

## Gluskonba and the Four Men

### Overview:

This story is about how four men tried to find Gluskonba [KLOOS-kon-BAH], so he would grant them each a wish. Each man had a special skill and had to obey Gluskonba's instructions to get their wish! The story includes themes of listening and following instructions, being patient, remembering what you have learned, and showing care for others.

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: After Gluskonba had done many things to help the people, he decided he had done enough; it was time for them to help themselves. So he climbed into his canoe and vanished into the big water. But he left word to the people that if anyone could find the island where he was living, he would grant them one wish. Many people tried to find the Island of Gluskonba, and many failed, but it was said that there were four men who were good friends; they were like brothers, and each of those four men had a special skill. One of them was a great maker of songs. One of them was a great carver; he could carve anything. One of them was a man who had great vision, he could see when others could not, and the fourth one was a man who owned a canoe and made canoes. So the friends said to the canoe maker, "You have a good canoe; we have these abilities. Let us all get together and make that voyage to Gluskonba's Island. Surely the four of us will succeed." They agreed it was a good thing to do that, and each of them had wishes they wanted to be fulfilled.

So they got in the canoe and began paddling. As they paddled out, the wind began to blow, and high waves came up. It seemed like they couldn't get their canoe through, but the one who knew songs knew a song, and he began to sing. This song was really powerful. It's so powerful, the waves began to listen. They calmed down, and the ocean became as smooth as glass. So they continued on their way. But now, in front of them, bubbles began to rise up to the surface—more and more bubbles, and then something came to the surface. It was whales! They looked at them, and one had sunk down. Then another whale rose up, and then another and another, and then those whales began to play; they began to leap in the air, leaping over the canoe and landing on the other side. There were whales leaping and playing all around them, and if one of those whales made a little mistake, that canoe would be crushed as it fell back down. But that was when the man who was a great carver got an idea. He reached into his pouch, pulled out a piece of wood, quickly carved the shape of a whale, then blew on it. Because he was such a good carver, he could carve a turtle and put it on the ground, and that turtle would walk away! He said to that little whale, "Take your brothers and sisters away from here." He dropped that little whale in the water, and the whale began to swim. The big whales saw it and began to follow it as they disappeared into the depths of the ocean and were gone. So the four men continued on their way.

Now mist began to come in, and it was so thick that no one could see, except that one man who had great vision. He got in the front of the canoe and said, "Brothers, I will guide you." He told them where to go, where to turn, and soon that canoe ran up on shore, and they'd reached an island. In the center of that island was a hill, and on top of the hill was a big wigwam, and someone was sitting in front of that wigwam with a pipe. The smoke from that pipe was swirling, creating a mist all around that island. They climbed up there; it had to be Gluskonba. They greeted him, and he greeted them. Then they said, "Gluskonba, we are happy to see you. We have wishes; can you grant them?" Gluskonba said, "Nidonbak [NEE-do-BAK], my friends, each of you come forward... Tell me your wish."

So the man who owned the canoe was the first to come forward. He said, "Gluskonba, I want to own many, many, many things more than anyone else. Many, many, many things." Gluskonba took a pouch and said, "Here, take this pouch, do not open it until you're in your own wigwam. You will get those things you want." And the man said: "Oh, Wliwini [Ole-onee] (Thank you). This is good. I have a pouch. That's a great start."

Now, the second one came up. He was the one who was great at making songs but also had a wish. He said, "Gluskonba, I want to be the tallest one, taller than any person." Gluskonba gave him a pouch as well with the instructions, "Do not open it until you're at your lodge." The man took that pouch and was very happy.

The third one, the woodcarver, came up and said, "Gluskonba, my wish is, I don't want to ever grow old and die the way people do. I'm very afraid of growing old and dying the way people do." Gluskonba gave him a pouch as well and the instructions as before, "Don't open it until you're at your lodge."

Then the fourth man came forward, the one who had great vision; he said, "Gluskonba, first of all, I thank you for all the things you've done for our people throughout so many seasons, you have done so much. And my wish, it's not a big one. I'll whisper it to you." And he whispered that wish to Gluskonba, who smiled and took a pouch and gave it to him. He said, "My friend, take this pouch. You will not open it until you are in your own lodge." Again, the man said, "Thank you, thank you Gluskonba."

Then the four men climbed into their canoe and began to paddle. They were paddling along and a whale came up and pushed them so fast, they were back on shore in almost no time. They were so happy. That man who was really good at seeing things turned around and said to the whale, "Nidonbak (my friend)," and the whale surfaced, rolled, and then disappeared. And then the man who owned the canoe said to the man who wanted everything, "My friend, you want many things. You can have this canoe; it'll be yours. I don't need it because I will be taller than anyone else. I won't need a canoe. I can see anything. I don't have to go anywhere." And he climbed out.

The man who wanted everything, now had the canoe, and he said to the others, "Why are you two still in my canoe? You can get out too." So they climbed out, and he began to paddle along happily, thinking of all the things he would soon own, but then he looked at that pouch and thought, how small it was, "Could this possibly contain everything I deserve? I can't wait to get

back to my wigwam. I need to see what's in it." He opened the pouch, and things began to pour out, all kinds of things, jewelry, cloth, a weapon. So much came out of that pouch that filled the canoe and covered the man. He was tangled in all those things with such weight that he and the canoe sank to the bottom of the water.

Now, the man who was afraid of growing old and dying was walking along toward his wigwam, and he began to get worried. He thought, "What if there's a bear behind that tree... what if I fell and hit my head? What if there's a mountain lion over there behind that hill... I can't wait. I've got to open this." And he quickly opened that pouch, and POOF, he disappeared, and where he had been was now a big rock that would never grow old and die.

The third man climbed to the top of a hill, looking out over the ocean, and as he sat there, he said, "Oh, this is good, and I'll be even taller when I have opened my pouch. What's in there? Would it be something I rub on myself or something I don't know? Maybe I should look and just make sure I know what to do with it." He opened that pouch and POOF, he disappeared, and in his place, there was a great pine tree, taller than any other... with its top like a feather, like the feather that man had worn, waving in the wind.

Now, the fourth man went back to his lodge, went inside, sat down, and said a prayer of thanks to the Creator and to Gluskonba, and opened his pouch. There was nothing in it, but to him came an understanding of the things he could do to help his people, of the things he could do to be a good hunter, to be a provider, to be a leader, and that knowledge helped him throughout his life. And so it was that of all those four men, I think I do not have to ask you, whose wish was the best of all?

### **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
- Nidonbak [NEE-do-BAK]: Friend

### **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 remembering what you have learned?
- How do you try to remember important things?
- What do you think the four men should have done?
- What would YOU do to try to stop the wind?
- What does a pine tree look like? Can you see how the top might look like feathers?
- The whales in the story might have been humpback whales, as they like to play near canoes and jump around—very dangerous for anyone in those canoes! It was important for the people to be aware of the whales. They were playful and didn't mean harm, but they can be dangerous. Similarly, when we observe nature, we should be aware that many things do not mean harm, but we should nevertheless be observant and alert of danger?

**Activity:**

- Make an art piece that can help YOU calm, like the song that helped the wind calm. This could be a song, an art piece, or a dance.