

Handout D: “How Raven Brought Light to the World”

From *Tlingit Myths* recorded in 1904 by John Swanton in English at Sitka (1908)

No one knows just how the story of Raven really begins so each starts from the point where he does know it. Here it was always begun in this way. . . .

When Raven was born his father tried to instruct him and train him in every way and after he grew up, told him he would give him strength to make a world. After trying in all sorts of ways Raven finally succeeded. Then there was no light in this world, but it was told him that far up the Nass River was a large house in which someone kept light just for himself.

Raven thought over all kinds of plans for getting this light for the world and finally he hit on a good one. The rich man living there had a daughter and he thought, "I will make myself very small and drop into the water in the form of a small piece of dirt." The girl swallowed this dirt and became pregnant. When her time was completed, they made a hole for her as was customary in which she was to bring forth, and lined it with rich furs of all sorts. But the child did not wish to be born on those fine things. Then its grandfather felt sad and said, "What do you think it would be best to put into that hole? Shall we put in moss?" So they put moss inside and the baby was born on it. Its eyes were very bright and moved around rapidly.

Round bundles of varying shapes and sizes hung about on the walls of the house. When the child became a little larger it crawled around back of the people weeping continually, and as it cried it pointed to the bundles. This lasted many days. Then its grandfather said, "Give my grandchild what he is crying for. Give him that one hanging on the end. That is the bag of stars."

So the child played with this, rolling it about on the floor back of the people, until suddenly he let it go up through the smoke hole. It went straight up into the sky and the stars scattered out of it, arranging themselves as you now see them. That was what he went there for.

Some time after this he began crying again, and he cried so much that it was thought he would die. Then his grandfather said, "Untie the next one and give it to him." He played and played with it around behind his mother. After a while he let that go up through the smoke hole also, and there was the big moon.

Now just one thing more remained, the box that held the daylight, and he cried for that. His eyes turned around and, showed different colors, and the people began thinking that he must be something other than an ordinary baby. But it always happens that a grandfather loves his grandchild just as he does his own daughter, so the grandfather said, "Untie the last thing and give it to him." His grandfather felt very sad when he gave this to him.

When the child had this in his hands, he uttered the raven cry, "Gaaa," and flew out with it through the smoke hole. Then the person from whom he had stolen it said, "That old manuring [Note to the reader: the grandfather actually used a different term] raven has gotten all of my things."