

The Wise Gray Jay - Gwiingwiishi

Retrieved from <https://www.canadiangeographic.ca/article/anishinaabe-stories-about-mischievous-wise-gray-jay> on May 12, 2020.

(This story has been reformatted to work with screen readers.)



Images of **Gwiingwiishi**: The gray jay — or whiskey jack or Canada jay — features prominently in the traditional stories and art of Indigenous peoples such as the Anishinaabe, to whom it is called **Gwiingwiishi**.

(Artwork: Mark Nadjiwan; Photo: Steve Phillips/Can Geo Photo Club)

By Niigaan Sinclair - November 17, 2016

I'm writing about an old relative, one that goes by many names:

- To the Cree, she is called *wisikejack*.
- To the French, she is called *mésangeai du Canada*.
- To the English, she is called *gray jay*.
- To my people, the Anishinaabe, she is **Gwiingwiishi**.

Gwiingwiishi has lived with us since the beginning. She is a life giver, a trick player and one of the smartest beings in Creation. [...] Gwiingwiishi is a great, wise teacher, and there is an old story that tells of her abilities to give gifts:

One day long ago, our great trickster Nanabozho changed himself into **Gwiingwiishi** and sat in a tree above two blind brothers as they began to share a meal.

As the first man reached for a piece of meat, **Gwiingwiishi** flew down and stole it.

Startled, the man asked his brother if he had taken his meat. The brother replied “No!”, reaching for a piece himself.

As he was about to place the food in his mouth, **Gwiingwiishi** flew down and stole it, too, then returned to the tree to watch.

The brothers accused one another of stealing, arguing with fear that one was trying to hurt the other. Just before they came to blows, **Gwiingwiishi** let out a huge laugh.

Suddenly, the two men realized that Nanabozho was playing a trick, teaching them to not let petty things come between them.

Nanabozho transformed back into a human but left a spirit of play and gift giving within **Gwiingwiishi**, something she still has to this day.

Her lesson? That it is only in caring for one another that we can find growth.