

Stories

Anishinaabe elder Basil Johnston tells of the time our teacher Nanabozho was fishing in the lake for supper, as he often did, with hook and line. Heron came striding along through the reeds on his long, bent legs, his beak like a spear. Heron is good at fishing and is a sharing friend, so he told Nanabozho about a new way to fish that would make his life much easier. Heron cautioned him to be careful not to take too many fish, but Nanabozho was already thinking of a feast. He went out early the next day and soon had a whole basketful of fish, so heavy he could barely carry it and far more than he could eat. He cleaned all those fish and set them out to dry on the racks outside his lodge. The next day, with his belly still full, he went back to the lake and again did what Heron had showed him. "Aha," he thought as he carried home the fish, "I will have plenty to eat this winter."

Day after day he stuffed himself. As the lake grew empty and his drying racks grew full, a delicious smell filled the forest. Fox began licking his lips. Again, Nanabozho went to the lake, so proud of himself, but that day his nets came up empty. When he got home to his lodge, the racks of fish were toppled in the dirt and every bite was gone. Nanabozho learned a key rule - never take more than you need.