



COTTONWOOD TREES AND THE STARS



From the Plains Indians: Cheyenne and Arapaho

All things come from Mother-earth.

Stars are no exception. They form secretly in the earth and then drift along just under the surface until they find the roots of the magical Cottonwood tree.

They enter the roots and slowly work their way up through the tree. Finally they come to rest in the small twigs at the end of the branches. Here they wait patiently until they are needed.

Then, when the “Spirit-of-the-Night-Sky” decides she needs more beautiful stars to light up the heavens, she calls on the Wind-Spirit to help her. The Spirit-of-the-Wind sends his blustery gusts in all directions. Soon the wind shakes the magical cottonwood trees so hard that the twigs begin to break off. Then, as each twig breaks away, the stars are released; and even more escape when the twigs break again as they hit the ground. Now new stars race up into the night-sky where each one is carefully put into a special place. Now, when the Spirit-of-the-Night-Sky has enough new stars, she tells the Wind-Spirit to stop; and the wind settles down to a gentle night breeze. Of course, the Spirit-of-the-Night-Sky wants to thank the Wind-Spirit for his help so she asks all the new stars to twinkle brightly for him. This way the Wind-Spirit can see where all the new stars he helped escape have been placed.

So, if you want to add a new star to the Night-sky, gather some Cottonwood Star twigs and snap a few to make sure you have good ones. Then wait for a clear night.

When your special night comes, find a spot where you can see lots of stars. Hold your twig up toward the night sky and snap it. After you snap, check the ends of your twig to see if you have a star pattern showing. If you do, then you have put a new star in the sky. The star pattern is the shadow that the new star leaves behind.

Look up at the night sky again, and if you look very carefully, in the same direction that you released your new star, you will see it twinkling brightly. This is your ‘thank-you’ for the Spirit-of-the-Night Sky, for adding a beautiful new star to her heavenly kingdom.

How to find Your Stars

The stars are found by snapping the small dry twigs which have fallen from a cottonwood tree. Look for the growth wrinkles in the bark. There will often be several on one twig. The wrinkles look a little like the wrinkles in a flex soda straw. Hold the twig close to the growth wrinkles and snap it quickly. Some twigs may be too green or too rotten, but many will produce a five point secret star. With a little practice, you will know which twigs have the stars hiding inside. You can see the star best if you shade it from the sun and look straight in at the broken end. You can also enhance some stars by rubbing them on fine sandpaper. A sanded star will usually show up better if you moisten it.