

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Sugarbush Tales

The Sugarbush is the word used by native peoples and settlers for the maple tree. Maple sugar is called *sinzibuckwud* by the Algonquin and *ninautik* by the Ojibwa. But the legends are much the same. It was the only spice used by them and contributed as many as 12% of the calories in their diets.

Read one of these stories aloud to your group, be prepared to retell it in your own words to the class, and answer the questions below.

### Questions:

1. Why was syrup so important to the Native Americans? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. When is syrup season? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### **How the Syrup Turned to Sap**

Here is a myth that is found in some form among all the tribes who lived in the northeastern United States:

When the world was young, life was easier for the people. The trees were filled with sugar, and when a small hole was cut, the sap just flowed out. There was a young prince (whom some call Glooskap and others Nanabohzo) who was journeying from village to village. One day he came to a village that was very quiet. No people cooked or hunted. No dogs barked. No children played. Glooskap looked for the people. He found them in the forest. Everyone in the village—even the dogs—was laying on the ground letting sweet maple sap drip into their mouths.

Glooskap was angry. He thought the people should work. So he used his magic to fill a very large bark container with water and pour it all over the trees. He told the lazy people, “Now you will have to work for your sugar. You will have to boil the sap and you will only find it in the spring.”

### **The Sugarbush Story**

One day when the world was young, an Indian chief came home from a long, unsuccessful hunt. It was early spring, and the animals were still sleeping in their warm dens. The chief was tired and angry because his meal was not going to be good. As he came home, he stuck his tomahawk in one of the trees outside his longhouse. By chance, the tree was a maple.

The chief had a daughter who cooked and kept his longhouse for him. The daughter made him a slim dinner of dried meat, and he slept. The next morning, he took his tomahawk out of the tree and returned to his hunt.

Every morning the chief's daughter took a large bowl to the stream to get water. This day she was lazy, and wasted time enjoying the returning sun. She forgot the bowl at the base of the maple tree. As the spring sun warmed the tree, sap began to flow into her bowl from the gash that the tomahawk had made.

When it was almost time for her father to return, the daughter realized her plight. She had to make a meal quickly. She found her bowl already had a liquid in it that looked like water. Thinking it was a gift from the Great Spirit, she used the "water" to boil the dried meat and grains for her father's meal. As the meal cooked, it became sweeter. The chief complimented his daughter on her hard work, and from then on the sap of the maple tree became an important part of their diet.

### **An Oral History**

Sugarmaking was called *ishkwaamizige* by the Ojibwa peoples. It was a special time during *zhwigun*, spring. Since salt was difficult to obtain in the Midwest, sugar was their main seasoning. They used it to preserve meat and stored it in containers called *mokuks*. Large amounts were made during the few weeks each spring when the maple sap ran. They called March *Izhkigamisegi Geezis*, the month of boiling.

This is how sugaring was remembered by a lady who was 74 years old in 1910. Her name was Nodinens (Little Wind) and this is how she described the month of March in Minnesota: “The men would leave for deep woods hunting and trapping. During the winter, women dried meat the men brought in....Toward the last of winter, my father would say ‘One month after another has gone by. Spring is near. We must get back to our other work.’ So the women wrapped the dried meat tightly in tanned deerskins and the men packed their furs on sleds or toboggans. Once there was a fearful snowstorm when we were starting. My father quickly made snowshoes from branches for all the older people.”

Nondinens told her story to her neighbors who wrote it down and remembered the history of the Sugarbush.