

## Gluskonba and the Seasons

### Overview:

This story is about how Gluskonba [KLOOS-kon-BAH] looks to bring spring and summer back to his village after a long winter. It includes themes of listening to the elderly and to others' advice, showing empathy and care for others, and sharing one's knowledge with others. It also features a whale and highlights the order and duration of the seasons.

Dr. Bruchac says: "Gluskonba is the first one in the shape of a human being. The traditional story is that when the Creator [the Great Mystery] Ktsi Nwaskw [ket-SEE-nee-WASKW], had finished making creation, some dust was left on the hands of the Creator. That dust fell on the Earth and began to shape itself into the shape of the first one, the form of a human being, and when he stood up, there was a hole in the ground where he had been. The hole filled in with water. Gluskonba tried to pull himself up, pushed up mountains, and made channels down those mountains, which became the green mountains and the Adirondacks. So that is what Gluskonba was, and he had great power and tried to do things to help the people."

### Story:

Dr. Bruchac shares: One of our oldest stories about Gluskonba is about a time when Winter would not go away and that caused the people of the village to suffer. So, Gluskonba asked Nokemis Agaskw [NO-ke-MES a-GASKW], Grandmother Woodchuck, what to do. Because he was very young and the first one in the shape of a human, he needed someone older and wiser to give him advice. So, the Creator gave him woodchuck to be his grandmother. Nokemis Agaskw then told Gluskonba that Winter was caused by the one known as Pebon [pe-BON], the Winter Maker, who lived in a lodge just to the North. Gluskonba said, "I will go and talk with him and tell him this Winter has lasted too long."

So Gluskonba walked to the lodge of Pebon, the Winter Maker. He scratched on the lodge door, which was made entirely of ice and snow, not birchbark, and a voice inside said: "Come in; I'm telling stories." Gluskonba said: "Oh, stories, I love stories." so he went inside. Pebon had hair that was made of icicles; icicles were also dripping from his nose and from his mouth. He was sitting by a fire that was cold. It wasn't a fire of wood, but a fire of ice, and cold came from it as the heat comes from a fire. Pebon, the Winter Maker, said: "Sit down, and I'll tell you a story." Gluskonba said, "Well, I love stories." And he sat down to listen. Pebon went: "a loong..." And before he finished the word long, Gluskonba was frozen solid. So Pebon picked him up and threw him out of the lodge. Gluskoba lay there for a while until the sun thawed him up, so he could get up and go back to the lodge to his grandmother. He asked her, "Grandmother, what can I do? Winter is so strong." and she said, "Niben [nee-BEN], the Summer, can help you find a way to convince Winter to leave. You will need Niben, but you also will need the help of the one called Siguan [see-GWAN], the Spring." Gluskonba asked, "Where can I find them?" And his grandmother responded, "Oh, far to the South."

Gluskonba began to walk; he turned himself into a giant, so his steps were very large. He walked across the land, further and further to the South, until he came to the great water, but he had no way to cross. He remembered the one we call Podaba [PO-da-BA], the whale. He called out "Podaba, my friend, come and help me." And indeed, the whale swam right up to shore.

Gluskonba said: "My friend, I need you to carry me." And the whale said, "unh-hunh!" (which means "yes" in Abenaki). Gluskonba said, "Wliwini [oo-LEE-oo-NEE], thank you." Which is good; being thankful is very important. He climbed on the back of the whale, and the whale began to carry him across that water, going further and further towards the distant shore. Now the water began to get shallow, and the Podaba said, "Gluskonba, I'm worried; this water may be so shallow that I will be stuck." Gluskonba said, "Don't worry. It's quite deep." That is when the clams started to sing... they sang, "The water is getting shallow, the water is getting shallow, throw him off so he will drown... throw him off so he will drown."

Why did the clams want to drown Gluskonba? Well, the clams are the enemy of Gluskonba, because he loves to eat clams. In fact, all over the coast of New England, there are huge piles of clam shells, and we say many of those were piled there long ago when Gluskonba ate thousands and thousands of clams.

Because the whale, Podaba, could not speak clam language, he asked, "What are those clams singing?" Gluskonba, who could speak all languages, said, "They're singing, the water is really deep, just keep going." And so it was that Podaba just kept going and ran up on shore, and got stuck. Gluskonba stepped off, and Podaba said, "Gluskonba, I am stuck here. What can I do? I will die." Gluskonba realized what he had done; he made his friend do something that was not a good thing to do. So he said, "Oh, my friend, I will help you." And he took his great bow off his back and began to push against Podaba with that bow, and the whale's nose got pushed in, as it is to this day! Podaba was pushed back out into the deeper water.

Gluskonba then said, "My friend, you've been so kind to me. I'm going to give you my pipe." Gluskonba gave his pipe, a great gift, to the whale. Podaba said, "Thank you, Gluskonba." To this day, you can see the whale happily smoking Gluskonba's pipe with the mist rising from its blowhole.

Gluskonba continued walking on this land, which was very warm, until he came to a place where there was a clearing and little, tiny people were dancing in a circle. They were dancing around someone whose name was Niben (Summer). They were all dancing, trying to gain her attention, but she paid no attention to them. And then Gluskonba noticed a little man sitting off to the side, looking very sad. His name was Seguan (Spring). Seguan told Gluskonba, "Oh, Gluskonba, I have loved Niben for so long, but she never pays attention to me... many times I have danced around her. Never has she paid attention to me." Gluskonba said, "My friend, I will help you. I will teach you a song on the flute." Then Gluskonba, who had carried his flute, said, "Listen." And he began to play.

After hearing the song, Seguan said, "Oh, that's really good. Can I have that flute?" Gluskonba agreed, made that flute very small, gave it to him, and asked him to play it while going North. Seaguana began to play that flute, and Nibon heard the flute and began to dance. And as Seguan walked towards the North as Gluskonba asked him to, Nibon followed. As they walked with small steps like those of a little bird, the warmth followed them further and further to the North. Gluskonba saw they were taking a long time getting there, and indeed it does take a long time for Summer, who is Niben, to follow Seguan, who is Spring. Gluskonba went ahead and got back to his lodge, and said to his grandmother, "They are coming, they are coming!" His grandma said,

"Wligen, good. Now go and speak to Pebon." So Gluskonba went to the lodge of Pebon, and he scratched at that lodge, and the voice said, "Come in, I'm telling stories." Gluskonba came in and sat down, and Pebon went, "A loooooooooooooooooooooooooooooong..." and Gluskonba said, "Yes, continue; I want to hear more." Pebon continued, "A loooooooooooooooooooooooooooooong..." And Gluskonba said, "Well, that's really good. Keep going!"

And meanwhile, they could hear something, so Pebon said, "What is that terrible sound I hear?!" It was the sound of the flute being played, followed by the songs of the birds, which echoed that flute. And that lodge began to melt away, and that cold fire vanished. Pebon began to shrink smaller and smaller, until his friend, the northern wind, picked him up and carried him back to the Northland, where he lives to this day and waits to come back every year at that same time. But he cannot stay throughout because of the coming of Seguan (Spring) and Niben (Summer). They came and lived in this land for a long time, but again, they had to go back to the Southland where they were from. Still, each year you hear the flute of the birds being played, the song of Seguan the Spring, and you know that Niben will soon arrive, and so, too, Pebon, the Winter, will go back to its place in the far North. And that is the story of how Gluskonba brought the Spring, with great help from Podaba the whale, who brought him to that Summerland.

### **Glossary:**

- Gluskonba [KLOOS-kon-BAH]: The first one in the shape of a human being
- Ktsi Nwaskw [ket-SEE-nee-WASKW]: The Creator, the Great Mystery
- Pitawbagw [BEE-taw-BAGW]: Lake Champlain
- Nokemis Agaskw [NO-ke-MES a-GASKW]: Grandmother Woodchuck
- Pebon [pe-BON]: Winter
- Niben [nee-BEN]: Summer
- Podaba [PO-da-BA]: The whale
- Wliwini [oo-LEE-oo-NEE]: Thank you
- Seguan [see-GWAN]: Spring

### **Discussion Questions and Notes:**

- What do you think the moral of the story is?
- What does this story tell us about the importance of listening and paying attention? How was that helpful to Gluskonba (e.g., listening to Grandmother Woodchuck, the wisdom of Elders)?
- What does this story tell us about the importance of the wisdom of Elders? What can they teach us that we haven't experienced yet?
- How was the whale a helper? And what did it get because it was a helper?
- How can you help other people?
- What does this story tell us about the importance of respect and care? When does Gluskonba show care, and when is he cared for?
- Can you think of a time when you cared for something or someone?
- Can you think of a time that someone else showed you kindness? How did it feel?
- What natural observations does this story point at? (You can mention parts of the story that describe a natural phenomenon like the passing of seasons, or distinct animal

anatomy like the whale's blowhole or its flat snout. The whale is probably a sperm whale!)

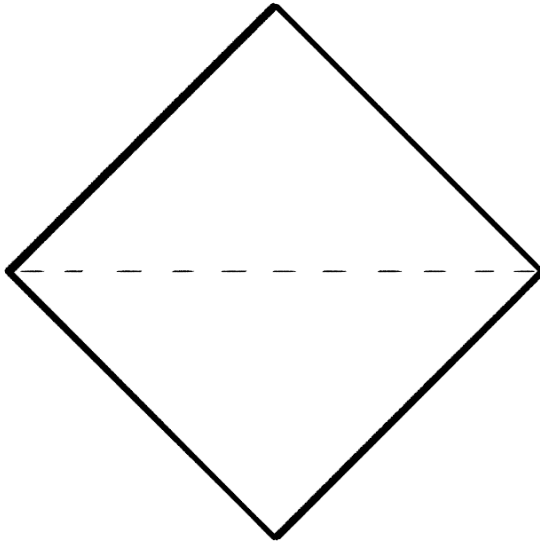
- Some of these questions connect concepts in the story to the audiences' experiences. Others are factual in nature. Make sure audiences understand that Pebon is "old man winter," Seguan is spring, and Niben is summer! You can also tell your students that, in Native American culture, tobacco was a sacred item that was often given as a gift.

**Activity:**

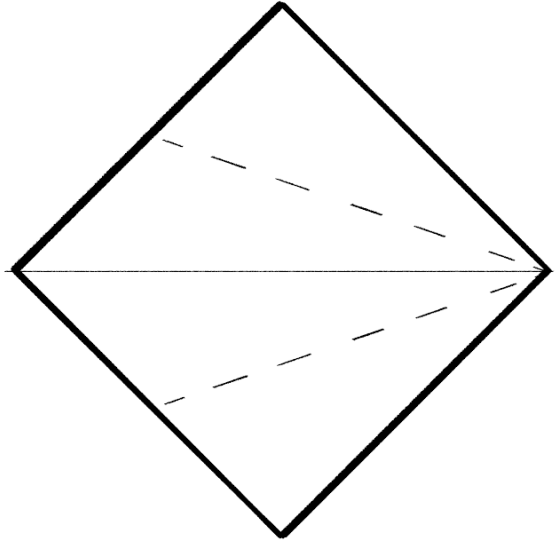
- You can make your own whale, origami-style, after you hear the story!
- How do you imagine the seasons appear as characters? Make a drawing of them!

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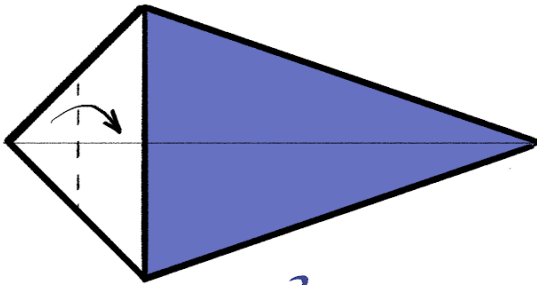
Origami pattern



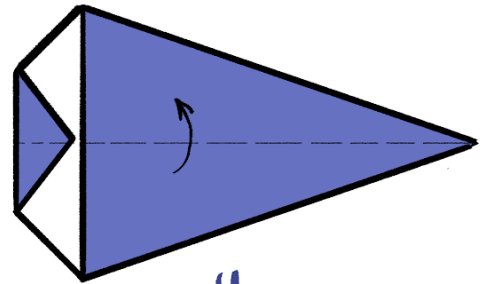
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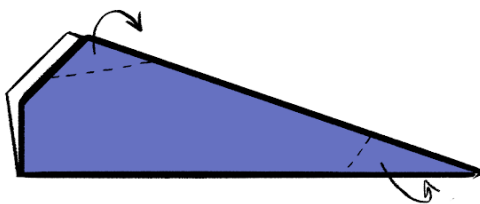
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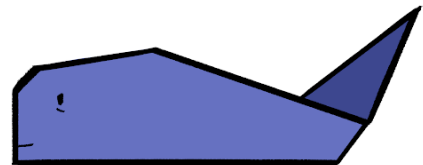
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