

## NEW WORDS:

warning  
recently  
especially  
sneaked  
ignored  
distance  
lure  
mauled  
companion  
incident  
destination  
urge  
replied  
comfort  
tempting  
delayed

## BEAR TEPEE

Developed by members of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe

**GEOGRAPHICAL AREA:** Plains Region

**STORY TYPE(S):** Natural Phenomena/Indian Values

### Summary:

Despite warnings, Indian Maiden went into some bushes to pick berries and fell victim to the powers of a bear who turned her into Bear Woman. Bear Woman captured her sister and mother. They remained in her power until, with the aid of seven brothers, they escaped. With Bear Woman in pursuit, the eldest brother used his special bow and arrow power to project them all to the top of a giant rock formation out of the reach of Bear Woman. Bear Woman clawed at the rock, leaving indentations in the rock in an unsuccessful attempt to capture the family. The rock formation is known as the Bear Tepee to the Northern Cheyenne. To many others it is called the Devil's Tower.

Bear Tepee has often been viewed as a mysterious and unique land formation and was often the home of bears in the region. These things, combined with the particular powers which the bear is believed to have, discouraged many Indian people from settling or hunting in its immediate vicinity. It is no small wonder that this story was developed to warn others not to go near this place.

As seen in many stories, characters usually pay serious consequences for ignoring advice. Indian Maiden not only brought misfortune upon herself but her family as well.

### Teacher Guided Activities:



1. Ask your students if they have been cautioned about specific areas in their community. What real dangers are present in these areas?

Have students write a story which would warn others of the dangers in a specific area, or have students pick another unique land formation like Devil's Tower and try to create a story about where it came from or how it was formed.



2. Have students make a paper maché model of Bear Tepee or paint or draw a picture of this unusual land form. Discuss how this might have been formed.



3. Read the Gros Ventre story *Broken Shoulder (How the Big Dipper and North Star Came to Be)*. How are the stories similar? How is the story different from *Bear Tepee*?

It is interesting that a similar story explains the origin of two very different natural phenomena. Discuss how tribes share similar stories. The Gros Ventre Tribe is located on the Fort Belknap reservation in northern Montana.

### **BROKEN SHOULDER**

#### **How the Big Dipper and North Star Came To Be**

This is a story about the seven stars up in the sky, called the Big Dipper and the North Star. Among the Gros Ventre (Grow Vont), these stars are known as “Cha-Be-Ká-Tha.” This means “broken shoulder” because it tells how the seven stars came to be.

Long, long ago a large band of Gros Ventre (Grow Vont) were camped in a big circle. Generally, whenever the Indians camped and stopped to rest, the children ran off to play among themselves. Once when they were all together one of the children asked, “What game shall we play today?” Another said, “I know. Let’s play bear.” To play bear was to play tag. The children were going to play tag and the one who was the bear was it. So they began the task of choosing the bear. All the children, both boys and girls, stood around to see who would be chosen as the bear. All of them were quite young except one girl. She was older than the rest. One of her brothers said, “Hey, let’s get her. She can be the bear. She can chase us like a bear chases all the other animals through the forest.” The girl said, “All right, I’ll be the bear. I will chase all of you.”

So they started to play bear. The girl chased them all over. She chased them through the coulees, in the brush and out on the prairie around the camp. She was the bear all throughout the day. When others played, the one who was touched or tagged became the bear but not among this group of children. The girl was the bear all the time.

The children kept running and hiding and finally one of them jumped up and looked around to see if they could see her coming. When he got up to look there was a real bear standing there.

He yelled at the other children, “Look! There’s a real bear standing in the brush. It isn’t our sister anymore.” So the children all looked and sure enough, there was a real bear standing in the brush. “Let’s get out of here!” the boy yelled, and all of the children began running. The boys whose sister was the bear stayed behind because they knew something had happened to their sister and she was not the bear. She did not come near them or try to do them any harm so they waited close by. There were seven brothers in all, and they were all there.

One of the children who had run off to the camp reported the incident to a group of men. He said, “We were playing bear out there and those seven brothers’ sister turned into a real bear. She’s standing out there. Come and look for yourselves.”

The men grabbed their bows and arrows and ran to where the children had seen the bear. The bear was still standing there with all of the seven brothers near. One of the men said, “We better kill it because it just keeps standing there. It must be their sister because it does not harm them, but she might turn mean and harm some of us. She’ll probably come to the camp when the boys return.”

The men charged. They shot with their bows and arrows. The bear fell over and the men knew they had wounded it. They had shot it in the shoulder with many arrows.

The men rushed back to the camp saying, "Everybody move. Take your lodges down so we may leave this place. We just wounded a bear and it will probably go mad. We must leave this area at once." The Gros Ventres (Grow Vont) immediately broke camp and left the area. The only lodge still standing was the one that belonged to the seven brothers and their sister. Even their parents had left, for they too were afraid of the wounded bear.

While the camp was moving the brothers were still with their sister trying to comfort her. They had no medicines and knew of no way to help her. Finally, one brother said, "Let's take her back to our lodge and take care of her. She's suffering and we have to try to help her some way." They took her back to their lodge and laid her down. She kept moaning and groaning and seemed to be in a lot of pain from the wound in her shoulder. The boys were confused and wondered what to do for her. One of the boys said, "Let's go down to the creek. At least we'll get her some water so she can drink." They went down to the creek and got some water for her and brought it back. After they did this they went back down to the creek. They all started to cry because they knew their sister had been changed into a bear and had been wounded. She was in a lot of pain and it was all their fault for wanting her to be the bear in the game.

Suddenly a man appeared to them and said, "Don't cry children. I'll help you. I know your troubles. I know all about it. Tell me what you want to have done."

One of the boys said, "Well, our sister is lying in our lodge up there suffering because she was wounded in the shoulder and we don't know what to do for her." Then the man said, "Well, she must be hungry by now. I'll go down by the creek and get a little bush rabbit for you. Here, take this to your sister, but before you do, take the hide off and make a big fire someplace and roast it for her." The boys did this and returned to their lodge with the man.

Then the man said, "You know, I'm kind of worried about you children. I don't think you should stay with your sister. I think you should run away. Your sister is suffering and she's liable to go mad and kill all of you. They say that bears go mad when they're sick or wounded so you must do exactly as I tell you. Go into the lodge and instead of feeding the rabbit to your sister, throw it into the wound on her shoulder. Then I will grant you three of four wishes so that you will be able to get away from her and be rid of her. She is a bear now and it will be better if you no longer see her or have anything to do with her."

The boys did as they were told. They went into the lodge and threw the cooked rabbit on the bear's wound and this immediately sent her into a rage. The boys left the lodge while the bear was busy trying to remove the hot meat from its open wound.

The first wish that the man gave the boys was that a huge prairie fire would start. They were to cross a ravine and the fire would be behind them which would stop the bear from chasing them. After the fire began the boys crossed the ravine. They looked back to see if the fire had stopped the bear. Much to their surprise, the bear had crossed through the fire and was still chasing them.

The boys knew that the bear would soon catch them since she could run faster than they could. They wished the second wish that the man gave them. The wish was that the whole area would be covered with cactus and the bear would be stopped by that. However, the bear started across the cactus patch and was soon full of large thorns from the cactus.

When the bear got through the patch she had to stop and pick the thorns out of her paws. The boys knew this and ran much faster because it gave them more time to get away. The bear was in a lot of pain from the wound on her shoulder and the thorns that were now in her paws. She was now in a complete rage and could barely see to pick the thorns out. When she was done she began chasing the boys again.

The boys saw her coming and knew that they would never be able to outrun her. One of the boys said, "Let's use the last wish that the man gave us. We'll wish for a large patch of brush, one that is so thick that even a rabbit or any other small creature cannot get through." The boys stopped to see whether the brush would stop the bear. They heard a loud crash, a rustling and much noise coming from the brush. She had somehow made it through the thick brush and now seemed to be on the verge of catching them.

The boys began running again and wondered what they could do. They had now run out of the wishes that the man had given them. None of the boys had any power or medicine themselves and they were desperate to find a way to get away from the rampaging bear. Then one said, "Our little brother always carries a little ball that he plays with. Let's try it and see if there is anything to it. There must be a reason why he kept it." They took the ball from the littlest brother and the oldest one kicked it into the air. The ball went high up into the sky and the boy followed the ball into the sky. The ball came back and the next brother kicked it and he also went into the sky. The succeeding five brothers all did the same and they also rose upwards into the sky.

Just as the last brother kicked the ball the bear came running up to the spot where the boys had been. She was still in a blind rage and could not do anything because the boys went high into the sky and became stars of the night. They stay together and shine every night hoping that their sister will come back from being a bear and she will know where they are and come and get them.

To this day, the Gros Ventres (Grow Vont) refer to the Big Dipper and the North Star as "Cha-Be-Ká-Tha" or "Broken Shoulder" meaning the time when the seven brothers were forced to flee from their own sister who had turned into a bear and went mad over a broken shoulder.

**Student Activity Card(s):**  
**See Tracks Card (10A-10B).**