

KANIENKEHÁ:KA CREATION STORY

Adapted from a story by
Ionataié:was , Mohawk storyteller

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Long, long ago, in the world we are now, we believe there was no land, just water and creatures of the water. But, up above, there was a place called **Karonhiá:ke**, The Sky World.

In **Karonhiá:ke**, there were beings who were in some ways like human beings and in some ways they were different. The beings in **Karonhiá:ke** had more powers and strength than human beings have, for instance, they could make things happen just by thinking about it!

Karonhiá:ke

There was a tree growing in the center of **Karonhiá:ke** called the Tree of Life. On that tree grew many different kinds of fruit and the blossoms on that tree glowed a most beautiful light that lit up **Karonhiá:ke**. The beings in **Karonhiá:ke** were told not to disturb that tree, but one day, a woman who was expecting a baby, asked for a drink of tea made from the roots of the Tree of Life.



Sky Woman

Her name was **Atsi'tsaká:ion** which means Mature Flower or Ancient Flower. In ancient times, she was also known as **Awenhnhá:i**. She is still remembered by the name **Teiawenháien** when the women sing the Planting Song.

When her husband, **Otáhe**, Guardian of the Tree of Life, started to dig near the bottom of the tree to get at the roots, the dirt caved in and some say that the tree fell down creating a massive hole in the floor of **Karonhiá:ke** - this was terrible.

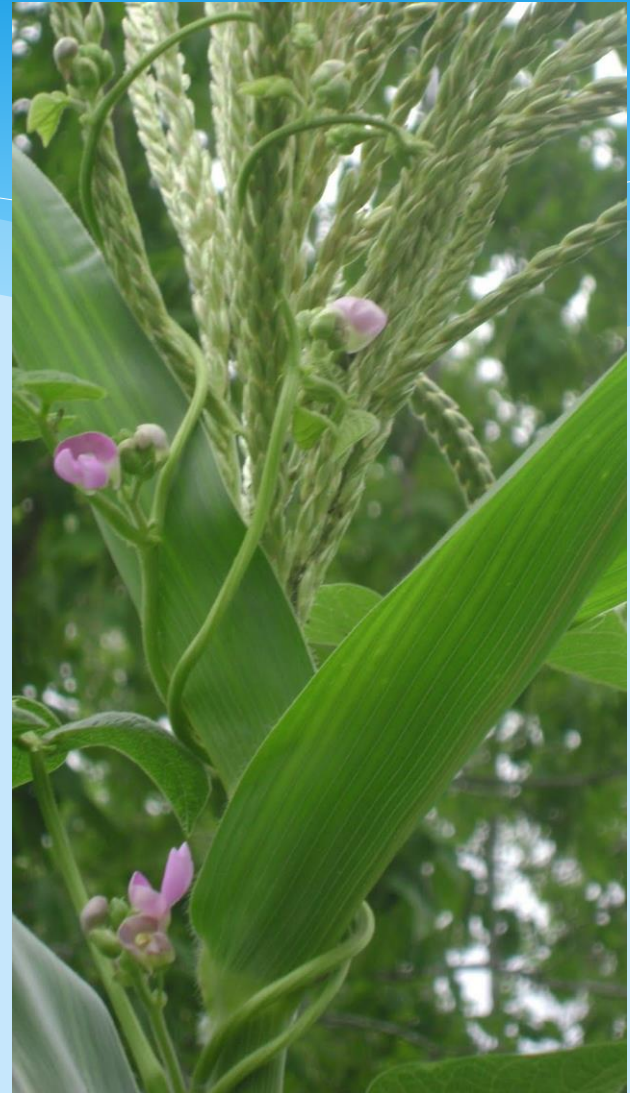
In the ancient Planting Song, Atsi'tsaka:ion was referred to as "Teiawenha:ien and "otsitsa" was called "a:wenha" -



Atsi'tsiaká:ion

Atsi'tsaká:ion went to see what had happened. Some say that she lost her balance while gazing, and fell into the hole. Some say that she knew she was destined to go through that hole, her insights coming from dreams she had had and so she jumped. Some say that she was pushed.

Nevertheless, when she did fall she grabbed some seeds from the roots of and around the Tree of Life. Because she fell through the hole in the sky, many people refer to her as **Atsi'tsaká:ion**, Sky Woman.



Down below, there was a flock of water birds flying through the air. Some say they were geese. Some say they were blue heron. Some say they were swans.

One of them looked up and saw **Atsi'tsaká:ion** Sky Woman falling. He spoke to the other birds and they decided to make a great blanket with their bodies and catch her on their backs. When they caught her they tried to bring her back up toward **Karonhiá:ke** , but she was too heavy and so they lowered her to the water below.

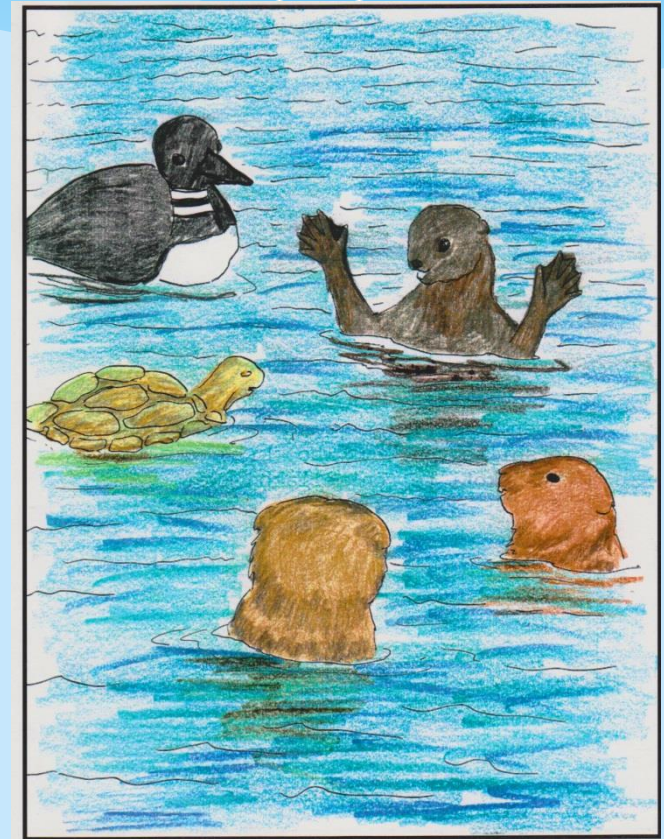


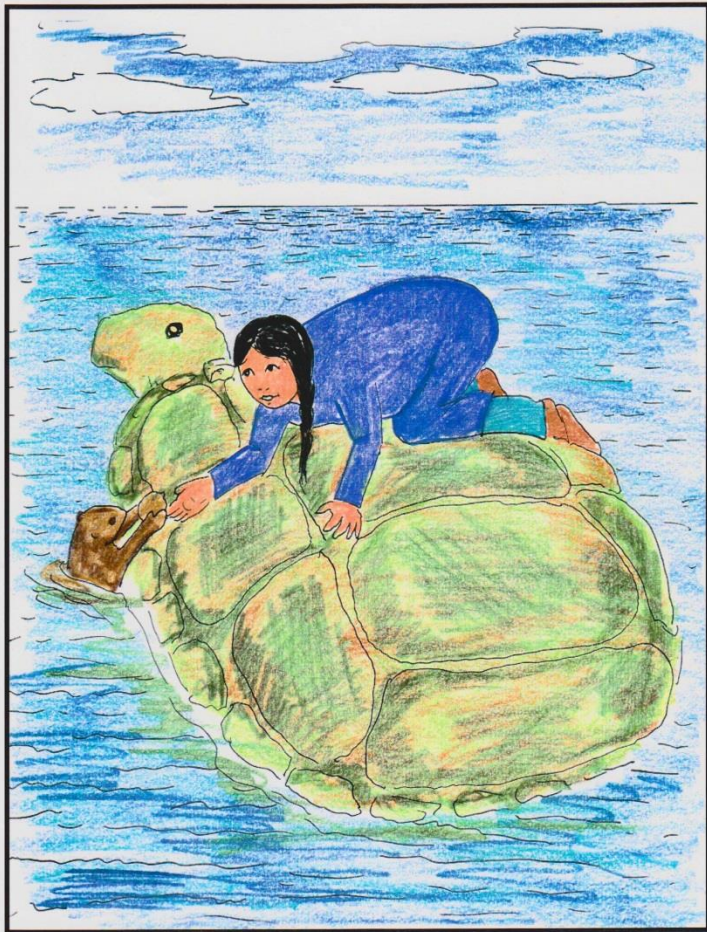
A **giant turtle** said that they could put her on his back, that his shell would be able to support her, so that's what they did. That is the reason some people call North America, **Turtle Island**.



Atsi'tsaká:ion Sky Woman thanked the creatures, she said that she needed land in order to survive and help other nourishment to grow. She explained **Karonhiá:ke** to the creatures and described things that were in existence in **Karonhiá:ke** and how she would need some of them in order to continue her life in the new world here.

One by one, the animals dove down to try to get dirt from under the water. Finally, some say it was Anó:tien the muskrat. Some say that it was Tawí:ne the otter.



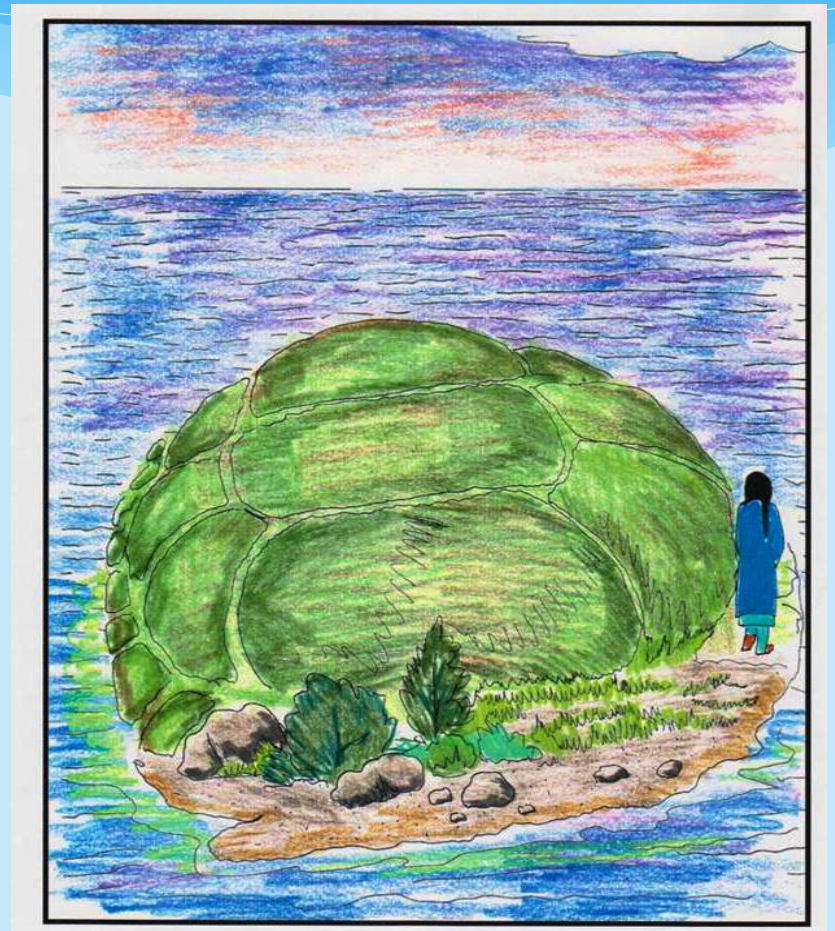


- * But finally, one creature was successful in bringing a few grains of dirt to **Atsi'tsaká:ion**.



She placed the dirt on the back of the turtle and she stood up.

She sang and danced in a counter-clockwise direction and when she did that, the turtle's shell grew and the grains of dirt multiplied. She dropped the seeds from the Tree of Life and they started to grow right away.



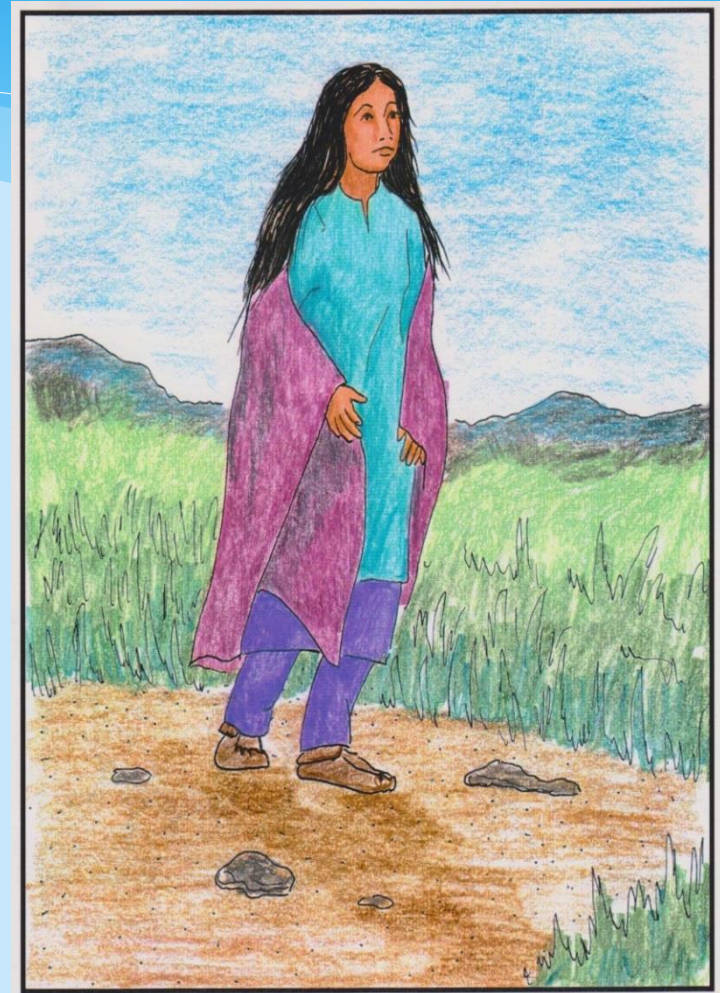


When she finished dancing and singing, there was land and plant life as far as she could see.

Some time went by and **Atsi'tsaká:ion** gave birth to a baby girl. Many know her as **Tako'skó:wa**, the Lynx.

Time went on and the baby girl grew up with the insights of her mother and knowledge of both worlds.

Tako'skó:wa, the Lynx was told by **Atsi'tsaká:ion** not to walk toward the west for she knew something was lingering but one day, her daughter did.



A wind started to blow from the west and a cloud started to move toward the daughter. **Tako'skó:wa** saw the outline of a male-being in the cloud and fainted.

When **Tako'skó:wa** woke up, she found two crossed arrows lying on top of her stomach, she had become the bride of the Spirit of the West Wind and now she was going to give birth to twin boys.



Atsi'tsaká:ion – Teiawenhá:ien

Those boys were very special. After all, their grandmother was **Atsi'tsaká:ion** and their father was the Spirit of the West Wind.

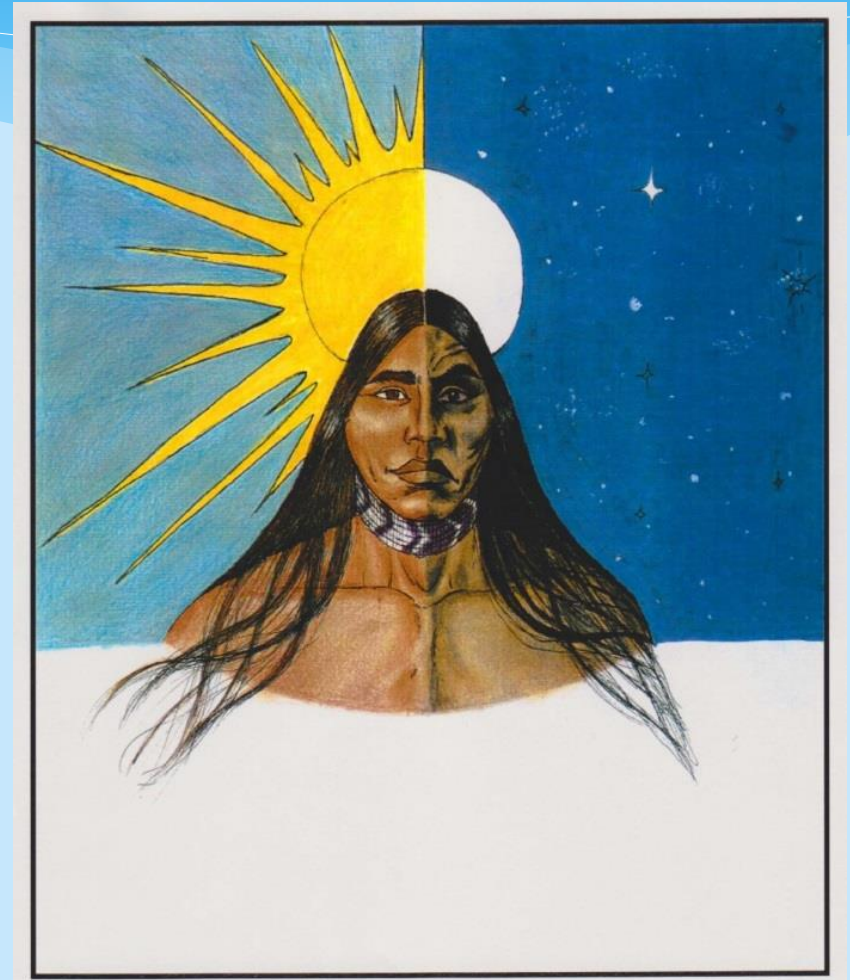
The boys could talk to each other while they were growing inside their mother, **Tako'skó:wa** and they didn't always agree with one another.



Tehníkhen – The Twins

When it was time for them to be born, the right-handed twin Sapling **Kanehtó:ton** (**Standing Sap**) was born in the usual way.

However, the left-handed twin Flint **Okarahtsikó:wa** (**Great Swampy Elm**) decided to push his way out through their mother's armpit, killing their mother leaving **Atsi'tsaká:ion**, now the Grandmother to raise the boys.



Iethi'nisténha Ohóntsa

They buried their mother and from her head grew **o:nenhste, osahè:ta, onon'ónsera** (corn, beans and squash); they are called **Tionhnhéhkwen ne ne áhsen nikontate'kén:'a**

– *sustainers of life*



Iethi'nisténha Ohóntsa

From her heart grew sacred tobacco which is used when there is a desire to communicate with the Creator. From her feet grew **ken'niiohontésha**, the wild strawberry which is known as **Ononhkwa'shón:'a**, the Big Medicine. Some say **ken'niiohontésha** grew from her heart, as it is shaped like the human heart.



Oien'kwahón:we - tobacco

Iethi'nisténha Ohóntsa

Even in her death,
Tako'skó:wa, the mother of
the two boys still made sure
that they had what they
needed to survive.

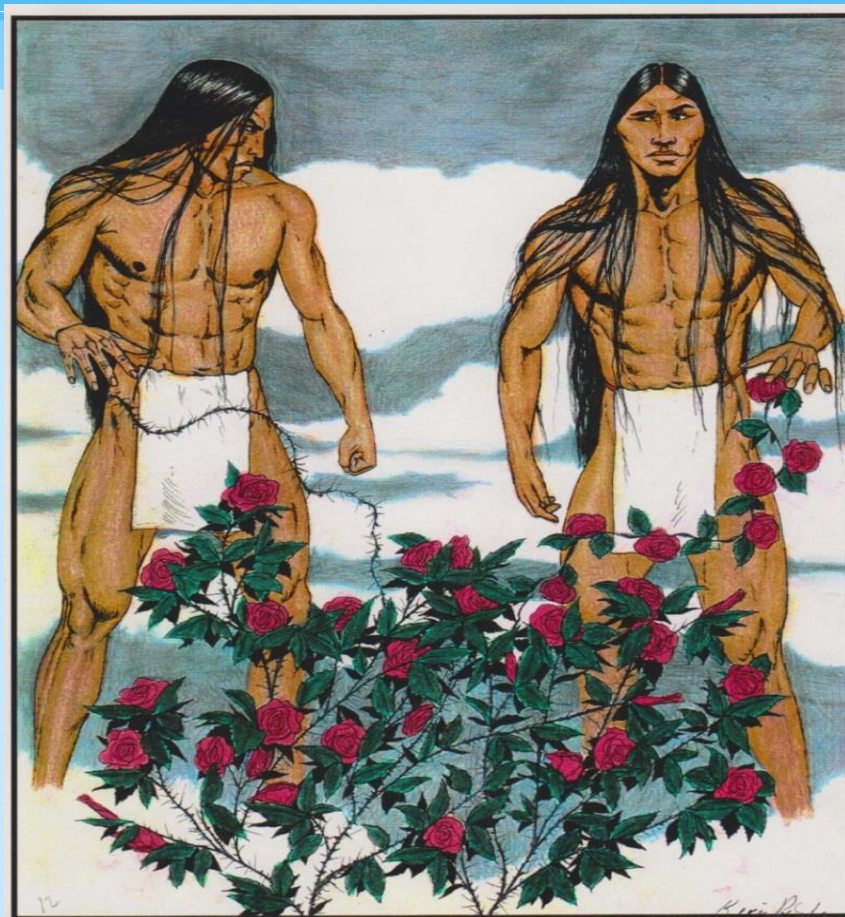
She is called **Iethi'nisténha
Ohóntsa** - Mother Earth and
to this day she still supports
all of the people, animals
and plants.



latate'kén:'a

The twin boys grew up and went about the task of continuing the work started by their Grandmother, **Atsi'tsaká:ion**; they created everything that is found in the natural world today.

They made rivers, flowers, animals and eventually they made the human beings.

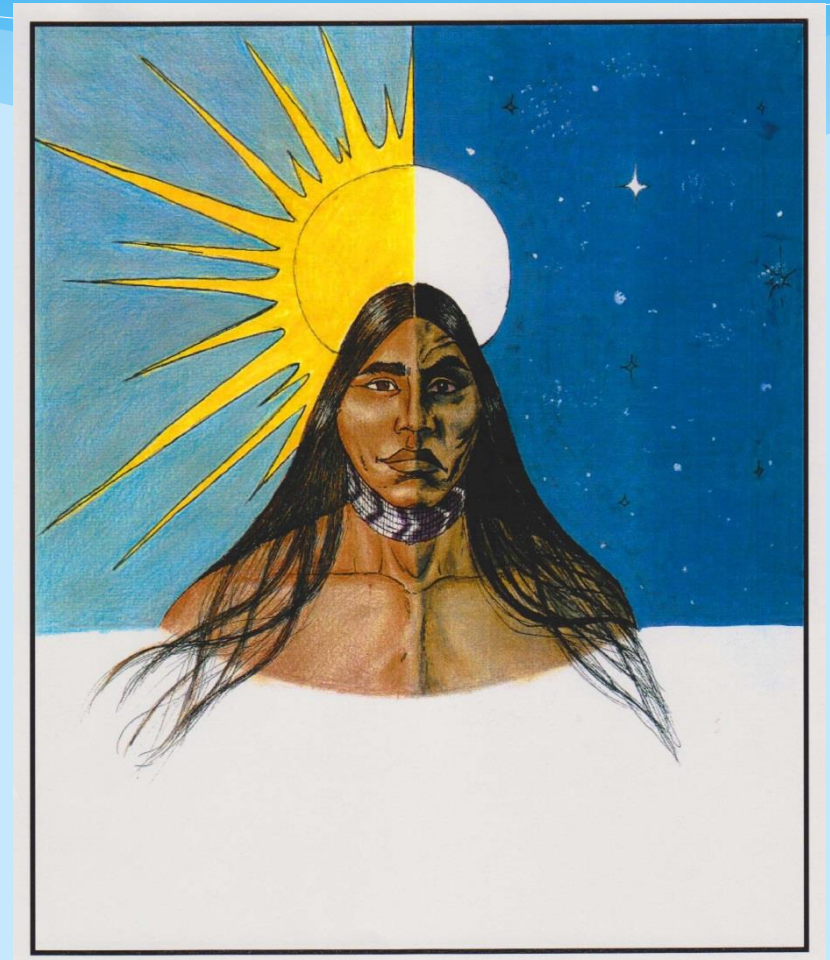


Sha'taió'ksteke

Balance

The left-handed twin, also known as **Hatowi** became the **keeper of the night** and the right-handed twin, **Tharonhiawa:kon** became the **keeper of the day**.

During creation a series of trials, tribulations and competitive times occurred amongst the brothers but when they were done making their creations, everything was in perfect **balance**.



Iethihsótha Ahshonthénhka Karáhkwa

When she passed away, her head was flung into the night sky by the twins. She is still there, and we called her **Iethihsótha Ahshonthénhka Karáhkwa** Grandmother Moon. She reflects light at night, She helps the people keep track of time. She controls the rise and fall of the waters, She keeps company with the stars and **Hatowi**, the left-handed twin, the keeper of the night and our Grandfather.

She regulates the monthly cycles of all of the female life which guarantees that new life will be born making her the leader of all the life.



Eventually, the human beings were made. They are meant to be the **Caretakers**, they are supposed to make sure that everything stays in balance

However, it seems though, sometimes it is the human beings who keep forgetting what they are supposed to do. The human beings need to remember to take only what they need and to leave the rest for the future generations to experience and enjoy.

The human beings are the ones who forget that everything in the natural world is connected and is part of the same web of life and so should be respected and honored daily.

It is the duty of all the people of the world that they will respect their original instructions and take good care of their Mother Earth.



Resources

Illustrations:

- * **Atsi'tsaká:ion on Earth:**
- * Katlatont Brenda Gabriel Doxtater
- * **Twins:** by Kevin Proulx
- * **Skywoman slides 2 + 5:** Katsi'tsakwas Ellen Gabriel
- * **Creation Story adapted from Ionataié:was** - Kay Olan
version - Ionataie:was Kay Olan is the niece of the late
respected Ahkwesahsne Elder Ernie Benedict.

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