

How the World Was Made

A Cheyenne Creation Myth

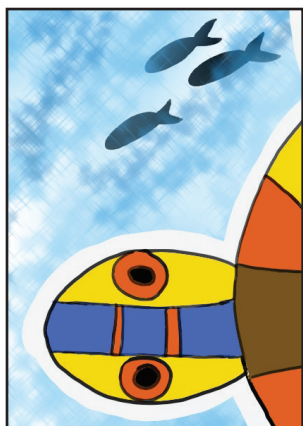


In the beginning of time, there was nothing. There was only darkness. Maheo the All Spirit lived alone in this darkness. He was tired of the dark. There was nothing to see. There was nothing to hear. Maheo was very powerful. He decided to use his power. He decided to create the world.

Maheo created water. It was like a great lake. The water was salty. Maheo decided that all life would come from this water. At first, he made animals that live in the water. He made fish. The fish swam in the water. He made the water have sand at the bottom. Then Maheo made animals to live on that sand. He made snails. He made lobsters. He made mussels.

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Next, Maheo made animals that live on the water. He made many types of birds. He made geese. He made terns. He made loons. Maheo heard their feet splashing in the water. He heard their wings flapping. But he could not see them.



“I would like to see the things I created,” Maheo said to himself. So Maheo created light. He saw all the fish swimming in the water. He saw all the birds swimming on the water.

“How beautiful,” Maheo said to himself.

Soon, a goose called out to Maheo. “Great Maheo,” it said. “Thank you for making this wonderful world. We are so happy. But the birds are not fish. We sometimes get tired of swimming. Sometimes we need to get out of the water.”

“So fly,” said Maheo. And he waved his arms. Maheo watched the birds fly. “How beautiful they are!”

After a while the birds became tired. “Please, Maheo,” said a loon. “We need a solid place to rest. We need a place to make our nests.”

One of the other birds saw something at the bottom of the water. He dove down deep. He came back with a mouthful of mud. The bird gave the mud to Maheo. Maheo rolled the mud into a ball. The ball became bigger and bigger and bigger. But Maheo had nowhere to put it.

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“A sea animal must help me,” said Maheo. “One of you must let me place it on your back.” Maheo tried many different animals. But the mud kept slipping off.

Grandmother Turtle came to Maheo.

“I am very old and slow,” said Grandmother Turtle.
“But I will try.”

Grateful, Maheo placed the mud onto her back. There it grew and spread until it covered Grandmother Turtle. Maheo could no longer see her.

“Let the earth be known as our Grandmother,” said Maheo. From then on, the turtle carried the earth on her back.



Now there was land, but it was empty. Maheo made plants and trees grow from the earth. But there was no one but birds to walk the land. So Maheo decided to

make humans. He pulled out one of his right rib bones. Then he blew on the bone. Then he placed it on the land. The bone slowly began to move and change. It became the first man. Maheo then pulled out one of his left rib bones. He did the same thing with this bone. It became the first woman.

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As time passed, Maheo saw that humans had needs. They needed to eat. They needed clothes to stay warm. They needed many things. As time went on, Maheo created different animals to help with those needs. He made deer, porcupines, prairie dogs, and all sorts of animals.

Finally, Maheo used his power to make buffalo. Maheo saw buffalo as the most perfect animals to help the humans he created. Humans could use buffalo for food. They could use buffalo for clothes. They could use buffalo bones for tools. They could use many parts of the buffalo for many things. For this reason, buffalo are sacred to the Cheyenne.

