

Gluskabe and Old Man Winter

Abenaki

The homeland of the Abenaki people is the area now known as northern New England, where the winters can be very cold. The Abenakis lived in small villages near the rivers, which were their highways. Their birchbark-covered homes were called wigwams and were shaped like domes or large cones. Their seasonal round of life would find them fishing at the rivers or the seashore in the spring and summer, and hunting for deer, moose, and caribou in the woods in the autumn and winter. Their fields of corn, beans, squash, and other plants were grown in the river valleys and at the edges of the big lakes. Today many Abenaki people still live in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine, and Abenaki children still love to hear stories of Gluskabe's clever tricks.

Characters

SPEAKING ROLES:

NARRATOR

GLUSKABE

GRANDMOTHER WOODCHUCK

HUMAN BEING

OLD MAN WINTER

FOUR OR MORE SUMMER LAND PEOPLE, INCLUDING THE LEADER*

FOUR CROWS

*Note: Each of the four speaking parts for the Summer Land People can be spoken by several children at once if a large group is performing the play.

NON-SPEAKING ROLES:

SUN

FLOWERS

PLANTS

Props/Scenery

Gluskabe and Grandmother Woodchuck's wigwam can be made of folding chairs placed back to back a few feet apart and draped with white sheets or blankets decorated to look like birchbark with ^-shaped marks cut from black construction paper. Shapes of ferns, half-moons, and stars can also be cut from construction paper and pinned to the sheets or blankets as decorations for the wigwams.

Old Man Winter's wigwam can be made by draping the same folding chairs with white sheets to look like snow.

Old Man Winter's fire made of ice can be suggested by a large ball of wax paper.

The Sun, Flowers, and Plants carry decorated paper cutouts.

Gluskabe's bag can be any large tote bag or sack.

Four balls each should be about the size of a child's head.

The pot full of summer is a large bowl that can be covered with red construction paper. Inside are the **summersticks**: several lighted flashlights, each wrapped in red paper or foil.

A rattle can be made by taping a pencil to a small milk carton covered with paper and filled with dried beans.

Costumes

Narrator carries a tote bag decorated with a fern design, representing a storyteller's bag (which, by tradition, would have held objects to remind the storyteller of the elements of his tale).

Gluskabe wears a red blanket or towel around his shoulders.

Grandmother Woodchuck wears a brown blanket.

Human Being wears a headband and leggings made of brown cloth.

Old Man Winter's white hair can be suggested with a wig made of cotton. He is dressed in white, with a white blanket or towel around his shoulders.

The Summer Land People wear eye patches, which can be made of felt circles sewed to a length of stretchy elastic. Make an extra eye patch to be worn by Gluskabe in Scene III.

The Crows wear black blankets or towels.

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Scene I: Gluskabe and Grandmother Woodchuck's Wigwam

Gluskabe and Grandmother Woodchuck sit inside with their blankets over their shoulders.

NARRATOR: Long ago Gluskabe (gloo-SKAH-bey) lived with his grandmother, Woodchuck, who was old and very wise. Gluskabe's job was to help the people.

GLUSKABE: It is very cold this winter, Grandmother.

GRANDMOTHER WOODCHUCK: *Ni ya yo* (nee yah yo), Grandson. You are right!

GLUSKABE: The snow is very deep, Grandmother.

GRANDMOTHER WOODCHUCK: *Ni ya yo*, Grandson.

GLUSKABE: It has been winter for a very long time, Grandmother.

GRANDMOTHER WOODCHUCK: *Ni ya yo*, Grandson. But look, here comes one of those human beings who are our friends.

HUMAN BEING: *Kwai, kwai, nidobak* (kwy kwy nee-DOH-bahk). Hello, my friends.

GLUSKABE AND GRANDMOTHER WOODCHUCK: *Kwai, kwai, nidoba* (kwy kwy nee-DOH-bah).

HUMAN BEING: Gluskabe, I have been sent by the other human beings to ask you for help. This winter has been too long. If it does not end soon, we will all die.

GLUSKABE: I will do what I can. I will go to the wigwam of Old Man Winter. He has stayed here too long. I will ask him to go back to his home in the Winter Land to the north.



GRANDMOTHER WOODCHUCK: Be careful, Gluskabe.

GLUSKABE: Don't worry, Grandmother. Winter cannot beat me.

Scene II: The Wigwam of Old Man Winter

Old Man Winter sits in his wigwam, "warming" his hands over his fire made of ice. The four balls of summer are on one side of the stage. Gluskabe enters stage carrying his bag and stands to the side of the wigwam door. He taps on the wigwam.

OLD MAN WINTER: Who is there!

GLUSKABE: It is Gluskabe.

OLD MAN WINTER: Ah, come inside and sit by my fire.

Gluskabe enters the wigwam.

GLUSKABE: The people are suffering. You must go back to your home in the Winter Land.

OLD MAN WINTER: Oh, I must, eh? But tell me, do you like **my** fire?

GLUSKABE: I do not like your fire. Your fire is not warm. It is **cold**.

OLD MAN WINTER: Yes, my fire is made of ice. And so are **you!**

Old Man Winter throws his white sheet over Gluskabe. Gluskabe falls down. Old Man Winter stands up.

OLD MAN WINTER: No one can defeat me!

Old Man Winter pulls Gluskabe out of the lodge. Then he goes back inside and closes the door flap. The Sun comes out and shines on Gluskabe. Gluskabe sits up and looks at the Sun.

GLUSKABE: Ah, that was a good nap! But I am not going into Old Man Winter's lodge again until I talk with my grandmother.

Gluskabe begins walking across the stage toward the four balls. Grandmother Woodchuck enters.

GRANDMOTHER WOODCHUCK: It is still winter, Gluskabe! Did Old Man Winter refuse to speak to you?

GLUSKABE: We spoke, but he did not listen. I will speak to him again; and I will make him listen. But tell me, Grandmother, where does the warm weather come from?

GRANDMOTHER WOODCHUCK: It is kept in the Summer Land.

GLUSKABE: I will go there and bring summer back here.

GRANDMOTHER WOODCHUCK: Grandson, the Summer Land people are strange people. Each of them has one eye. They are also greedy. They do not want to share the warm weather. It will be dangerous.



GLUSKABE: Why will it be dangerous?

GRANDMOTHER WOODCHUCK: The Summer Land people keep the summer in a big pot. They dance around it. Four giant crows guard the pot full of summer. Whenever a stranger tries to steal summer, those crows fly down and pull off his head!

GLUSKABE: Grandmother, I will go to the Summer Land. I will cover up one eye and look like the people there. And I will take these four balls of sinew with me.

Gluskabe picks up the four balls, places them in his bag, and puts the bag over his shoulder.

Scene III: The Summer Land Village

The Summer Land People are dancing around the pot full of summer. They are singing a snake dance song, following their leader, who shakes a rattle in one hand. Four Crows stand guard around the pot as the people dance.

SUMMER LAND PEOPLE: *Wee gai wah neh (wee guy wah ney),*

Wee gai wah neh,

Wee gai wah neh, wee gai wah neh,

Wee gai wah neh, wee gai wah neh,

Wee gai wah neh.

Gluskabe enters, wearing an eye patch and carrying his bag with the balls in it.

GLUSKABE: *Kwai, kwai, nidobak!* Hello, my friends.

Everyone stops dancing. They gather around Gluskabe.

LEADER OF THE SUMMER LAND PEOPLE: Who are you?

GLUSKABE: I am not a stranger. I am one of you. See, I have one eye.

SECOND SUMMER LAND PERSON: I do not remember you.

GLUSKABE: I have been gone a long time.

THIRD SUMMER LAND PERSON: He does have only one eye.

FOURTH SUMMER LAND PERSON: Let's welcome him back. **Come join** in our snake dance.



The singing and dancing begin again: "Wee gai wah neh," etc. Gluskabe is at the end of the line as the dancers circle the pot full of summer. When Gluskabe is close enough, he reaches in, grabs one of the summersticks, and breaks away, running back and forth.



LEADER OF THE SUMMER LAND PEOPLE: He has taken one of our summersticks!

SECOND SUMMER LAND PERSON: Someone stop him!

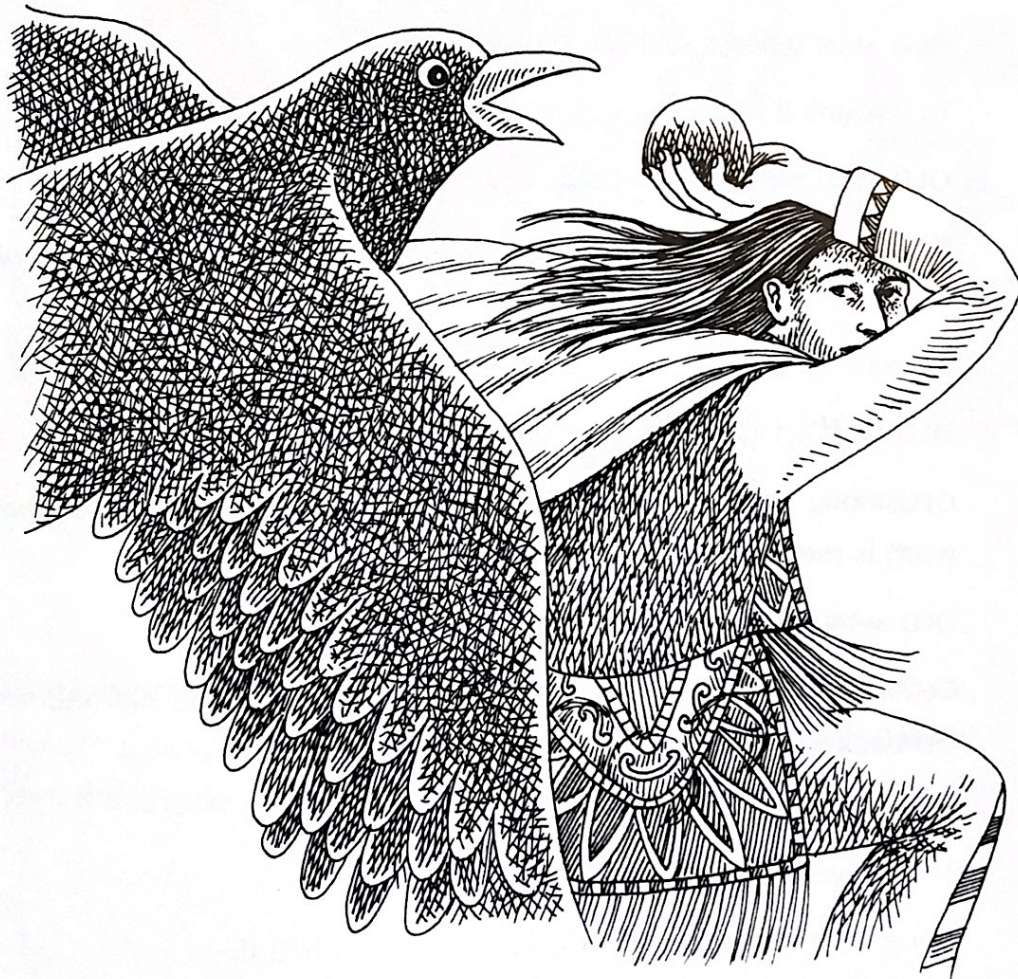
THIRD SUMMER LAND PERSON: Crows, catch him!

FOURTH SUMMER LAND PERSON: Pull off his head!

The Crows swoop after Gluskabe. He reaches into his pouch and pulls out one of the balls. As each Crow comes up to him, he ducks his head down and holds up the ball. The Crow grabs the ball. Gluskabe keeps running, and pulls out another ball, repeating his actions until each of the Crows has grabbed a ball.

FIRST CROW: *Gah-gah!* I have his head.

SECOND CROW: *Gah-gah!* No, I have his head!



THIRD CROW: *Gah-gah!* Look, I have his head!

FOURTH CROW: *Gah-gah!* No, look—I have it too!

LEADER OF THE SUMMER LAND PEOPLE: How many heads did that stranger have?

SECOND SUMMER LAND PERSON: He has tricked us. He got away.

Scene IV: The Wigwam of Old Man Winter

Gluskabe walks up to Old Man Winter's wigwam. He holds the summerstick in his hand and taps on the door.

OLD MAN WINTER: Who is there!

GLUSKABE: It is Gluskabe.

OLD MAN WINTER: Ah, come inside and sit by my fire.

Gluskabe enters, sits down, and places the summerstick in front of Old Man Winter.

GLUSKABE: You must go back to your home in the Winter Land.

OLD MAN WINTER: Oh, I must, eh? But tell me, do you like my fire?

GLUSKABE: Your fire is no longer cold. It is getting warmer. Your wigwam is melting away. You are getting weaker.

OLD MAN WINTER: No one can defeat me!

GLUSKABE: Old Man, you are defeated. Warm weather has returned. Go back to your home in the north.

The blanket walls of Old Man Winter's wigwam collapse. Old Man Winter stands up and walks away as swiftly as he can, crouching down as if getting smaller. People carrying the cutouts of the Sun, Flowers, and Plants come out and surround Gluskabe as he sits there, smiling.



NARRATOR: So Gluskabe defeated Old Man Winter. Because he brought only one small piece of summer, winter still returns each year. But, thanks to Gluskabe, spring always comes back again.