was his wife, Lucy, with eyes as bright as stars and hair as wavy as the sea. Lucy was a steel driver herself. At noontime she drove the spikes while John Henry sat with their little boy, Johnny, in the sunny mountain grass and ate his lunch of ham hocks and biscuits with molasses.

Lifting Johnny high into the air, John Henry shouted, "Someday you're going to be a steel-driving man like your daddy!"

July of that summer was the hottest month on record in West Virginia. Working in the terrible heat, many of the steel drivers collapsed by noon. But John Henry tried to protect their jobs by picking up their hammers and doing their work too. One week he did his own work and the work of four others as well. He hammered day and night, barely stopping for meals.

When the men tried to thank John Henry, he just smiled and said, "A man ain't nothing but a man. He's just got to do his best."

August was hotter than July. One day as the men labored in the white light of the afternoon sun, a city salesman drove up to the work site. "Come see, everybody!" he shouted. "Lookee here at this incredible invention! A steam drill that can drill holes faster than a dozen men working together!"

"Aw, I don't know about that," said the railroad boss, rubbing his grizzly jaw. "I got the best steel driver in the country. His name is John Henry, and he can beat *two* dozen men working together."

"That's impossible," the salesman said. "But if you can prove your hand driller is faster than my steam driller, I'll give you this machine for free."

The boss called to John Henry, "This fellow doubts which of you can drill faster. How about a big contest?"

As John Henry stared at the steam drill, he saw a picture of the future. He saw machines taking over the jobs of the country's finest workers. He saw himself and his friends out of work and begging beside the road. He saw men robbed of their dignity and robbed of their families.

"I'd rather die with my hammer in my hand than let that steam drill run me down," he yelled back. And his boss and friends all cheered.

"That contest will be the death of you, John Henry," Lucy said later. "You got a wife and child, and if anything happens to you, we won't ever smile again."

John Henry just lifted Johnny into the air and said, "Honey, a man ain't nothing but a man. But a man's always got to do his best. And tomorrow I'm going to take my hammer and drive that steel faster than any machine!"

Lucy put on her best blue dress, and folks came from all over Ohio, Virginia, and Kentucky. They came from the countryside, and they came from the cities.

At half past six in the morning, John Henry and the salesman with the steam-powered drill stood side by side. Early as it was, the sun was burning hot. There was no breeze. Sweat poured down people's faces like water down a hill.

As the onlookers gathered around the contestants, Little Bill, the worker who loved John Henry the best, said, "There ain't a steam drill anywheres that can beat that man!"

But the city folks, who had staked their hopes on the future of machines, said, "He won't beat that drill unless the rocks in the mountain turn to gold!"



"No, sirree!" said Jimmy, John Henry's oldest friend.
"Before that drill wins, he'll make the mountain fall!"

*Bang!*----the race was on! As the steam-drill salesman turned on the steam, John Henry kissed the smooth handle of his hammer.

At first the steam drill drove the steel twice as fast as John Henry did. But then he grabbed another hammer and started working with a hammer in each hand. He went faster and faster, striking blow after blow as he tunneled into the mountain.

"That man's a mighty man," a city man shouted, "but he'll weaken when the hardest rock is found."

"Not John Henry! Just listen to that steel ring!" Little Bill said.

"I believe these mountains are caving in!" said the city man.

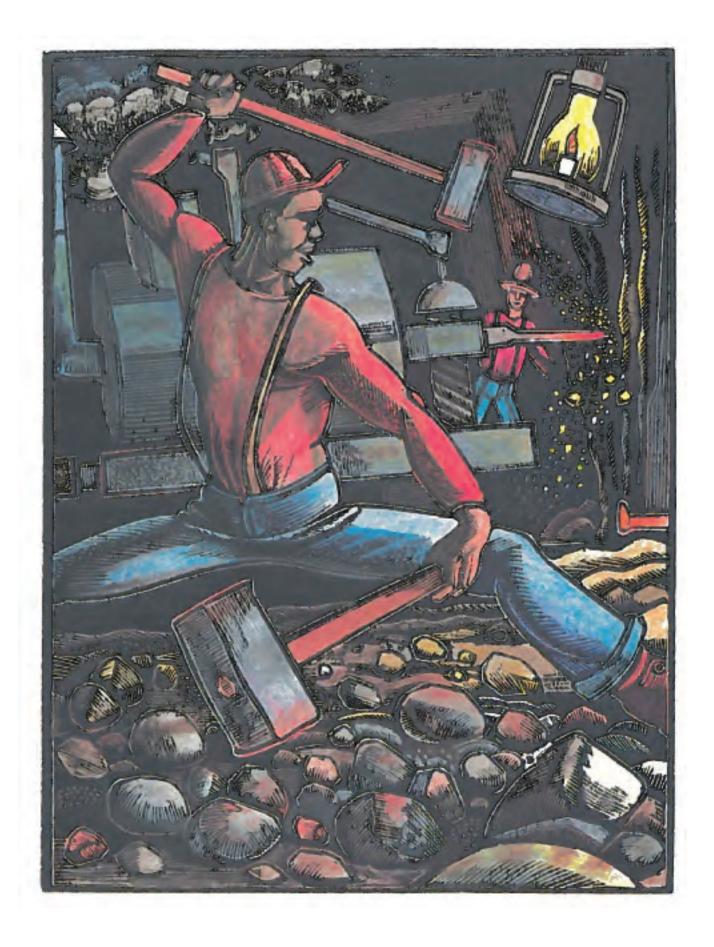
"No, they're not. That's his hammers you hear in the wind," Jimmy cried.

Inside the dark tunnel, where the yellow dust and heat were so thick that most men would have smothered, John Henry hammered faster and faster. As clouds of stone dust billowed from the mouth of the tunnel, the crowd shouted and screamed. John Henry's hammers sounded like ten thousand hammers.

Lucy, Little Bill, and Jimmy cheered when the steam drill was dragged out of the tunnel. Sputtering and spewing, it had broken down.

"Come back now, John Henry!" Lucy shouted.

But John Henry kept hammering, hammering faster than any man had ever hammered before, hammering against all the machines of the future. As his hammer glowed white-hot, he tunneled deeper into the darkness, driving the steel so hard that the mighty ribs of his body began to crack, and his insides broke in two, and his great heart burst.



When John Henry fell, it sounded like an earthquake.

There was a terrible silence inside the mountain. Lucy stood still as stone, for she knew what had happened.

When Jimmy and Little Bill brought him out of the tunnel, John Henry's blood ran red over the ground. But his hands still clutched one of his mighty hammers. "I've beat them," he gasped. "Now I'm dying."

"Don't go, John Henry!" Lucy begged.

"Bring me a cool drink of water, honey," he said. Then took his last breath.

Lucy fell down on her knees and sobbed. "Lord, this was a good man," she said.

They carried John Henry down from the mountain. They carried him to the river and buried him in the sand near the cabin where he was born.

Folks stood in the rain and flagged the westbound train headed for John Henry's grave. And word spread quickly across the land: "John Henry's never coming back."

Soon the steam drill and other new machines took over the work of the steel-driving men. Little Bill, Jimmy, and others like them left their families and wandered north and west, looking for work. As they walked the hot, dusty roads, they took the only jobs they could find. They picked cotton and dug ditches. But often while they worked, they sang about John Henry:

John Henry told his friends,
"A man ain't nothing but a man.
Before I'll be beat by that big steam drill,
I'll die with my hammer in my hand,
I'll die with my hammer in my hand."



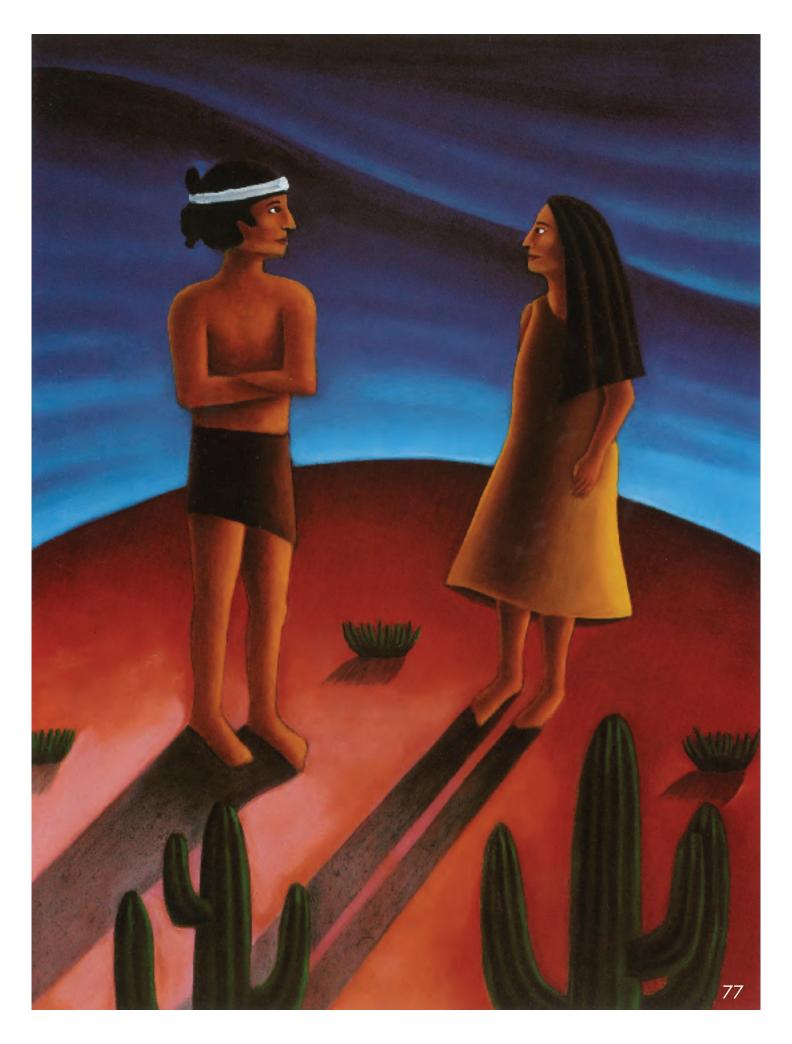
This is a retelling of a legend told to the Navajo Indians by Hosteen Klah, their great medicine man, at the turn of the twentieth century.

It is part of the mythology that details the mysteries of Earth in the beginning.

## How the Stars Fell into the Sky A Navajo Legend



When the pulse of the first day carried it to the rim of night, First Woman said to First Man, "The people need to know the laws. To help them, we must write the laws for all to see."



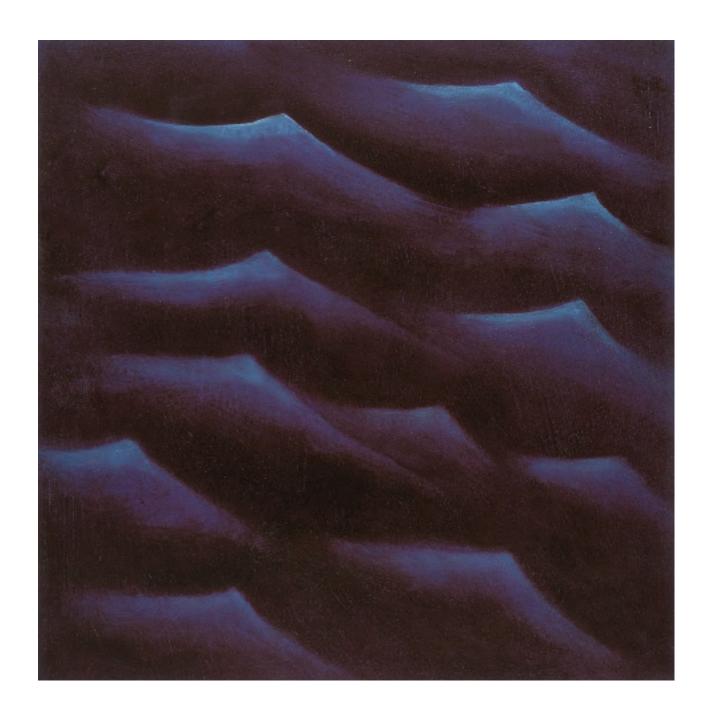


"Write them in the sand," he told her.

<sup>&</sup>quot;But the wind will blow them away," she answered.

"Write them on the water then," he said and turned to go, having more important matters on his mind.

"But they will disappear the moment I write them on the water," First Woman called out.





First Man turned back impatiently and looked at her squatting there on the rim of the night, a blanket of stars at her feet.



"Why don't you write them in the sky?" he said.

"Take your jewels there and write them in the sky."



And so she began, slowly, first one and then the next, placing her jewels across the dome of night, carefully designing her pattern so all could read it.



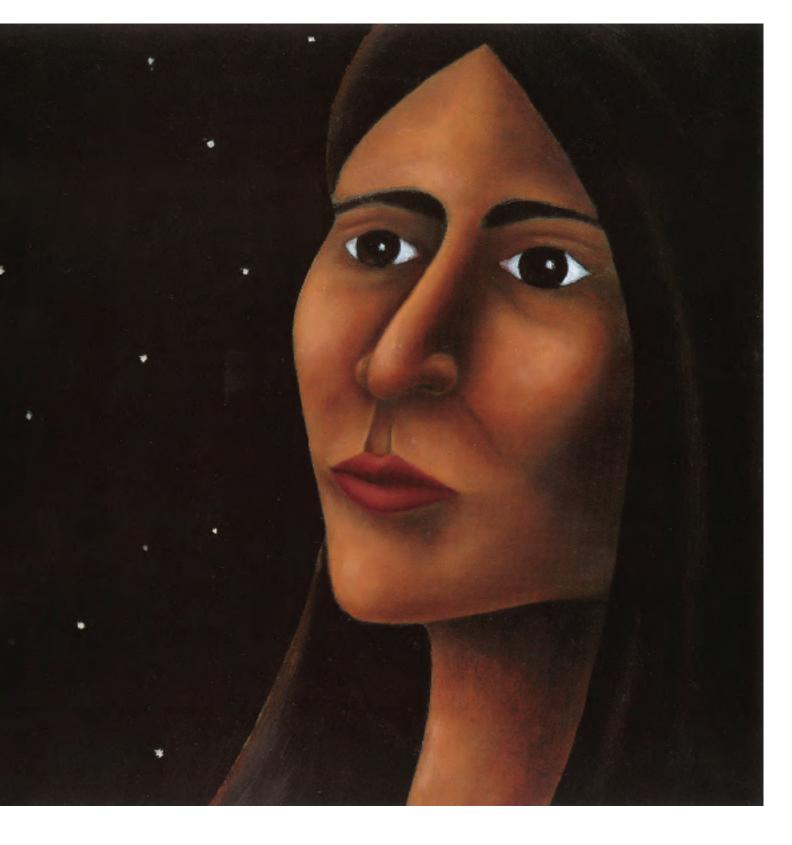




But First Woman was not alone. Behind a low tree Coyote crouched, watching her as she crafted her careful mosaic on the blackberry cloth of the night. He crept closer.



"What are you doing?" he called to her in a voice that sounded like the whine of an arrow whistling in the wind. "Why are you tacking up the night sky with your jewels?"



"Oh." she answered, deliberately shifting a star, "I am writing the laws so all the people can read them. There will be no confusion if we can always see the laws."



Her hands glowed from the warmth of the stars she was touching, and she smiled as she toiled. "May I help?" Coyote asked. First Woman nodded. "Begin here," she said and handed him a star.







Coyote hung the star and stepped back to look. He hung another, and another. But for each star he hung, First Woman's blanket held a hundred thousand more.

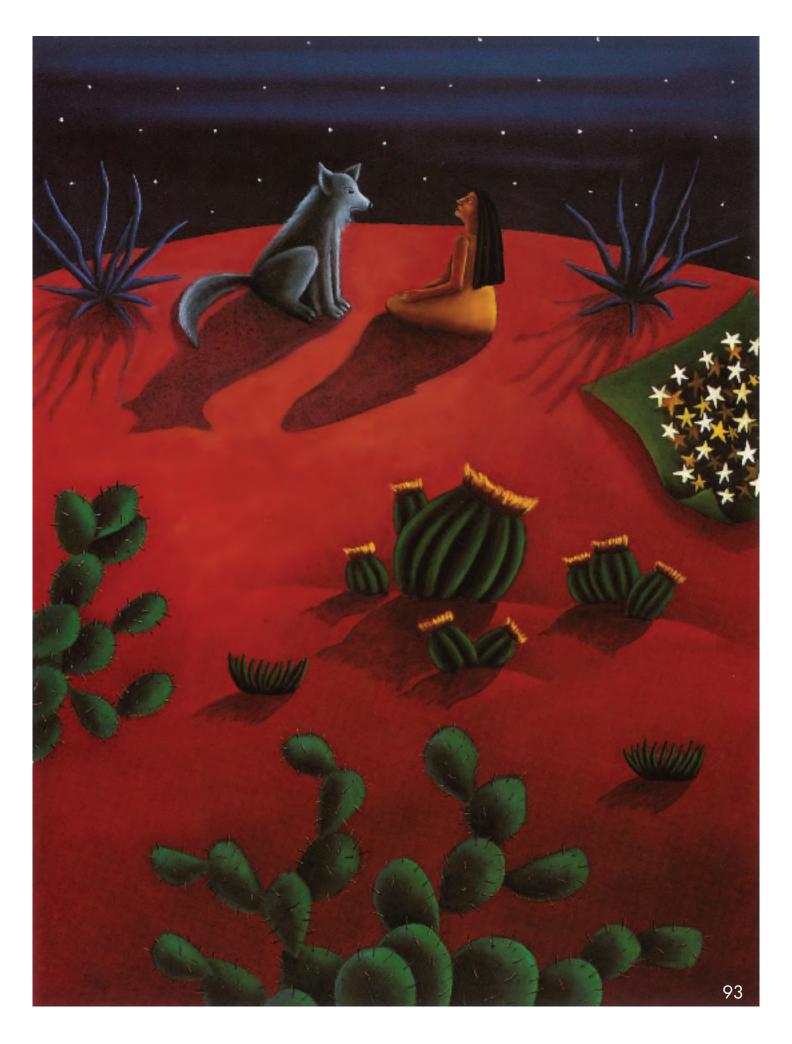
"This is slow work," he grumbled.



"Writing the laws could take many moons," she said and began humming to herself.

"Can't we find a faster way and be done?" Coyote asked.

"Why finish?" she answered. "What is there to do next that is half so important as writing the laws?"





"The people will see these laws before they enter their hogans at night."



"The young mother will sing of them to her child."



"The lonely warrior, crouching in an unknown country, will look up and warm himself by them."



"Writing the laws may be what I do each night for the rest of my life."

But Coyote lacked First Woman's patience. He loved best to see a job finished.



Impatiently he gathered two corners of First Woman's blanket, and before she could stop him . . .

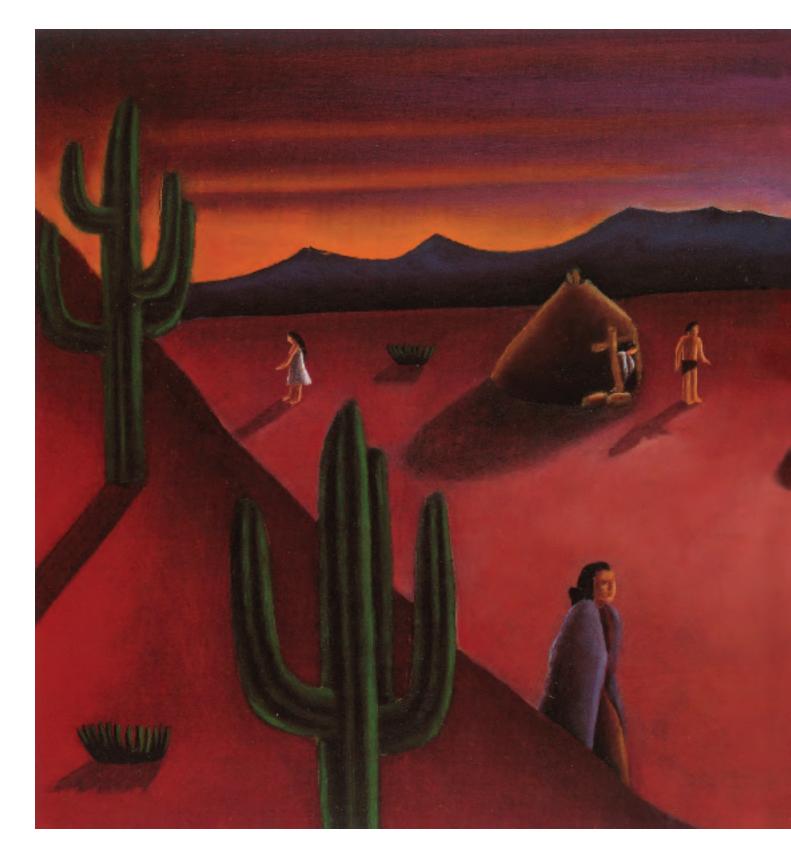


... he flung the remaining stars out into the night, spilling them in wild disarray, shattering First Woman's careful patterns.

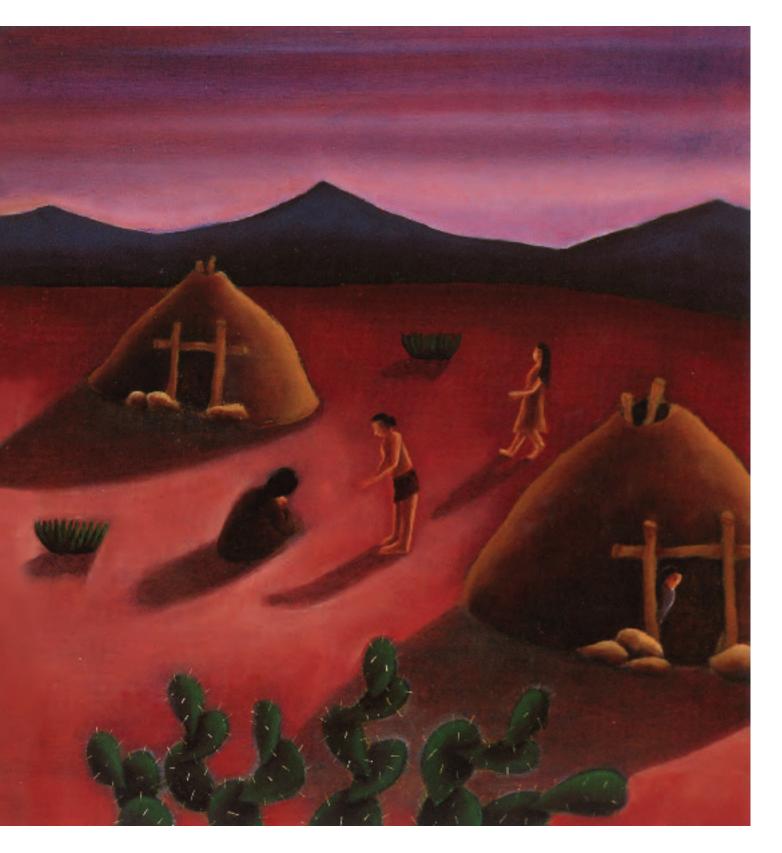


First Woman leaned far into the night and watched the tumbling stars. "What have you done, you foolish animal!" she shrieked at Coyote. He crept away while First Woman wept because there was no undoing what Coyote had done.





As the pulse of the second day brought it into being, the people rose and went about their lives, never knowing in what foolish haste Coyote had tumbled the stars . . .



 $\ldots$  never knowing the reason for the confusion that would always dwell among them.

# Northwest Coast Peoples



Land of Salmon and Cedars

Thousands of years ago, humans began to settle along the narrow strip of land that hugs the Pacific Coast from what is now southern Alaska to southern Oregon. It was a land of abundance. Fish and sea mammals crowded the ocean. In spring, salmon left their ocean homes to swim up streams, where they were easily caught. The nearby forests provided berries, meat, and edible roots. The mild, rainy climate resulted in thick forests of evergreen trees, particularly cedars, which the people used to make shelter, clothing, and transportation.

The social practices of the region differed from those of other Native American groups in three major ways. First, it was the only culture in the Americas not influenced by the Maya and Aztec cultures of Central America. Second, the people developed an advanced lifestyle without practicing agriculture or making pottery. Third, since food was easily available, the people had time to spend on producing material goods. Thus, the people of the Northwest Coast were one of the few Native American groups to place importance on acquiring possessions.



THE RUGGED NORTHwest Coast stretches
2,000 miles from
north to south
100 to 150 miles
wide. Mountains
separate it from
the rest of the
continent. Offshore
are many islands,
which are the tips
of submerged
mountains.

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# The village Coast peop beach, ofte stream flow A river gave access to the consisted of wooden ocean. Her in the fall a In the sprin however, the constant of the stream flow of the stre

The villages of Northwest Coast peoples were built on a beach, often where a river or stream flowed into the ocean. A river gave villagers easy access to the inland. A village consisted of one or more rows of wooden houses facing the ocean. Here, the people lived in the fall and winter months. In the spring and summer, however, they moved to

temporary dwellings further inland. There, they hunted and gathered berries and roots to be dried and eaten in the winter. Since they collected enough food in spring and summer to last through the winter, their winter months were spent creating art, telling stories, and feasting at elaborate ceremonies.

▲ VILLAGE HOUSES WERE made of cedar. A rectangular frame was constructed of logs. The walls were made of planks, so the houses are called plank houses, or sometimes long houses or big houses. The planks were leaned

against the frame or tied to it with woven cedar rope. The planks could be easily removed and brought to a family's temporary summer camp, where they were attached to a frame left standing there. The outside of a plank house might be painted with symbols representing the family's heritage Totem poles might be part of the frame or stand alone in front of a house. This picture shows a Haida village in 1878.

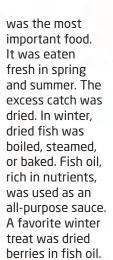


A IN THE SOUTHERN part of the region, people covered the frames of their summer huts with mats woven from reeds or cedar bark rather than planks.



gratefully kill a whale that had been stranded in shallow water and use every part of its body. But only the Nuuchah-nulth and Makah hunted whales in the open ocean. Whale hunting was dangerous. Eight men would follow

and kill a 50-foot whale using only harpoons made of mussel shells and ropes made from spruce roots. The success of the hunt depended on the chief harpooner, who would have been chosen by a special spirit as a boy and received years of training.





■ Some Groups

were more warlike than others.

Warriors wore

wooden armor,
including helmets
that were carved
and painted to make
a warrior look larger

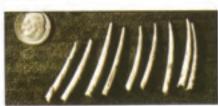
and fiercer. Surprise nighttime attacks of neighboring villages were often made in war canoes. The aim was to capture enemies, who then became the slaves of their captors.



IN THE EARLY
1700's, a sudden
mudslide buried
the Makah village
of Ozette. The
mud preserved the
village much as
it was. Between
1970 and 1981,
the site was
excavated, bringing

to light carved house boards; baskets; wooden boxes; clothing; cradle boards; mats; hats; looms; toys; equipment for whaling, fishing, and sealing; tools; and ceremonial gear.





THE PEOPLE OF THE Northwest traded all along the coast. Some groups even traded with inland peoples for raw materials they did not have. Traded goods included dried foods,

meat were eaten

fresh or dried

in winter. Fish

sea otter skins, carved wooden dishes, canoes, baskets, and blankets. Rare dentalia shells (above), found off the coast of Vancouver Island, were sometimes used as a kind of money.



They were woven



from grasses or carved from wood and often painted with animal designs.



# Family Life

People of the Northwest Coast often lived in villages that were divided into two groups, called moieties (MOY-uhtees). Each moiety was composed of clans. A village might include two to several clans. The members of a clan considered themselves related because they shared the same spirit ancestor. Clans were part of larger groups called phratries (FRAY-trees). Their primary purpose was to govern marriage rules and provide aid. People from the same clan, moiety, or phratry could not marry.

Each clan had three ranks of people: nobles, commoners, and slaves. Nobles were the richest members of their clan. Commoners were respected members of a clan, but they had less wealth than nobles. Families could gain or lose social status by increasing or losing their wealth. Slaves were captives from other villages. They could not change their status. Usually, several related families lived together in a plank house, which was owned by the wealthiest man.

## A POPULAR GAME WAS

hoop and pole, in which rivals tried to toss pointed sticks through a ring that was rolled along the ground. A ball game called shinny was similar to field hockey. Wrestling, arm wrestling, and finger wrestling were also popular.

BABIES WERE BATHED daily, rubbed with whale oil, dusted with willow ash powder, and wrapped in cedar-bark diapers. They spent the first year of life in a cradleboard, which a mother could strap to

her back or lean against a tree while she worked. Since a flat head was considered beautiful and a mark of status, noble and commoner babies had their heads flattened. A board was placed over the forehead and attached to both sides of the cradleboard for the first few months of a baby's life. It was not painful. The children of slaves did not have their heads flattened.

the fish, it burned like a

candle. The fish came to

be called candlefish.

It was dark inside a plank house because there

were no windows. A

small oily fish called eulachon could be used

for light. When a cedar

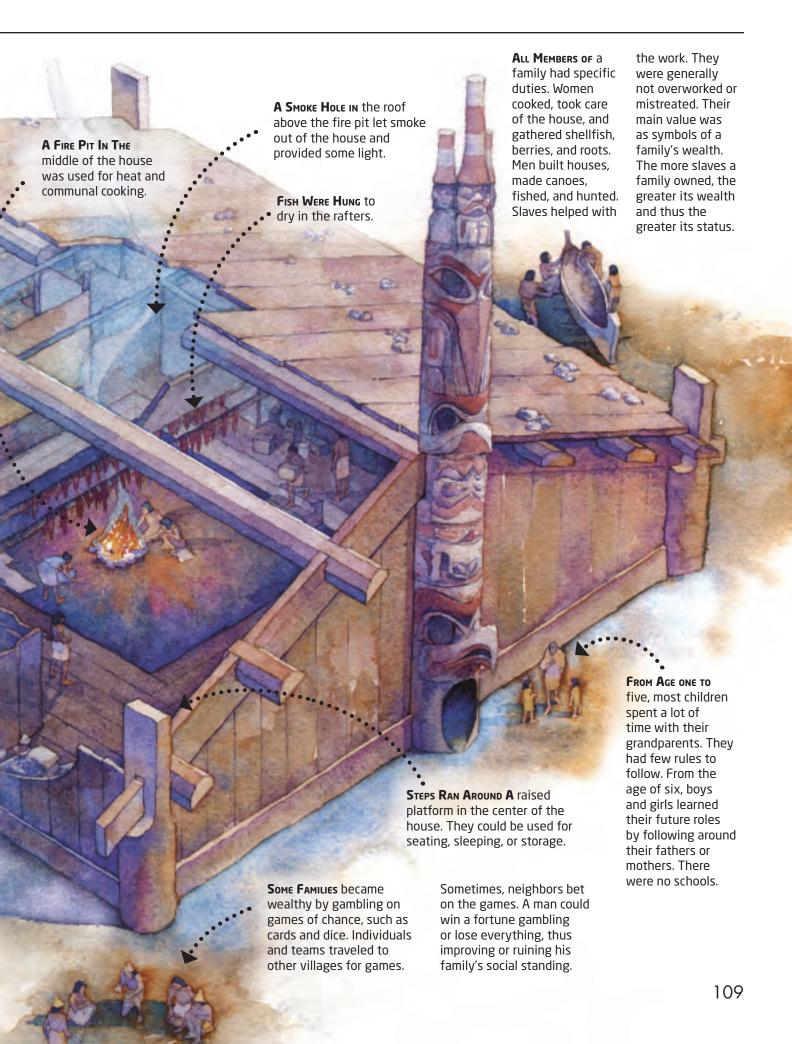
wick was pulled through

WOVEN MATS
or wooden
screens were
used to divide
the living
space and give
each family

some privacy.

CLOTHES, FOOD, AND tools were stored in wooden boxes or baskets.

108



# CARVED AND WOVEN BEAUTY

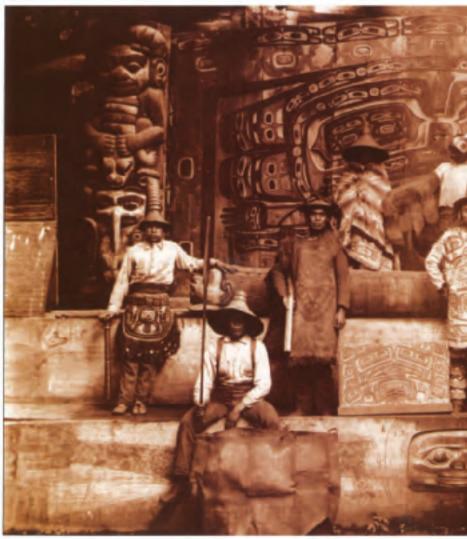
Like artists everywhere, the people of the Northwest Coast used materials that were readily available to create art. The women excelled at weaving baskets and textiles. The men were skillful wood carvers.



**▲** BASKETS WERE made from roots, twigs, and grasses. The materials were gathered and prepared in the summer for weaving in the winter. Roots and twigs were soaked, peeled, and split. Grasses were dried and dyed. Cedar bark and twigs were prized for baskets. Shiny bear grass and grape roots were often used to create designs on the finished baskets.

**₩** Wool for **WEAVING** Was shorn from mountain goats and wool dogs, a breed raised by women especially for its thick fur. Chilkat (a division of the Tlingit) women used the wool of mountain goats to weave blankets that also served as ceremonial robes. Nuxalk women, of the Coast Salish group, pounded cedar-bark strips and wove them into ceremonial aprons, which they decorated with embroidery and beads, and sometimes painted wooden masks.

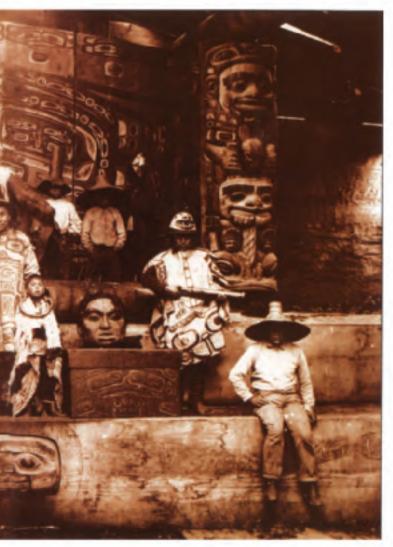




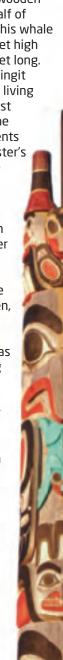


➤ Wooden Masks were used in ceremonies. Part of an animal mask might be hinged so that when a string was pulled, it revealed the human face behind it. Some ➤ Houshold ITEMS, such as ceremonies cooking and storage boxes, included stories were made to be useful as of animals that well as beautiful. turned into humans.





▼ THE PAINTED WOODEN screen (upper half of photograph) in this whale house is nine feet high and eighteen feet long. It separates a Tlingit master's private living area from the rest of the house. The painting represents a raven, the master's clan animal. The round hole (center, bottom of screen) is the opening through which the master entered and left. Since the opening is in the belly of the raven, each time the master passed through, it was as if he were being reborn from his ancestors. This house no longer stands, but the spectacular artworks remain in Klukwan, Alaska, as cherished heirlooms.



✓ A CANOE WAS made from a large hollowed-out cedar log. The log was partially filled with water. Red-hot rocks were placed in the water to make it boil. The boiling water made the wood soft, so cross-pieces of wood could be added to push out the sides. After the water was removed, the wood dried and became stiff. The canoe could then be decorated.

**⋖** Some Totem poles were memorials to a family's history and heritage. Others marked the graves of leaders. A coffin could be placed in a fork at the top, or ashes could be placed in a hidden opening. Some totem poles were entrances to houses, with a hole for people to walk through. Some entrances were carved as ravens' beaks, with an arrangement of ropes and pulleys that let them open and close. The top figure in a totem pole represented the major animal associated with the owner's clan.



**COPPERS WERE** thin sheets of decorated copper. They symbolized a chief's wealth. Copper wasn't found on the Northwest Coast but was acquired through trade with inland groups or with outsiders after contact was established.







# **Outsiders Arrive**

Russians were the first to record reaching the area, in 1741. In 1774, Spanish ships sailed up the Pacific Coast from Mexico and encountered the Haida. Britain sent Captain James Cook to claim a foothold in the area in 1778. Russia and Britain were mostly interested in trading for sea-otter fur. Eventually, Russian, British, and American traders competed for the fur trade. The people of the Northwest Coast were shrewd traders, and they were happy to exchange fur pelts for guns, iron, sugar, blankets, flour, and sails for their canoes. However, contact with the new arrivals brought disastrous results.



▲ Outsiders Carried diseases that had never before existed in the Americas. Since the people had never been exposed to these diseases, they had no immunities to them. Therefore, when one person caught a disease, it spread rapidly, wiping out whole communities. By some estimates, the Northwest Coast people lost 90 percent of their population between 1800 and 1900. Above is a Haida cemetery.

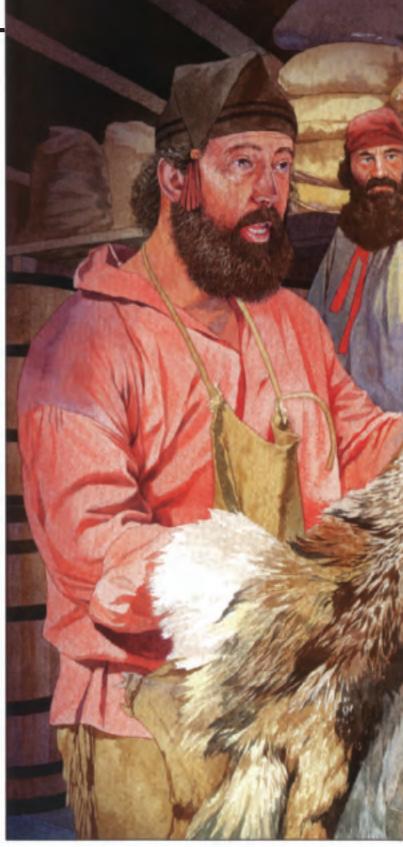
**▼** THE REDUCTION in population had a significant effect on Northwest Coast culture. Survivors of epidemics gathered together in combined villages. But this sometimes led to fierce competition for leadership titles in the new villages. Leadership had

determined by wealth as expressed in potlatch giveaways. Trade had brought even more wealth into the area. So the competition for leadership took the form of more and more elaborate potlatches. In some cases, to show how great their wealth was, people destroyed goods instead of giving them to others.

always been



★ BEFORE LONG, the animals that the people had depended on for food had been hunted for fur almost to extinction. For food and other supplies, the people had to rely more and more on trading posts set up by the Russians, Spanish, and British. Traders kept increasing the price of needed supplies to force the people to provide more furs. Sometimes, the owners of trading posts refused to sell supplies or closed up and moved away. Many of the people starved.









**▼** THE GOVERNMENTS of Canada and the United States supported the settlers and disregarded the rights of the Northwest Coast people. The governments set up reservations (called reserves in Canada). These tracts of land were usually located at winter villages. Any land not part of an established reservation was considered to belong to the government and open to settlement. Thus, the people were denied their right to the land they had roamed for centuries.

**▲ G**OVERNMENT agents tried to convince the people to live as European-**Americans** did. Christian missionaries tried to convert the people to their way of worshiping, insisting that the people give up their traditional way of life. Some children were sent to boarding schools, where they were punished if they spoke their language. In 1884, the Canadian government banned potlatches and secret dancing societies. Some people defied the ban and went to iail. Others continued them in the guise of Christmas parties or charitable giving. But many obeyed the law, in effect giving up their culture. The ban was not lifted until 1951.



▼ Traders HAD NO interest in taking land from the Northwest Coast people. But in the 1840s, settlers began to arrive, and they wanted land. Factories

for canning fish were built on the best salmon rivers. Lumber companies began logging. Gold was discovered, and miners flocked to the area.



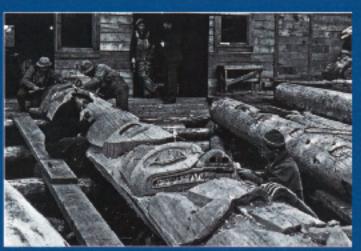
# **Northwest Coast Nations Today**

Today, thousands of Native Americans live along the Northwest Coast, some in reservations or reserves, and others in cities and towns. The people in the same region who speak related languages are called a nation. Governed by chiefs and elders, the nations work to raise awareness of their traditions, languages, beliefs, and

ceremonies. Several nations have their own schools. Their languages and way of life were nearly destroyed, but the people of the Northwest Coast have survived and are determined to flourish. In recent years, the population has increased, though the number of people speaking the native languages is small.



➤ Northwest Coast people continue to fight for the right to their land and culture. They have also fought against racism and for their rights as citizens of the U.S. or Canada. In 1912, the Alaska Native Brotherhood was formed. By 1922, it had won the right to votetwo years before **Native Americans** in the continental U.S. In the late 1930s, the group started a movement to restore totem poles as a way to reclaim part of the people's heritage. In 1944, in the U.S., **Native Americans** formed the National Congress of American Indians. This group works to keep tribes and tribal life alive.



**▼** In the 1850s', government treaties with Northwest Coast people guaranteed them the right to fish in their traditional fishing grounds. Over the years, commercial and sports fishers used and sometimes blocked access to traditional fishing areas. More recently, **Native Americans** trying to practice a traditonal way of life have come

into conflict with environmentalists and animals-rights activists. In 1999. the Makah held their first whale hunt in 70 years and harpooned a gray whale from a canoe. Some criticized them for this. But other groups have defended Native Americans' rights to their traditional wav of life.



in 1966. The house posts have carved totems of Thunderbird and Grizzly Bear and crests from local tribes. The front of the house shows a killer whale, or orca. Here, the people can come to immerse themselves in their art and culture.







When John Henry was a little babe,
A-holding to his mama's hand,
Says, "If I live till I'm twenty-one,
I'm going to make a steel-driving man, my
babe,

I'm going to make a steel-driving man."

When John Henry was a little boy,
A-sitting on his father's knee,
Says, "The Big Bend Tunnel on the C. & O.
Road

Is going to be the death of me, my babe, Is going to be the death of me."

John he made a steel-driving man,

They took him to the tunnel to drive;

He drove so hard he broke his heart,

He laid down his hammer and he died, my babe,

He laid down his hammer and he died.

O now John Henry is a steel-driving man, He belongs to the steel-driving crew,

And every time his hammer comes down, You can see that steel walking through, my babe,

You can see that steel walking through.

The steam drill standing on the right-hand side,

John Henry standing on the left;

He says, "I'll beat that steam drill down,

Or I'll die with my hammer in my breast, my babe,

Or I'll die with my hammer in my breast."

He placed his drill on the top of the rock, The steam drill standing close at hand;

He beat it down one inch and a half

And laid down his hammer like a man, my babe,

And laid down his hammer like a man.



Johnny looked up to his boss-man and said,
"O boss-man, how can it be?
For the rock is so hard and the steel is so tough,
I can feel my muscles giving way, my babe,
I can feel my muscles giving way."

Johnny looked down to his turner and said, "O turner, how can it be?
The rock is so hard and the steel is so tough That everybody's turning after me, my babe, That everybody's turning after me."

They took poor Johnny to the steep hillside, He looked to his heavens above; He says, "Take my hammer and wrap it in gold

And give it to the girl I love, my babe, And give it to the girl I love."

They took his hammer and wrapped it gold And gave it to Julia Ann;
And the last word John Henry said to her Was, "Julia, do the best you can, my babe Was, "Julia, do the best you can."

"If I die a railroad man,
Go bury me under the tie,
So I can hear old Number Four,
As she goes rolling by, my babe,
As she goes rolling by."

"If I die a railroad man,
Go bury me under the sand,
With a pick and shovel at my head and feet
And a nine-pound hammer in my hand,
my babe,

And a nine-pound hammer in my hand."





# Back to Nature

by Marilyn Singer

We cover the earth

with asphalt

tarmac

concrete

brick

We want to be far away

from humus

moss and leaf mold

from things soft and unpredictable

that slide beneath our feet

But even in the city

sparrows nest in lampposts

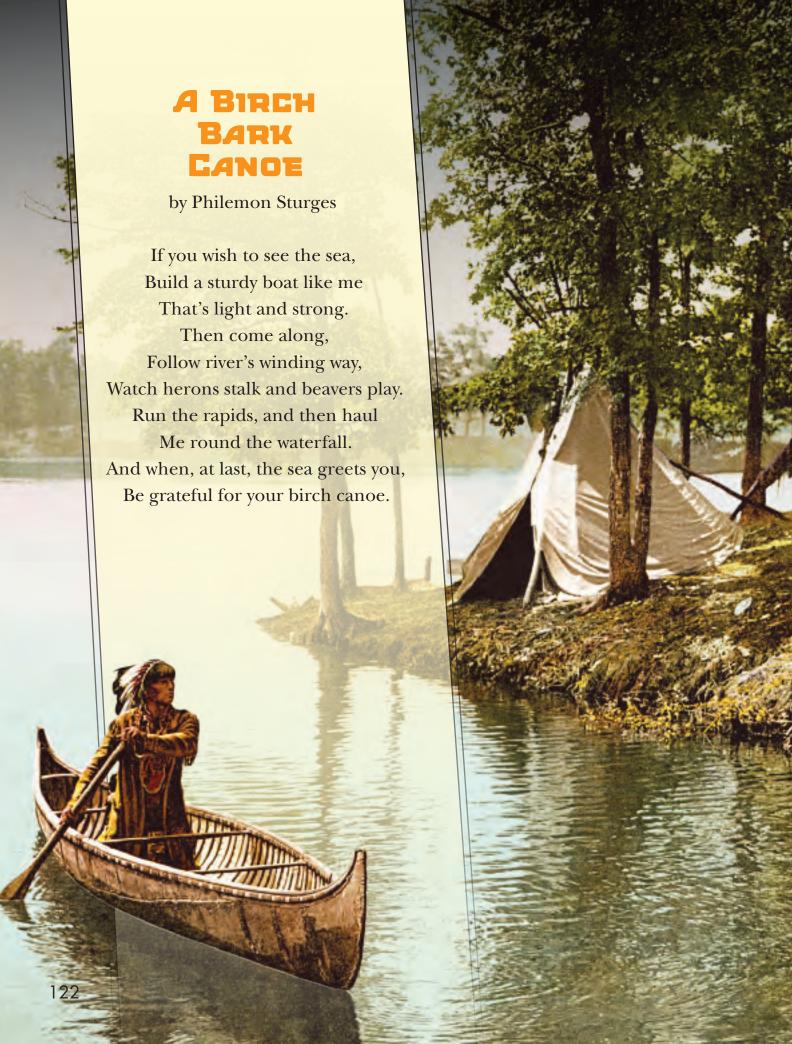
tree trunks rise from sewers

and mulberries fat and purple

rain on sidewalks

turning the pavement soft and unpredictable making it slide beneath our feet





# RING AROUND THE WORLD

# by Annette Wynne

Ring around the world

Taking hands together

All across the temperate

And the torrid weather.

Past the royal palm-trees

By the ocean sand

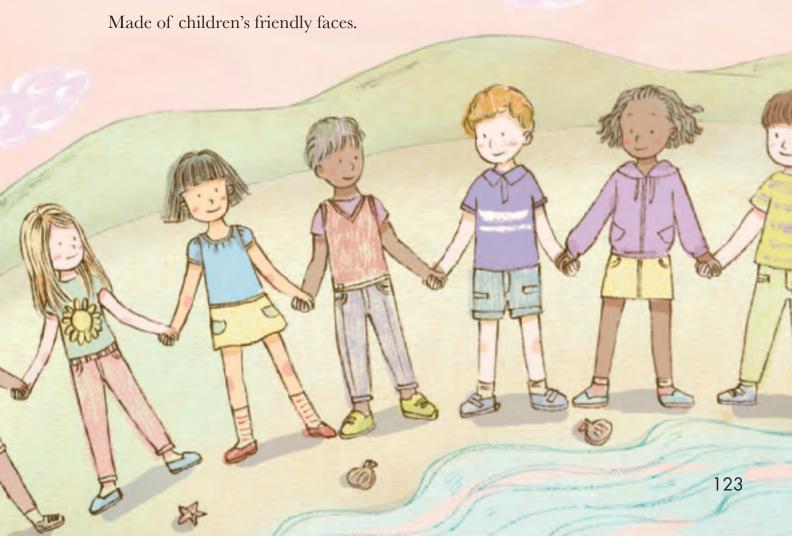
Make a ring around the world

Taking each other's hand;

In the valleys, on the hill,

Over the prairie spaces,

There's a ring around the world





# MIDWEST TOWN

by Ruth De Long Peterson

Farther east it wouldn't be on the map—
Too small—but here it rates a dot and a name.
In Europe it would wear a castle cap
Or have a cathedral rising like a flame.

But here it stands where the section roadways meet.

Its houses dignified with trees and lawn;

The stores hold *tête-à-tête* across Main Street;

The red brick school, a church—the town is gone.

America is not all traffic lights,

And beehive homes and shops and factories;

No, there are wide green days and starry nights,

And a great pulse beating strong in towns like these.

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