

The Gift of the Maple Tree

ONCE THERE WAS a village that had no trees. The ground was brown and bare. The people of the village longed for trees but didn't know where to find them.

Every night before they went to bed the people of the village went to the well in the center of town and dropped a small stone into the water and made a wish. From the smallest toddler to the oldest grandmother, they all wished for trees.

This went on for several years and then one evening after the villagers had gone to bed, an earth fairy heard the bouncing and echoing of the small wishing stones falling down the well. She lived deep underground in the earth and could feel the vibrations of the stones and hear the echo of the wishes through the air spaces between the soil particles.

She wanted to help so she went to one of the tunnels underground where the earth fairies store seeds for the future of the world and collected some seeds from the piles and put them in a small round pouch around her waist. Then she climbed out of the ground and flew up into the air to the village that had no trees.

She left the seeds on the rim of the well.

The next morning the villagers found the seeds and rejoiced. They knew just what to do. They planted the seeds around their village and in time big beautiful trees grew. They were Maple Trees.

Every season of the year the Maple Trees gave a gift to the people of the village.

In the Autumn, the trees wore brilliant colored leaves of gold and orange and red. They lit up the village like a sunset and others came from far and wide to see them.

In the winter the Maple Trees gave their limbs for firewood to keep the people of the village warm.

In the spring the villagers tapped the trees and boiled the sap to make sweet syrup for their pancakes and oatmeal.

And in the summer, the children played under the shade of the tree's large green canopy and stayed cool and happy even when the sun was blazing hot.

And ALL year round the trees gave the villagers sweet fresh air to breathe.

Every season the villagers would collect their gifts and go home to enjoy them. One year, the earth fairy came back to check on the village. She noticed that the people were loving the gifts from the trees but she didn't see the villagers doing much for the trees in return.

She decided to leave something else on the rim of the well: a note with a wish of her own.

"Find a way to thank the trees," is all that it said.

When the villagers found the note, they all talked and talked about what to do. They loved the trees and wanted to make sure they gave the trees a gift in return and they felt bad for not thinking of it themselves.

[ask the audience: does anyone have an idea of what the villagers could do for the trees? What gift could you give a maple tree?]

One villager offered to share some of his water when he drew buckets from the well to bring home to his family.

"I'll pour water on the tree's roots before I go home with my own water," he said.

Another person said, "I'll make sure to only harvest branches for my fire from the strongest healthiest trees who have plenty of branches to spare. "

The youngest child spoke up and chimed in with "everytime I play under a tree, I'll hug the tree before I go home."

Everyone in the village had an idea and the trees overhearing them, quivered with gratitude.

And from that day on, the villagers and trees shared gifts with each other each season and they all lived long healthy lives ever after.

THE END

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(Inspired by Maple Nation in *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer)

