

A LENAPE CREATION STORY

A Lenape came to the house of a Dutch man who lived in Hackensack. The Dutch man was curious about the Indian's beliefs.

He asked the Lenape, "And where did your father come from? And your grandfather and great-grandfather, and so on to the first of your people?"

The Lenape was silent for a little while, and he then took a piece of coal out of the fire and began to write upon the floor. He first drew a circle, on which he made four paws, a head, and a tail.

"This," he said, "is a tortoise, lying in the water."

He moved his hand around the figure, and continued:

"This was all water, and so at first was the earth. Then the tortoise gradually raised its round back up high, the water ran off, and thus the earth became dry."

He then took a little straw and placed it on end in the middle of the figure, and proceeded:

"The earth was now dry, and there grew a tree in the middle of the earth. The root of this tree sent forth a sprout, and there grew upon it a man, who was the first male. This man was alone, and would have remained alone, but the tree bent over until its top touched the earth, and there came forth another sprout, on which there grew a woman. From these two were all people produced."

Adapted from The Journal of Jasper Danckaerts, 1679–1680.

LENAPE CREATION STORY QUESTION SHEET

1. How did the Lenape Indian tell the Dutch man about the creation of the world? What visual aid did he use? Why do you think he did this?
2. How is this creation story similar to other creation stories you might know?
3. How is this creation story different?
4. Why do you think there are similarities between creation stories from different cultures?