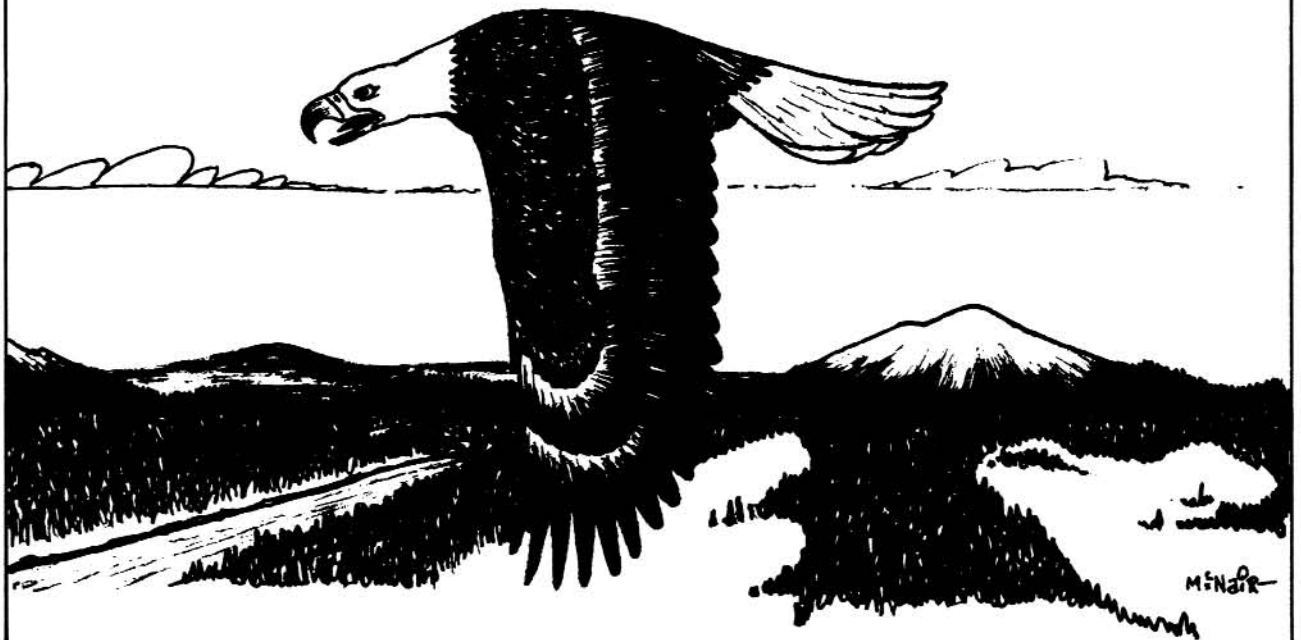


HOW EAGLE BECAME LEADER OF ALL BIRDS

(Klamath)



Developed by members of the Klamath, Modoc and Paiute Committee

Marc McNair, Coordinator
Carlette Tupper
Cleve Hecocta

Illustrated by Marc McNair

Story told by Cleve Hecocta

Joseph Coburn, Director
Pacific Northwest Indian Reading and Language Development Program
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

Developed by the Pacific Northwest Indian Reading and Language
Development Program, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory,
300 Southwest Sixth Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97204

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The work upon which this publication is based was performed pursuant to
Contract No. 400-80-0105 with the Educational Equity Group/Multi-
cultural/Bilingual Division of the National Institute of Education. It does
not, however, necessarily reflect the views of that agency.

Printed and bound in the United States of America

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(Klamath)

Years ago, birds were like people. They walked around and they could talk just like humans. The only difference was that they could fly. These birds admired the humans in their villages because everything always went smoothly. The birds had one problem. They didn't have a leader.

The Indian people didn't have this problem. The Indian children had their parents. The Indian parents had their parents. They all had their chief and holy men and they had the Great Spirit. They all had someone to follow and it worked!

One day all of the birds decided to hold a council meeting. They chose the Owl to lead their council meeting because he was said to be the wisest. Old Owl got up in front of all the birds from near and far and said, "On behalf of all birdkind, I thank you for coming to this meeting. As you know, life for us has been tough. What we need is a strong and faithful leader!"

All of the birds agreed to this and then began discussing just who should be the leader. After a long discussion, they finally came up with two names, Hawk and Eagle.

"These are both very fine birds, I'm sure," said old Owl, "but we still have a problem. We must choose between the two. Does any bird have any idea as to how we are supposed to make this choice?"

"I propose a contest of skill!" said a voice from the crowd. All of the birds agreed to the contest.

"All right, a contest it is!" yelled old Owl. "Both Hawk and Eagle shall have to prove themselves in flight." Owl went on, "The one who can fly the highest shall be our leader. Eagle, Hawk, you both have five days to prepare yourselves for the contest," said Owl. "In five days we shall hold the contest and determine just who our leader shall be."

After the meeting broke up, the two chosen birds began preparing themselves. They went through different preparations. They both knew that they had to be physically fit, as well as mentally fit, in order to complete their appointed task.

Finally the day of the contest arrived, and both contestants were ready. All of the birds gathered around as the Hawk was chosen to be the first. Up he flew, higher and higher, until he was almost out of sight. "Golly! He's way, way up there!" said a voice from the crowd.

Soon Hawk began to circle as he was descending to earth. Finally, he landed in front of the judges and the crowd cheered.

Next was Eagle's turn. Off flew Eagle to try and beat the height of Hawk. Up

he flew, higher and higher, until he was almost out of sight. “Wow! He’s way, way, way up there, and he’s still going!” said a voice from the crowd. Yes, Eagle flew up and out of sight. He began circling as he was descending back to earth. He finally landed in front of the judges and the cheering crowd.

“Well, well,” said old Owl, “that was quite a flight! And for showing us that you have mastered the art of flying, you are now our new leader.” Owl added, “As for you Hawk, you are still very important to us. Don’t feel left out.”

And from that day on, the Eagle had become more than just a leader for the birds. He is used in Indian ceremonies, rituals and gatherings. In later years he was chosen to be the National Bird of America.