

Adaawx

What is an Oral Tradition?

Ts'msyen society has always been an oral society. Knowledge, skills and history have been passed on orally; that is, by speaking and listening. In the past, people had memory training. They were trained to learn and remember the history of their family, house and clan. These were passed on through special stories or narratives called adaawx.

What is an adaawx?

The word adaawx is translated as "true tellings" or "sacred history." They are special kinds of stories which hold important information about Ts'msyen culture and society. They are a big part of the identity of Pdeex (Clans) and Waap (House Groups). Adaawx have been passed down from generation to generation for hundreds and even thousands of years.

Many adaawx have a special importance for the history of a Waap (House Group). These narratives often tell of heroic ancestors who had an amazing encounter with supernatural beings. These stories usually connect to the territories of the House Group and show how they came to own special crests which only they and their descendants would have the right to display.

Here are some of the types of important information told in adaawx:

- The origins of House Groups
- Migrations of House Groups
- The territories owned by House Groups
- Natural disasters like floods or avalanches
- Battles

What is Transformation?

Transformation is a key element in most adaawx. Transformation means changing from one form to another form. An adaawx often tell of events which happened when the world was different from what it is today. Animals and naxnox (supernatural beings) lived in parallel worlds. Under special circumstances, humans could visit these worlds. Humans are usually transported to the parallel worlds of animals or naxnox to be taught an important lesson. Often this is a warning to respect nature and the land which provides the resources that people need to survive.

Ksmwüts'iin or Mouse Woman is a character who often appears in adaawx. She helps the humans when they are in the animal or supernatural world. She helps them understand what is happening.

Animals or other creatures appear differently in the human world and their own worlds. A salmon has the form of a fish in the human world, but in their own world under the water, the salmon appears in human form. As well, they live in longhouses and have chiefs who give feasts. Their lives are parallel with human life. Some aspects of life, however are reversed. For instance, when fat is thrown into the fire in one of these worlds, it is not consumed by the fire. Instead, it grows and becomes huge.

What is significant about adaawx?

- Adaawx are ancient. They have been held in people's memories, told and passed on for thousands of years. It is amazing to think that these stories have lasted longer than many civilizations.
- Cultural identity. In many ways these narratives define traditional Ts'msyen beliefs and values, especially in the ways they connect the people with the land.
- Family history. It is very important for a person to know his or her family history to be a full member of Ts'msyen society
- Layers of meaning. These are complex literary works which can be interpreted at several levels, including:
 - entertainment: they are captivating, fascinating stories
 - cultural practices: they show us what life was like in ancient times
 - values and beliefs: they tell us about deeply-held spiritual beliefs and moral values
 - clan history and connection to the land
- Legal: Today they are recognized as evidence in court cases under the laws of Canada.

