

Native American tribes are very diverse. Cultural teachings, philosophies, and social dynamics differ greatly from one tribe to another. Even within one tribe, stories and teachings may vary from region to region.

The teachings shared in our *Kinoomaagewin Mzinigas* (Little Teaching Books) may be presented differently in other areas.

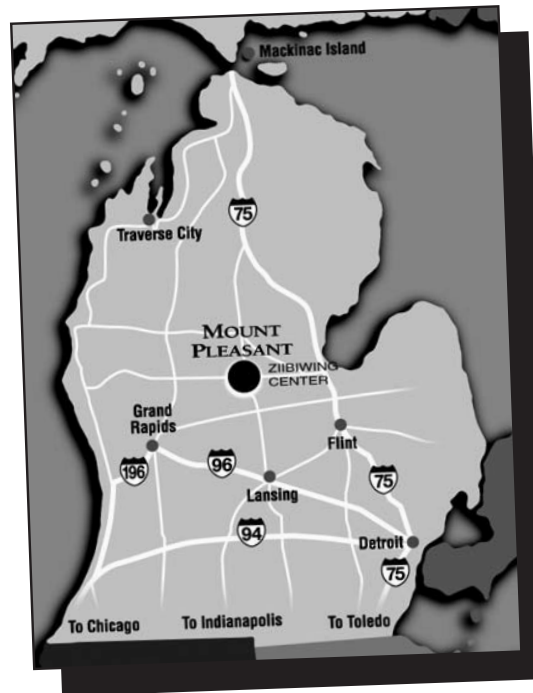


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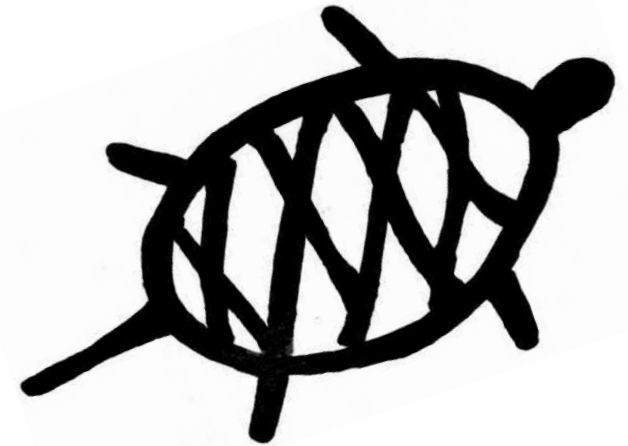
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## **Gdodemonaanik Do Kinoomaagewinawaan**

(Clan System Teachings)



Part 2 of a series of  
*Kinoomaagewin Mzinigas*  
(Little Teaching Books)

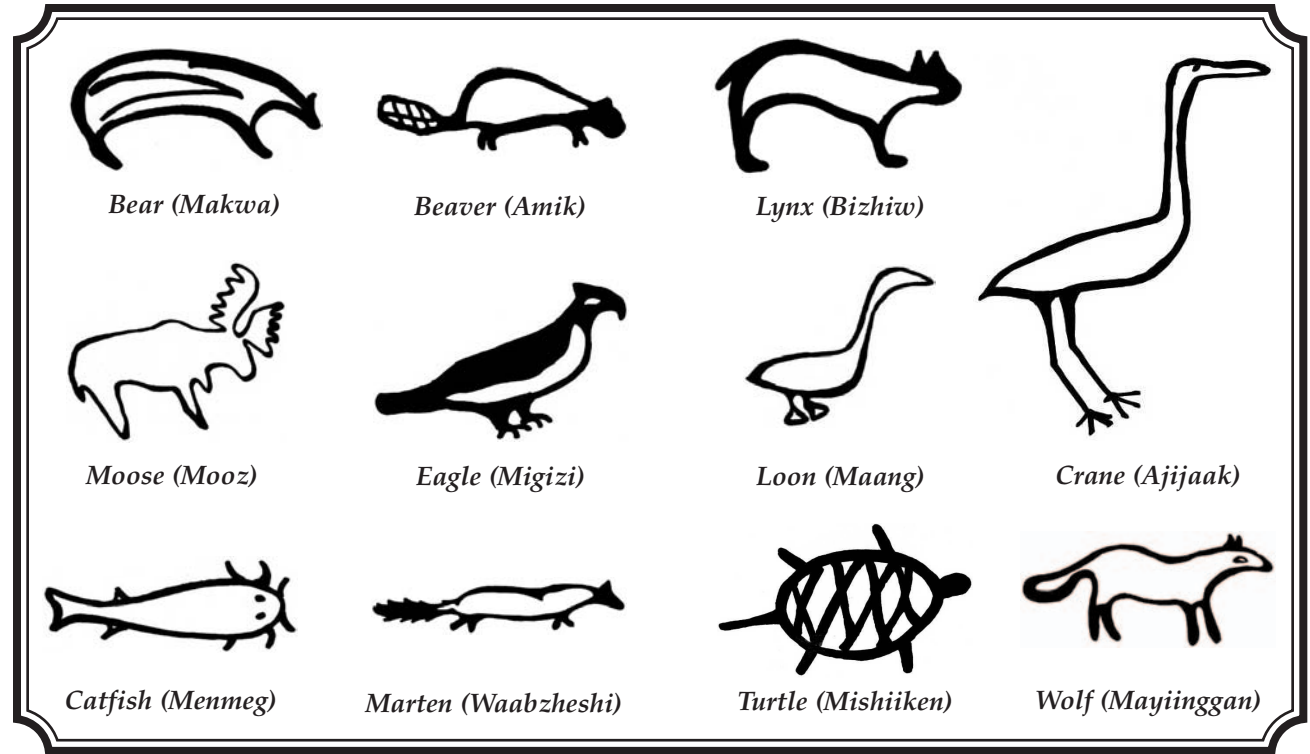
## Origin of Clans

Long ago, before the Anishinabek were placed on Mother Earth, the Creator told all of the animals that humans were coming and they would not be able to provide for themselves. The animals agreed that they would take care of the humans and show them how to live in harmony with all Creation. The animals said, "We will sacrifice ourselves as food so they won't starve. We will offer our skins to them so that they will be warm. We will teach them what medicines and ceremonies to use to heal themselves."

It was just as the animals had said when the Anishinabek arrived. The animals kept their word and provided the people with all they needed to survive. The Anishinabek were very thankful for the animals and their generosity. The animals were teachers and the Anishinabek watched closely. Our ancestors saw that each animal species had an important role to play and that together the animals achieved an incredible balance between each other. Through these observations, the Anishinabek organized their communities based on the relationships they saw between the animals around them. This social structure is our clan system.

Anishinabek family groups were assigned the roles and responsibilities of a particular animal that lived in their region. This then became their clan. Before European contact, Anishinabek did not use family names — their clan identity served this purpose. Anishinabek children are born into the clan of their father. With the clan system, Anishinabek communities established a balance of power and specialization of skills and responsibilities.

The following are some of the common Anishinabek clans, though it is said that clans may be almost any animal, fish, or bird. Clan animals vary by region because they were based on the animals that inhabited a particular area.



*Clan symbols such as these were used by our ancestors to mark many of the treaties with the United States.*

## Learning Your Clan

Colonization brought about severe disruptions to our clan systems. Today there are many Anishinabek who do not know their clan. By researching family, church, treaty, band or school records sometimes this information can be revealed. Also, one can offer tobacco to a spiritual person, who has the ability to seek the information needed to find out what clan one belongs to.

## Clan Customs

Each clan has their own teachings, but some customs are universal. People of your clan are considered to be your brother, sister, uncle, or aunt. When you meet someone of your clan who is younger than you, they are to be considered one of your

nieces or nephews. It is one's responsibility to look after the relatives of your clan. When someone visits your community, who is a member of your clan, you are to make sure they are taken care of. When you do these things you bring honor to your clan and yourself.

Today more people are learning about their clans and their ascribed responsibilities in ceremonies and within the community. Clan membership is an important part of our Anishinabek identity along with our spirit name. To learn the teachings, colors, songs, and dances about your particular clan, we suggest that you consult with an elder from your community.