

# The Bear Who Stole the Chinook

The chinook is a warm, dry wind that blows down from the east side of the Rocky Mountains in Canada, North America. During winter, when snow and ice cover the land, the chinook can cause a rapid surge in temperature, effectively vaporising the snow before it has a chance to melt. Due to this, chinook winds are sometimes called 'snow eaters'.

The chinook wind was very important to Native Americans of the Blackfeet Nation. When it arrived, the buffalo could be hunted and firewood gathered. Many legends were written about the chinook. One tells the tale of the time the chinook wind did not come.

One winter, long ago, the snow came early for the tribes of the Blackfeet Nation. It lay in deep drifts and powdered the mountain crests. Cold, bitter winds armoured the land in a diamond-hard frost. While tears froze on the cheeks of hungry children, their fathers hunted in vain and their mothers struggled to find firewood to keep their families warm.

People prayed for the arrival of the chinook, to give a little respite from the winter, to allow them to build up their stores, but a young orphan boy decided to take matters into his own hands. He would go out and find the chinook. He



took with him four of his animal elders: Owl, Magpie, Coyote and Weasel. After the boy had told them his plan, Magpie let out a caw and ruffled his frozen feathers, "Friends, it is the bear. He has stolen the chinook."

The five friends headed into the winter wilderness, travelling through ice sculpted valleys and through screaming storms of ice crystals. The snow had distorted every shape, blanketing the world in white, and yet they found themselves descending into a sheltered hollow. Could this be the lair of the bear?

A rumbling snore and wicked snarl told them they had reached their goal. Owl used his incredible eyes to peer into the dark den but flew away as Bear poked at him with a stick. Weasel was lightning fast and slithered inside the den with ease. Bear roared with rage, "I am the bear who stole the chinook!"



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The young boy, frightened at first, gathered his wits and made medicine smoke. Into the den he blew it, "phoooooooo!" The bear gaped, the bear stumbled, the bear fell down into a deep sleep. Coyote crept cautiously inside and pulled out the bag that held the chinook. Together, they unpicked the stitches of the bag with great care and released the chinook to blow across the land, to bring relief to the people of the Blackfeet Nation.

With a sudden burst of anger, Bear awoke from his sleep. He found himself alone as the four friends had already made the journey back down the mountain. Bear searched desperately for the chinook, but the pursuit was in vain. Never again would he find the warm wind to keep to himself in his den.

This, it is said, is why the bear must hibernate for the long, long winter. He slumbers fitfully, grumbling and snarling, calling out wistfully, "I'm the bear who stole the chinook!"

