

Tricked On The Trail

The possum smoked for fun, now he's the sorry one!



Opossum, The Modern Tail

Long ago, when all the animals were given special duties to perform, it was the opossum's job to carry in its pouch one of the sacred plants, "Sema." The sacred plant is also known as "tobacco."

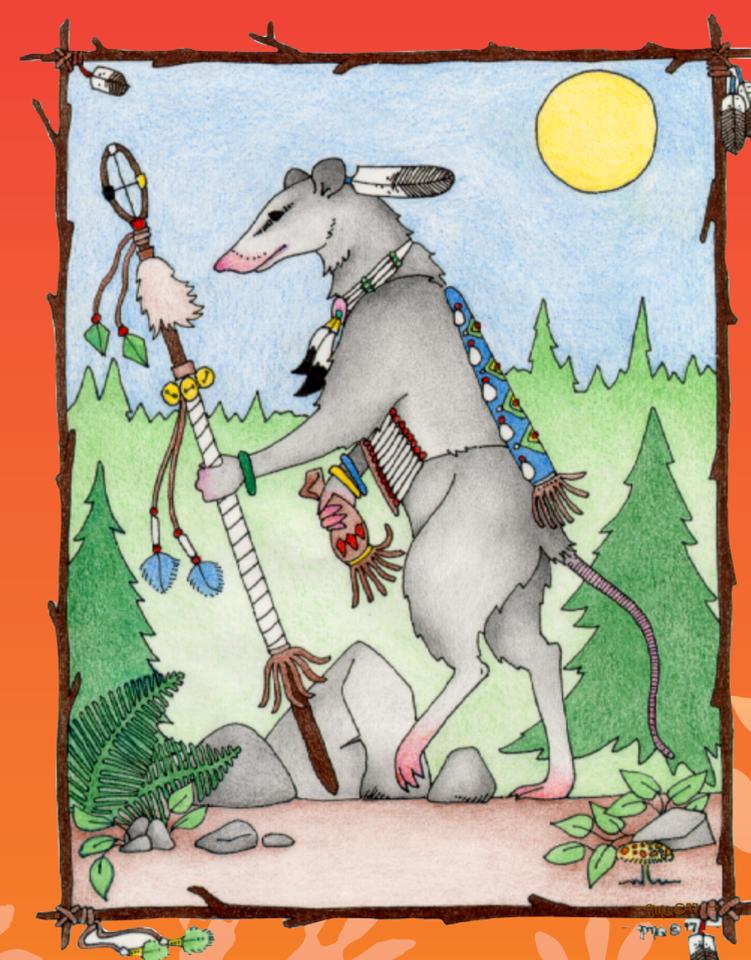
One day the opossum was walking to a nearby Ojibwe village. When the opossum was about halfway there, out of the bushes came Nanaabush. Nanaabush asked if he could walk with the opossum. The opossum answered happily, "Why sure you can." The opossum was glad to have some company. They walked for a while when Nanaabush said, "Let's stop and rest awhile on this tree stump." As they sat there Nanaabush noticed the opossum's pouch.



Nanaabush asked, "What's in your pouch?" The opossum said, "I have Sema." "Oh," said Nanaabush, as he reached behind his back and pulled out a corncob pipe, "let's smoke some. It will help us relax and calm our nerves." "Oh! No!" said the opossum. "This Sema is for ceremonies; it's sacred." Nanaabush then asked if he could see the Sema. And so the opossum opened its pouch and Nanaabush looked in. Nanaabush, being a sly trickster, quickly reached in and took a small pinch of the Sema and put it in his pipe. Nanaabush quickly lit the pipe and took a big puff. "Oh, it's so good. Here, take a puff, Opossum." This made the opossum very angry. But not wanting to make a fuss or cause a scene, the opossum took the pipe and took a small puff.



After a few puffs, the tobacco in the pipe was smoked up. Nanaabush said, "See, nothing happened," as he reached back into the opossum's pouch. But this time, Nanaabush grabbed a big handful of the tobacco. Nanaabush then tried to stuff the big pile of tobacco into his corncob pipe. The pipe was so packed full that the tobacco was stacked about five or six inches high. Then with a grin, Nanaabush put fire to the tobacco. He tried to take a big puff, but the whole thing started to burn. The flames burnt Nanaabush's eyebrows. He jumped up and threw the pipe into the air. The pipe landed on the opossum's furry tail, and flames caught the opossum's furry tail on fire and burned all the hair off. That's when Nanaabush ran back into the woods. The opossum quickly jumped to the ground and began to roll back and forth.



When the opossum's tail was finally out, the opossum just laid there for about an hour. The opossum looked dead. The opossum laid there with its eyes open and looked around. Finally the opossum got up, and the opossum felt sadness, guilt, and shame because of what happened.

The opossum asked the Creator for forgiveness. Then the opossum asked the Creator to have another animal take the Sema pouch to watch over. And finally, the opossum kept the hairless tail to remind everyone to use Sema in the way it was meant to be used. And to this very day, the male opossum does not have a pouch, or hair on its tail; and if anything bad happens to a opossum, it falls to the ground and plays dead.