

TSAPAH

TALKS OF PHEASANT

(Muckleshoot)



Developed by the Muckleshoot Curriculum Committee

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(Muckleshoot)

Lance awoke excited today. He dressed hurriedly and quickly ate his breakfast. This was the day Tsapah (saw-paw) (Old Grandfather) was coming to Lance's class to talk with the children. Lance loved to listen to his stories of long ago. As Lance waited for the bus on the dirt road, he could picture in his mind Tsapah talking and the far away look Tsapah always got in his eyes. His grandfather always seemed to fade into another time as his stories came forth, and Lance would drift along with him.

As Lance waited with his schoolmates, he happily told them of Tsapah's visit to school. "Guess what? Today my Tsapah is going to be in my class with me! He's going to tell us stories and everything."

The other children were soon excited, too. "Gee, your very own Tsapah coming to school!" one exclaimed "I wish my Tsapah would do that."

"Yah," said Jeff, Lance's friend, "I wish I were in your class. My teacher would never think up something like that."

In no time at all, the bus came bumping along the road and the children climbed aboard. Soon every child on the bus knew of Tsapah's visit to Lance's classroom. The non-Indian children were drawn into the contagious excitement about Tsapah's visit.

When the bus finally arrived at school, Lance stepped off and dashed to his classroom. Lance and his classmates could talk of nothing else but Tsapah's anticipated arrival at school.

Miss Moses glanced around the room at the whispering, squirming little people. She wondered how she was ever going to control them when they were all so excited and active. It took longer than usual for class to begin. Miss Moses was from the nearby Muckleshoot Indian Reservation. Because she was Indian and understood Tsapah and his ways, he had agreed to come to the school. Tsapah had been visiting his daughter in Seattle, Washington, which was about thirty miles away. Miss Moses had traveled there to persuade him to come to her class. Tsapah's daughter would be bringing him to the school in the afternoon.

As Lance sat at his desk, his mind took him again to the way his Tsapah was. Tsapah lived quietly in his old house on the Muckleshoot reservation. He had only his dog Postud with him. Postud, which means White People, got his name because he was all white and Tsapah said the dog always acted as if he wanted everyone to notice him. Postud understood the Indian language because that was all Tsapah ever spoke at his house. Postud would not obey unless he was given a command in the Indian language.

Tsapah's sons always brought him salmon, deer and elk. Sometimes Tsapah would can some of it in jars, but he smoked or dried most of the meat and fish. That was because he like it that way. He gave a lot of the meat and fish he prepared to his children and his grandchildren.

Lance's mind snapped back into the classroom when his classmate Marvin tapped him on the shoulder and asked, "When is Tsapah gonna be here?" Marvin had long braids and was Lance's cousin. Marvin sat behind Lance, so Lance turned and explained that Tsapah would not be there until after lunch.

At last, lunch time arrived and Miss Moses' class lined up at the door. Miss Moses led the children to the cafeteria and hoped the upcoming afternoon session would be a success.

After lunch Lance went with Marvin to the playground. As they stood in line to play tetherball, they briefly discussed Tsapah's visit. A boy standing behind them overheard their discussion and said, "So what, an old man talking to you. Boring." He maliciously pulled one of Marvin's braids and said, "Right little girl?" Lance and Marvin glanced at each other and decided to ignore the boy.

Marvin said, "Sometimes I wish I could just punch someone, or cut my hair off."

Lance looked at Marvin and said, "Well my mom cut my braids off last year. I didn't like everyone bugging me. But now I am growing my hair again and I don't care any more if I get teased."

The bell for class rang too soon. Marvin was winning at tetherball, but in the back of his mind was the thought that Tsapah would soon be there. All of the children returned to the classroom and seated themselves. The room was buzzing with anticipation. Miss Moses entered and walked to the front of the room. "Well class," she said, "Tsapah is here and will come in soon. I would like you to be quiet and listen carefully. If you do not, Tsapah may get offended. This is a very special occasion. Tsapah has never come to the school before." Just as Miss Moses finished, the classroom door opened and Tsapah entered. He stopped at the doorway and looked at the students for awhile.

The boys and girls stared at him. Tsapah had grey hair that hung to his shoulders. He was wearing old faded jeans and a red plaid shirt. He had a pair of beaded moccasins on his feet. Tsapah was very old, but he stood straight and tall. He had a red handkerchief tied as a headband on his hair. His face was expressionless. The students were enthralled by Tsapah's presence. Tsapah slowly walked to the front of the room and greeted Miss Moses in the Muckleshoot language.

Miss Moses turned toward the class and announced, "This is Tsapah. He will talk with you today. I do not know what he will say, but I do know that it will be good." She turned toward Tsapah and indicated that the class was turned over to him. Tsapah said he did not want the children to be at their desks. He had the children clear an area at the front of the room and they all sat on the floor around him.

"You are special people," he said. "You young folk are the leaders of tomorrow. There are many things you must learn. That is why you are going to school. You

will not learn everything here at school. There are some things you will learn by living. My grandfather used to tell us of many things. Always the things he spoke of left us with a lesson to remember. The things he said were meant to help us be good people, if we took them in our hearts. I know you are not all Indian people. But it makes no difference, for you, too, will grow up, and will want to be good people.”

Lance glanced at his classmates as they listened to Tsapah. Lance was so proud to have him at school. “My Tsapah loves people,” he thought.

Tsapah said, “I will tell you something, and it may help you as you travel through this life.” Tsapah held his hands before him, for it was his manner to use his hands as he spoke.

“All of the men were hunters many years ago. They had to go out and bring in all the deer and elk they could to keep the people healthy and content. The hunters all had animal names because they were not men as we know them today. They were named according to the way they hunted and killed. There was Cougar. Cougar enjoyed stalking the animal as much as finally killing it for the meat. Cougar believed he was a very good hunter. People always knew they would hear stories of how good Cougar was when he came around. He loved to brag about his hunting skills.

“Wolf was a good hunter, too. Wolf did not really take time in stalking an animal, as Cougar did. Instead, if he came upon an animal, he would chase it and quickly kill it. Wolf’s problem was that he would sometimes destroy a lot of meat while killing the animal.

“Around the campfires at night, Wolf would be loud and noisy, saying, ‘Oh, you should have been with me today. I got the biggest deer I’ve seen in a long time. I really had a hard chase, but I caught him. When I got him down he jumped up again. Three times that deer did that to me. By that time I was very angry. When I got that deer down again, I killed him quickly. You all know that I got the biggest deer today, because I am such a good hunter.’ Then Wolf threw his head back and filled the forest with his loud laughter.

“Weasel was listening to all the bragging of Wolf. ‘Wolf,’ said Weasel, ‘You know sometimes you go out on a hunt and bring back nothing. When I go out to hunt, I always bring back something.’ When Weasel hunted, he would chase the animal and stick his teeth into the animal’s neck. Weasel would not let go until the animal was dead.

Woodpecker could also be heard telling of his hunting ventures. Woodpecker felt he was special because he could travel in the sky and see what was below. Woodpecker had a high thin voice and could always be heard above everyone telling of his hunting skills.

“The only hunter who was silent at these meetings was Pheasant. Pheasant would merely sit among the hunters and listen. The hunters would sometimes make fun of Pheasant and laugh because they thought he was not a good hunter. Pheasant would never answer them, and they would soon tire of teasing him and go back to their hunting tales.

All of the people listened to the hunters' stories with interest. The people thought the hunters were very good people. The hunters brought food that would last all year long. The people smoked or dried the meat, but they really enjoyed fresh meat when they could get it. Sometimes the people would have to go many months without fresh meat if the hunters had a bad season. Even during these bad seasons, the hunters would gather to brag and laugh. It was during one of these meetings around the campfire that the hunters got a little disturbed with each other. There had to be a way for them to decide who the best hunter was, once and for all.

Cougar said, 'Let us have a contest. We will each go out tomorrow to hunt. The first hunter to come back with meat shall be the best hunter.'

"Yes,' exclaimed Wolf, 'that sounds like a good idea. Then we would know for sure who the best hunter is.' The rest of the hunters nodded in agreement since each was determined to be the best.

The next day each hunter prepared for the hunt and went out into the forest. All, that is, except Pheasant. Pheasant merely watched as the other hunters left the camp.

All the people waited anxiously to see who would be first back with the meat. As night drew nearer and the sun began to go down, the people knew the hunters must not be having any luck with the hunt. One by one the hunters began to return. Not one of them had meat. There was much complaining around the campfire that night.

"Wolf,' said Woodpecker, 'I saw you headed right toward a deer this afternoon. How is it that you did not bring that one down?'"

"Wolf glared at Woodpecker and retorted, 'Well, if you saw the animal, why didn't you get it? I just had a little bad luck today, that's all. It can happen to the best hunter. Tomorrow I intend to be first with a big buck. That will show you, Woodpecker!'"

"Pheasant was kneeling in his usual place listening to the disappointment of the hunters. 'Well,' Pheasant thought to himself, 'Tomorrow I shall go out, and perhaps these hunters will learn a lesson from me.'

"The next morning as the hunters prepared to leave camp, they noticed Pheasant making preparations also. 'Hah!' said Cougar, 'Everyone, come and see what is happening. Pheasant! Making arrows to hunt with. So you decided to join the hunt, eh, Pheasant?' Cougar asked Pheasant. 'Well, it is an open contest. Anyone can be in it, even you.'

"The hunters left for the forest, and Pheasant was still preparing his arrows. Pheasant plucked a feather from his own clothing and attached it to his arrow. He turned the arrow in his hands and examined it closely. 'Now,' Pheasant thought to himself, 'I am ready to go on the hunt. I know for certain I shall get some meat. It is this feather which will guide my arrow straight and true.'

"Pheasant had not gone far when he saw a deer. He shot his arrow and killed the deer instantly. Pheasant was not able to pack the deer back to camp alone, so he traveled back to get assistance from one of the other hunters. On his way back

to camp, he came upon Weasel who agreed to help him take the meat to camp. Weasel said to Pheasant, 'Oh, the other hunters are going to be surprised about this. No one even knew you could hunt. Now you have proven yourself to be the best hunter among our people.' Pheasant did not reply, but set about preparing the meat to take back to his people.

"There was much excitement in the camp that night. The people were happy to have fresh meat, and the hunters were more quiet than usual. They were talking quietly of Pheasant and how he had beat them all in this hunt. Pheasant soon appeared and went to his usual place by the campfire. The hunters began asking him questions right away.

"How is it that you shot so straight today?" asked Wolf.

"It is my feathers,' replied Pheasant. 'When I put one of my own feathers on the arrow, I never miss. I can even get an animal that is very far away. Only my feathers will work to make the arrow go straight and far.'

"After that the hunters had a new respect for Pheasant's hunting ability. All continued to hunt. Sometimes they were successful, and other times they were not.

"Mountain Eagle was a good man. When he heard of the manner in which Pheasant used his feathers on his arrows, Mountain Eagle decided he would like to try his own feathers. When Mountain Eagle went out to hunt, his arrow turned and missed the deer. Mountain Eagle's feathers were too wide and too thin.

"The other hunters asked Pheasant if they could get feathers from him when they needed them for hunting. Pheasant answered. 'My feathers keep me warm. If I were to allow you to take feathers whenever you wanted them, I would get cold. I cannot give you any feathers.' Pheasant noticed how disappointed the hunters were at his reply. He decided to make a compromise. He knew the hunters might get mean toward him. Cougar even attempted to jump Pheasant. 'I will tell you what,' Pheasant said, 'I will give one person a feather of mine, but you must decide among yourselves who will get the feather.'

"Black Eagle from the mountains was present, and in the end the hunters decided that he should be the one to get the feather. Black Eagle made an arrow and brought it to Pheasant to receive his feather. Pheasant put the feather on Black Eagle's arrow. Pheasant instructed Black Eagle, 'When you are hunting and shoot game, just bring the arrow back to me and I will fix it right away.'

"Black Eagle went on his hunt. When he saw a deer, he aimed and shot his arrow. The deer died, and Black Eagle took home much meat. This proved to the other hunters that Pheasant was a good person. He was the best hunter and a real sportsman.

"After awhile, however, the other hunters became jealous of Pheasant and tried to fight with him. Pheasant knew they could harm him if they really wanted to. 'Please do me no harm,' Pheasant pleaded. 'I do not consider myself important because of the hunting contest. When I am hungry I go out for meat. I do not abuse my power and I am not greedy.' After considering what Pheasant told them, the hunters left and did not bother Pheasant in this manner again.

"Another man was in the mountains at that time. This man was called Changer.

It was Changer who made the earth as we know it today. He changed the hunters as well as the rocks, trees and all manner of life. Changer and Pheasant met and became friends. "This is your fate, Pheasant. You will be a good hunter, but the Indian people are coming now. I am going to make it so they will be able to receive your power. You will be a good spirit. If young Indian people receive your power, they also will become good hunters."

"A long time passed. The Indian people came. They told their children to go up into the mountains and look for a power to make them good and brave. One Indian boy went up in the mountains and met Pheasant and took Pheasant for his power. Pheasant explained about the contest to decide the best hunter. 'It does not matter if bigger men go out to hunt with you, young man' Pheasant said. 'You will always be a good hunter and be the first to kill game.'

"When the young Indian boy returned from the mountains, he found that he was indeed the best hunter."

Tsapah looked around at the children who had been listening intently to the story of Pheasant. "Now that you have heard the story and thought about what happened, what kind of a person was Pheasant?"

"I know, Tsapah!" exclaimed Lance as he waved his arm in the air. "Pheasant was a quiet person, but a good person."

"That's right," said Marvin. "He proved he was the best hunter because he knew it to be true. But Pheasant did not have to brag or be noisy about it."

Tsapah said, "Good, you are good listeners. Even if you are good at something, and you know it, you do not have to brag and tell everyone about it. You will know it in your heart and be able to have the skill even if you not brag about it."

"I think you could see, too, when the other hunters wanted to fight with Pheasant because of their jealousy, Pheasant found a better way out of it. The hunters were satisfied and went on their way, and left Pheasant to live his life the way he wanted." Tsapah concluded, "Remember, being big and boastful does not show people that you are the best. Say nothing, and proving you are good has greater influence."

Miss Moses stood and said, "Thank you Tsapah for being with us today. I know the children enjoyed this afternoon and will have much to think about when they remember the story of Pheasant."

Lance had been so involved with the story that he felt as if he had just awakened from a dream. Tsapah rose slowly from the floor and said, "I am glad, young people, that I came here to share this story with you. I must go now, but you think about everything. Live to be people with good hearts and good spirits. Don't pull all your feathers out." The children laughed as Tsapah mentioned their feathers.

Miss Moses walked with Tsapah to the door. He raised his hand to the children in a final wave to say goodbye. The children waved back, and there was a chorus of "Goodbye, Tsapah! Goodbye! Please come again, Tsapah!"

Miss Moses had a little trouble keeping the children's minds on their afternoon studies. She knew the afternoon session with Tsapah was a big success. Tsapah's

story left a good feeling in the room. The children were light-hearted and happy. She knew this would have to happen again.