

from
The Walam Olum

DELAWARE INDIAN

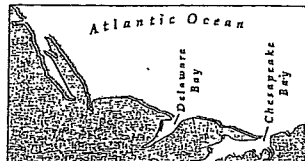
Examine What You Know (Prior Knowledge)

The following selection is the creation story and a history record of the Delaware, a Native American tribe. A creation story tells how the universe, the earth, and life on the earth began. Most of the world's cultures have their own stories explaining these mysteries. Which explanations do you know? Consider explanations from religions, literature, and science. Then write a brief account of one of the creation stories you know.

Expand Your Knowledge (Building Background)

Walam Olum means "painted record." While generations of Delaware told and retold *The Walam Olum*, the story was also preserved in drawings called pictographs. A pictograph was made for each event in the story and carved into birch bark. The poem was eventually written down and later was translated into English. Like some translations, the one you will read here is an interpretation of the original poem.

During the 1600's, the Delaware people lived along the Delaware River valley and in what is now New Jersey. They were among the first tribes to encounter the Europeans who came to the New World. Despite the peacefulness of the Delaware, they were eventually forced westward to Kansas and Oklahoma.



Enrich Your Reading (Reading Skill)

A Narrative Poem *The Walam Olum* is a narrative poem, a poem that tells a story. Use the following strategies to increase your understanding.

- Read the poem aloud. All poetry is meant to be heard. Pieces such as *The Walam Olum* were traditionally recited aloud at tribal gatherings.
- Let the punctuation be your guide. Pause at commas. Don't stop at the end of a line if there is no period; read through to the period, which is the real end of the thought.
- Note the repetition of words and phrases. Repetition in poetry creates a rhythm, reinforces ideas, and enhances the sound of a poem.

FROM THE WALAM OLUM

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The Walam Olum

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I

At first, in that place, at all times, above the earth,

On the earth, [was] an extended fog, and there the great Manito was.

At first, forever, lost in space, everywhere, the great Manito was.

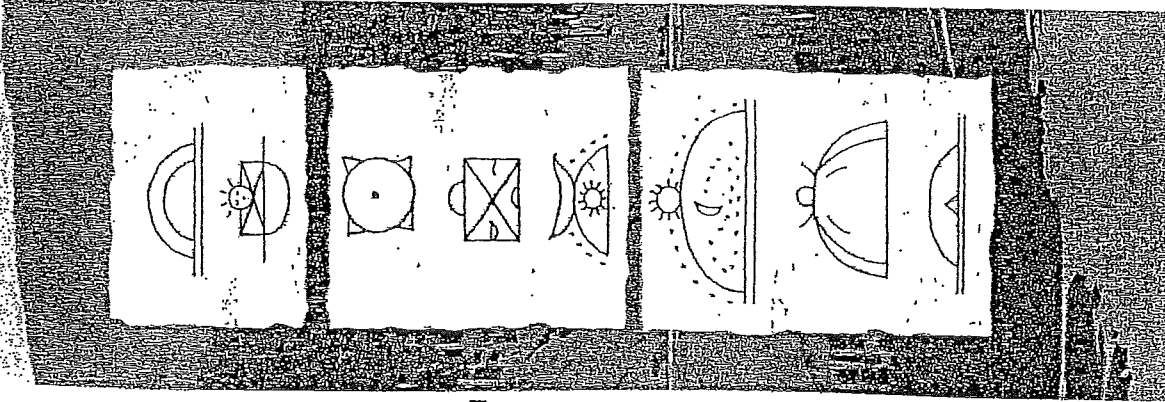
He made the extended land and the sky.

He made the sun, the moon, the stars.

He made them all to move evenly.

Then the wind blew violently, and it cleared, and the water flowed off far and strong.

And groups of islands grew newly, and there remained. ← 5



Anew spoke the great Manito, a manito to manitos,¹

To beings, mortals, souls and all,

And ever after he was a manito to men, and their grandfather.

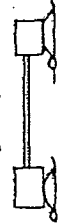
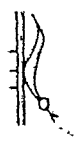
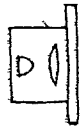
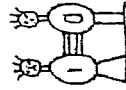
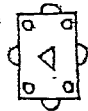
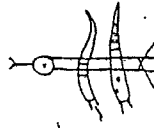
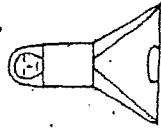
He gave the first mother, the mother of beings.

He gave the fish, he gave the turtles, he gave the beasts, he gave the birds.

But an evil Manito made evil beings only, monsters,

He made the flies, he made the gnats.

1. a manito (man' a to') to manitos: the Delaware god. Manito was the creator of other sacred beings, manitos, both good and evil.



All beings were then friendly.

Truly the manitos were active and kindly

To those very first men, and to those first mothers, fetched them wives,

And fetched them food, when first they desired it.

All had cheerful knowledge, all had leisure, all thought in gladness.

But very secretly an evil being, a mighty magician, came on earth,

And with him brought badness, quarreling, unhappiness,

Brought bad weather, brought sickness, brought death.

All this took place of old on the earth, beyond the great tidewater, at the first.

The preceding excerpt was Part I of The Walam Olum. The following excerpt is taken from Part V, the end of The Walam Olum, in which the succession of Delaware tribal chieftains and their deeds is given.

V

A great land and a wide land was the east land,

A land without snakes, a rich land, a pleasant land.

Great Fighter was chief, toward the north.

At the Straight river, River-Loving was chief.

Becoming-Fat was chief at Sassafras land.

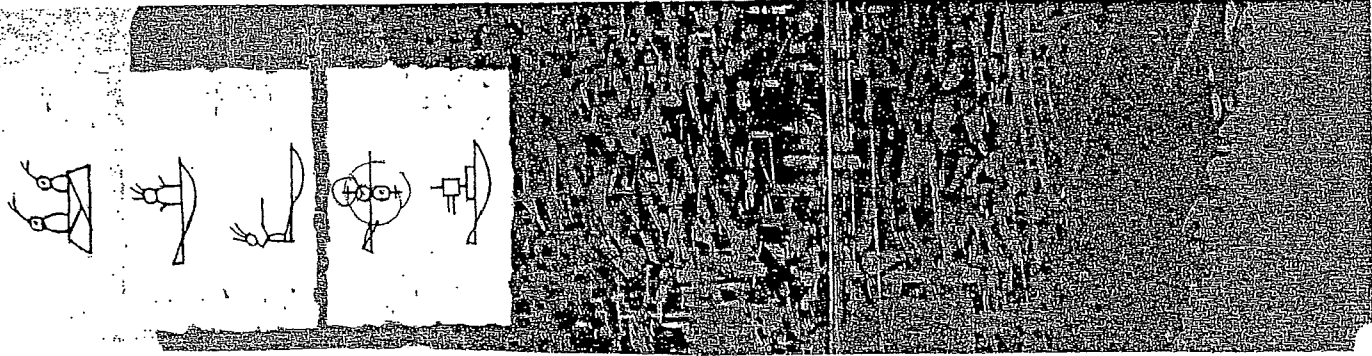
All the hunters made wampum² again at the great sea.

Man-Who-Fails was chief; he fought the Mengwe.

He-is-Friendly was chief, he scared the Mengwe.

Saluted was chief; thither,

2. wampum (wām' pan): beads made of shells, used by some Native Americans as money and ornamentation.



Over there, on the Scioto³ he had foes.

White-Crab was chief; a friend of the shore.

Watcher was chief; he looked toward the sea.

At this time, from north and south, the whites came.

They are peaceful; they have great things; who are they

3. Scioto (st ó' tú): a river in Ohio.