

# Chapter Seven:

## Adaawaku

# Guxw Gampt

*Guxw Gampt is a legend told by Sigidimnak' Angaye'e, a Laxgibuu and matriarch of the Gitwilnaak'ii.*

*This adaawak is printed with special permission from Jaalu, William Azak, for the enjoyment of the readers.*

Many years ago, said my father,  
There was a year when there was  
Almost no fish to be harvested by the Nisga'a.  
It was also a time when the Nisga'a  
Could still converse with the Plant and Animal people.

It was then that Guxw Gampt made a plan.

*According to Nisga'a legend, there was a time, long ago, when people could talk to plants and animals. In recent memory only Halayt had this skill. (See page 150)*

He would call all the animals to his home for a feast.  
First he brought in some Fern people  
To teach them how to sing.  
The Fern people only looked puzzled.  
They uttered not a sound  
As Guxw Gampt tried to teach them how to sing.  
He took them and put them away.

Guxw Gampt lived near the salt water.  
He went to get some of the Clam people.  
He seated them exactly as he wished them to sit.  
After he had composed his special song,  
He began to teach them to sing,

“Whose feet are these?  
Whose feet are these?  
They look like the feet of Guxw Gam,” he said.  
“They look like the feet of Guxw Gam,” he said.  
“He drags behind him his fishing gaff.  
He drags behind him his fishing gaff.  
So he can fish in the little creek.  
So he can fish in the little creek.

“Bis-biiz say the grasshoppers  
Who sit on the tall, drying, wavy grasses.

“Hit it! Hit it!

Hit it! Hit it!

Hit it!

Hit it!

Hit it!”

Guxw Gampt smiled as he heard his song  
Coming from the wide-open mouths of the  
Clam people.



*As guests arrive at a Nisga'a feast their names are announced and an usher shows them to a seat. In this photo Adam Azak looks to see which usher should seat Edward Azak, Eric Nyce drums. Gitwinksihlkw, 1994.*

As the guests arrived  
He took the fiercest of them  
And seated them on one side of the feast house.  
He took those who were not aggressive  
And seated them away from the fierce ones.

### The great feast begins

The Clam people entertain the guests with their singing.  
Guxw Gampt dramatizes the words of the song.

“Naahl hli sisaayit as guniia?  
Naahl hli sisaayit as guniia?  
Wihl hli sisaayis Guxw Gam,” diya.  
Wihl hli sisaayis Guxw Gam,” diya.  
Luu k’aliik’eekhlithl sk’anmaa’uda.  
Luu k’aliik’eekhlithl sk’anmaa’uda.  
Adim sihoont ahl hlgu aksiya.  
Ahl dim sihoont ahl hlgu aksiya.

“Bis biiz diyahl mismoots  
Daa ligii niwant ahl lax gangantgwithl hap’isgwoo!  
“Yatshl haa-ha! Yatshl haa!  
Yatshl haa-ha! Yatsh ha!  
Yatshl ha!  
Yatshl ha!  
Yatshl ha!”

The last part, “Hit it! Hit it!” tells what he usually did  
With his catch.

As he gets to this part,  
Guxw Gampt pretends to hit his guests.  
He is such an excellent dancer that  
Eventually he actually taps his guests.  
He leaves them wondering who has hit them.

Soon they are annoyed.  
Soon accusations begin to fly.  
Soon there is nudging and shoving.  
Soon there is a big fight.  
Soon the strong, fierce ones turn on the weak ones.  
It was for food that Guxw Gampt invited the Animal  
people.

When the fighting was over,  
The fierce

    Mountain Lions,  
        Wolves,  
            Lynx,  
                Wolverines

Still snarling, still growling,  
Stomped out of the feast house.

The piles of meat  
Which were left behind  
Were awesome to see.  
Guxw Gampt had much food for the winter.

It is such creativity,  
    Such resourcefulness,  
        Such wisdom,  
Which has helped our people to be here today.  
This is the story which my father, Paul Jaalu, told me  
As a child.

# Hasa Galyeen

*This traditional Nisga'a story has been adapted for this text by Nii<sup>h</sup>kw'ililkw.*

A very long time ago there were only Nisga'a living in the valley of K'alii'aksim Lisims. Of the many villages in the valley at the time, there were two that were located on either bank of Lisims only a few kilometers along the river from each other. They were so close that if a person from one community walked down to the water's edge, past the large stands of majestic cottonwoods, and looked carefully, s/he could see some of the longhouses. They were difficult to see for these dwellings seemed to blend in naturally with their lush environment. Very little smoke could be seen even though each longhouse had a large fireplace.

At this time of the year, there was much activity in the Nisga'a villages as everyone prepared for the winter feasting which accompanied the opening of a new longhouse, a marriage, or other important **function** which required the attendance of many witnesses. However, when you approached the one village, **andoosda'a**<sup>1</sup>, you could sense right away that it had been abandoned. You could see the broken canoes with no paddles or **hat'aaks**. You noticed that, although the people were supposed to be back from the summer fishing camps, there were no older children hanging out, giving accounts of their latest exciting adventures of the summer. You see, **Gwiix Litsxkw**<sup>2</sup>, this village had been attacked and most of its inhabitants had either fled or had died. There were only two survivors, a young woman who was expecting a child, and her jiits. They survived because they had been away when the raiders came.

Not too long after their return, the young woman's son was born. She named him **Hasa Galyeen**. Hasa Galyeen was energetic, bright, and extremely curious about everything. He spent many hours studying plants, bugs, and other fascinating objects in his **environment**. When he was little, he already knew a great deal about rocks. He knew what they tasted like, what they sounded like when he banged them together. He knew what it felt like to walk on pebbles and on rocks. He could sort them out by color, shape and size. To encourage him in his learning, his mother made him a rattle by putting pebbles in a hollow bone and securing each end with a piece of leather tied with a thong. He loved to make music with his rattle. He even accompanied his **uuli** when she sang.

<sup>1</sup> **andoosda'a** is a Nisga'a word that means "the other side of the river"

<sup>2</sup> **Gwiix Litsxkw**: Great Reader



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*This is an halayt's rattle that belonged to Sim'oogit Leets'. If you look carefully you can see stitching on the side. Unlike rattles used by children for play, a rattle like this was used to help cure the sick.*

When Hasa Galyeen was seven years of age, his mother became concerned that her gifted son was not getting the proper education. There was only so much that she and her grandmother could teach him. They had already begun to tell him the **adaawak** that belonged to their **wilp**. He was beginning to be more aware of what “**status**” meant. He appreciated the fact that all of his history came from his elders and so he had a growing respect for them. He learned, but only because he was told, how important it was to be completely alert to the behavior of the fierce animals in his environment. You too, **Gwix Litsxkw**, have had to do some of your learning this way. He had not gone through the ceremonies that would have brought him closer to those **predators** such as wolves and mountain lions with whom his people shared the same food. As a toddler he had not received power through the special ceremony where he was put inside the still-wet skin of a newly caught animal such as a beaver or a bear. These gaps in his education, if they were not filled, would have meant that he would become a **survivor** rather than a successful, wealthy and respected provider to his people. So it was decided by his mother and grandmother that they should approach the now-blind but still great archer, **Galoosa T'imges**, from that not-so-friendly village just upriver, andoosda'a.

Galoosa T'imges was a remarkable teacher. As his eyes had gradually clouded over his other senses had become sharper. He challenged Hasa Galyeen to walk to him through many kinds of **terrain**, in all kinds of weather, and to touch his shoulder without being detected. He explained to the boy only once that he must slightly bend the knee of his supporting leg as he took his step. He demonstrated how Hasa Galyeen should take his step, how it was important



for Hasa Galyeen to take a smaller step, to carefully place his little toe, and then the outside of his foot on the ground before gliding it forward as he put his weight down on it. Even for the alert and eager Hasa Galyeen, this was a major but enjoyable challenge. Walking home after one of several such outings, Galoosa T'imges asked his very-determined student what kinds of changes he was beginning to notice. He nodded and smiled as Hasa Galyeen began to tell him. Then he laughed and put his arm around the boy's shoulder and hugged him. He told the boy that he had learned to see well by himself and should be very proud.

What Hasa Galyeen had begun to notice was that colors had become more **vibrant** and that sounds had become more **distinct**. When he looked down on the ground, he **marveled** at how the **duff** in the forest seemed to be alive, especially the seeds from the **deciduous** trees. Without looking for them he was now able to see insects on the barks of these trees. It seemed to him that although he was moving very slowly, he was achieving more. It seemed to him that time and timing, which were all-important to his people, did not matter as much when he was practicing this special walk. He was struck by the fact that when he extended his arms in front and slowly moved them out to either side at eye-level, wiggling his fingers as he did so, he could see his fingers moving even with his eyes front. When he turned to check how far back he had stretched his arms, he shook his head in awe for they were slightly back of his shoulders, shaping his arms almost like a bow. No wonder his teacher said that he must be proud of what he had learned all by himself just by carefully following the instructions for the hunter's walk. He was **exhilarated**, even though he had yet to reach his teacher and tap him on the shoulder before he was detected!

During that year, Hasa Galyeen was taught how to construct a bow from aged yew wood. It was the same height as he was, and felt almost too strong for him to use. However, he had a very large target. Galoosa T'imges had shown him how to make a cedar **withe** hoop which, when he stood it on its edge, came to the middle of his knee. This he suspended from a low branch of a nearby tree. He treasured his bow and valued the arrows which he had so **laboriously** created. Once he completed these two extremely challenging assignments, he would get up earlier than usual so he could complete all his chores sooner. Once he had carried in enough wood for the day and brought to flame the live coals at the fireplace ready for cooking, he would haul water until he filled two of the large kerfwood boxes, **gal'ink**, which sat just inside, near the front entrance and the one near the fire. Then he was ready for practice! Shooting with his new bow and arrows was great fun, especially since Galoosa T'imges told him he could choose to stand at whichever distance from the target he wished to. On the days when the wind blew or when it was raining or snowing, it was less fun. It was during these times that his teacher would tell him **adaawak** about unprepared, arrogant, careless, or lazy hunters. His teacher taught him how to harvest the plants that he would require to prepare **salves** for his body when it hurt. He learned how to apply frog leaves to his blisters. He learned that they worked better if they were dried first.



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### **Gal'ink**

*Nisga'a made "bent wood" boxes. All four sides of one these boxes were made by bending one piece of wood. The corner was sewn or pegged together and a bottom and/or lid fitted on.*



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Before he knew it, Hasa Galyeen was able to pull his bow to its fullest extent. He could shoot through the target even when it was quite windy out. His arm and neck

Some of the many uses  
of Wan - deer

*Hasgaltkw* (antlers)  
tools  
arrow and  
spear points  
utensils  
crutches

*Mihla* - bile  
pigments  
(blue &  
green)

*Smax* - meat

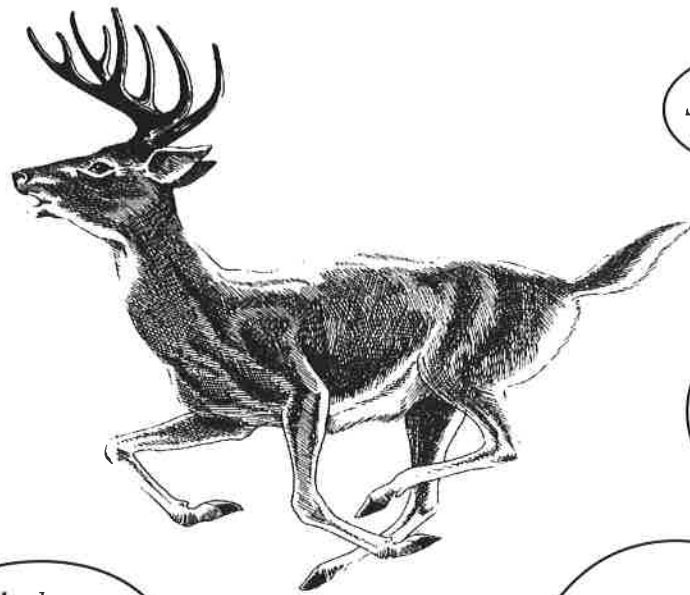
*Ween* - teeth  
rattles  
ceremonies

*Ts'ip* - bones  
jewellery  
utensils  
sled runners

*Neek* - hooves  
rattles  
glue

*Gaakw* - sinew  
bow strings  
thread  
lashing

*Anaas* - hide  
Clothing  
Robes  
Blankets  
Leggings  
Moccasins



muscles didn't bother him anymore. He smiled as he thought of the word "effortless," to describe how he used his bow and arrows. He thought "**Lukw'il aam!**" After one of his most successful workouts, he decided he would go after a deer. He wanted to surprise everyone with his hunting **pro**wess. He carried his new quiver with him, making sure he had in it four of his straightest and most evenly balanced arrows. He knew that he had to move quickly and quietly so he chose a well-worn trail which he knew led to some areas where there were small patches of grass where deer enjoyed **bro**wsing. He made sure he had nocked an arrow when he sensed he was getting close to his **qu**arry.

*\* Sgawo was a woman who married a man from the sky. He tried to take Sgawo and her grandmother back up to his home but the grandmother would not listen. Finally, he just pushed her into a hole in a tree. When the wind blows you can still hear her crying in the trees.*

He moved more slowly. He wondered if he should try to talk the deer language and then decided against it. He wondered how close he would get before the deer saw him. He heard a mewling sound. It was only Sgawo's\* grandmother protesting as usual about being too high up! He could feel the deer very close. Something inside told him to go to the left. There it was. It looked up at him and then went back to its browsing. He aimed at its hind. The arrow found its mark-----and-----bounced-----off! The deer was gone in a flash. Hasa Galyeen was stunned. How come his arrow didn't take the deer?

He became very angry. He took his arrows and hurled them as far as he could telling them to go and pretend someplace else. He looked at his bow and attempted, unsuccessfully, to break it. He was sweating and breathing hard. He slumped down against the trunk of a huge spruce. For a long time he sat before he could hear the leaves whispering to him. He looked up. It was then he noticed that the sun was nearly above him. Halfheartedly he got up and made his way home. What could he tell his teacher and mother? He would know by the time he reached home.

The first person he saw was Galoosa T'imges who looked right at him as he came out of the bush. The old man waited. Hasa Galyeen sat beside him. It was a long time before the youth spoke. His voice was full of sadness as he related the events of the morning to his teacher. Galoosa T'imges was completely attentive. Finally he commended the youth for being honest, for practicing the hunter's walk, for his good intentions to surprise his mother and grandmother with a gift of deer meat and the precious hide, so highly valued for its lasting beauty when made into

ceremonial garments. When Hasa Galyeen asked why the arrow did not take the deer, his teacher asked him about the arrow head. He asked why it was shaped that way. He asked what it would take to make a successful arrow. He drew out the youth until Hasa Galyeen had given an answer to each question he had asked his teacher. He learned that his arrows were designed to be harmless to animals he had not yet learned to understand. Then he remembered that although he was already twelve years of age, he had yet to go on his first quest. From this experience he learned that when he behaved impulsively he was the one who lost out in the end. He was satisfied. He had learned this lesson well.

The archery lessons continued. When Hasa Galyeen mastered the art of shooting three arrows in a row through a smaller, rolling hoop, Galsoa T'inges took him into the longhouse, gave him the dry, pectoral fin bone of the ya'a and directed him to fasten it to the wall. It had a small, round hole in it. This would be Hasa Galyeen's new target. He had to hit this hole which was approximately five millimeters across. He smiled as he began his practice sessions. His arrows were sharper, more balanced. His arms were stronger, steadier. His eyes were super sharp. He felt great. It would not take him long to learn. Galsoa T'inges stood near him, commenting on each effort, showing Hasa Galyeen again and again how to measure his own progress, reminding him that his bow and arrows must become an extension of himself. To relieve the stress from this training, Hasa Galyeen would close his eyes after he aimed and then release the arrow. He was pleasantly surprised at the near-accuracy of his aim.

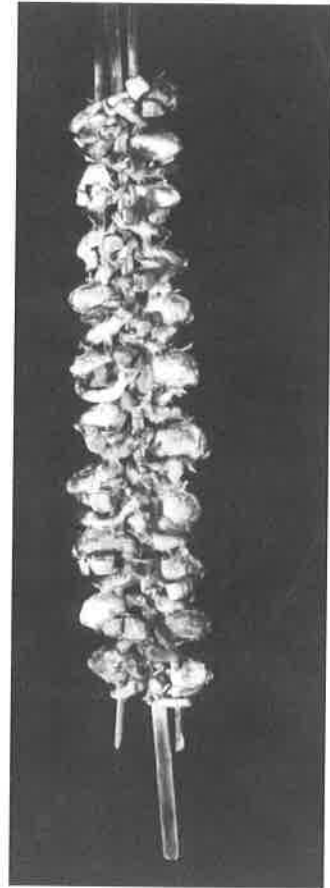
In **sim'algax**, the pectoral fin bone of a fish is called "ts'ip muxw," ear bone. Before he was sent to go for his first deer, Hasa Galyeen learned that one of the best places to hit the deer was behind its ear, a **vulnerable** spot. He was asked why this would be so and he gave a very common sense answer. There was a soft spot there. His teacher smiled and nodded his approval. Only after this round of training and his first quest was he encouraged to go hunting. The hunt was successful in more than one way. Not only did Hasa Galyeen get his quarry, but he gutted it without **contaminating** the meat, and had a beautiful hide with no holes in it. He enjoyed helping his mother to cut the meat in narrow strips and insisted on climbing high in the house to hang them to dry. He saved all the **marrow** for his grandmother, so she would become warmer after she ate. She was most proud of her hunter. He was in his glory.

When he was about sixteen years of age, old enough to be recognized in his own right, he and his mother were invited to attend a great feast at the village andoosda'a. His mother had made him the most beautiful regalia and over the years he had snared enough ermine to make himself a robe. Although his mother advised against it, Hasa Galyeen wore this over his deer hide shirt and pants with their hand-painted designs and fringes. His mother did not go.

At the feast house Hasa Galyeen was seated among the young nobles. He had been trained by his teacher to not show his nervousness, but his heart was pounding. He hoped he would be accepted by the people of Galoosa T'imges.

He had to wait for a fairly long time to find out. After the welcome dance by his host family, there were speeches of welcome and announcements by various members of the host's extended family. There were the many courses served in beautifully carved feast dishes - roasted meats of various kinds and toasted, dried salmon. There were strings of oolichans which had been cooked in huge kerfwood boxes filled with water which had been heated with hot stones. There were dried, smoked cockles and clams which he could take home with him and large sheets of dried seaweed. Then there was the herring roe-on-kelp heated to just the right temperature. There were reconstituted, dried berries and the small, apple-like fruit coated in oolichan grease, **hlayx** his uuli called it. There were **wits-maay**, great bowls of freshly crushed blueberries and salmon-berries mixed with elderberries and grease. There were huge dishes of whipped **iss** sweetened with the marrow from the stems of the fireweed, his favorite. Delicious. Many of these foods he had only heard of during his uuli's **reminiscences** so he was thoroughly impressed.

Then the gift-giving began. There were huge piles of elk hides and other items such as pelts, paddles, feast dishes, many **hoobixim gan**, **hax'iss**, **haseex**, and **amiilukw**. There were robes piled almost to the rafters. Both men and women of the host clan took part in the **distribution** of goods. Hasa Galyeen could hardly wait to see what he would be given. He knew he would get what he deserved, a valuable gift. He looked forward to the day when he would be a **renowned**, hard working chief. Then not only would he be seated in a place of honor, but he would always be one of the first to receive his gifts. The best, the rarest, the greatest number of precious gifts were presented to each of the chiefs who had

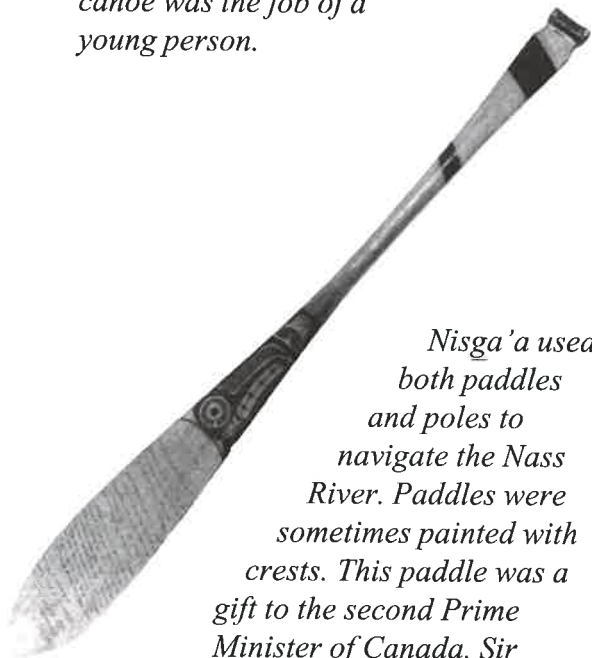


Royal B.C. Museum PN #14786

*Dried clams*



*This canoe bailer was a useful item in rough waters. Bailing the canoe was the job of a young person.*



*Nisga'a used both paddles and poles to navigate the Nass River. Paddles were sometimes painted with crests. This paddle was a gift to the second Prime Minister of Canada, Sir Wilfred Laurier.*

been invited to witness the **transactions** during the feast. He felt something brush against his head. He looked up just as a whole hide was being placed in front of him. His heart pounded in his ears. He could hear nothing more. There it was, his gift. It was the most holey, the most mouldy, the most **pathetic** piece of leather he had ever seen.

He could hear his peers whispering and giggling when they saw his gift. He stood up and **strode** out of the feast hall clenching the gift in his fist, his beautiful ermine robe slung over his shoulder. He threw his robe carelessly into the bottom of his canoe, stepping on it with wet moccasins as he pushed off. Near the beach he spotted a deadhead and pulled it over with his oar. He took his gift and wrapped it around the deadhead and fastened it with an arrow. As he did this he yelled back toward the feast house telling them what he thought of them and their generosity. Then he rowed angrily back to the other side of the river.

All the guests were shocked. They decided that Hasa Galyeen had gone too far. Immediately the young warriors left the feast house, launched their canoes and pursued Hasa Galyeen. He was waiting for them. Before they had a chance to land, he had shot the six men in the first canoe. He repeated this feat four more times before someone decided to tell the elders what was happening; still canoes of young warriors kept going over. Galoosa T'imges decided that he



would investigate. As his canoe made its way over, one of the warriors described to him what was happening. In his mind's eye he could picture Hasa Galyeen emptying his quiver and quickly hopping backwards into his home to **replenish** it before reappearing to shoot the next canoe full of warriors who were attempting to land. Galoosa T'imges asked a warrior to show him where Hasa Galyeen was. He asked for a bow and arrow. He directed the paddlers to hold the canoe steady in the fast-moving Lisims. He shot. The arrow hit Hasa Galyeen on his left side. He hopped, as he had done previously, backwards up to his house. He groaned as he got inside and collapsed.

After what seemed a longer time than usual, he came running back to his position and aimed at the oncoming canoes. Some of the arrows found their mark; many did not. Galoosa T'imges knew, then that he had severely wounded Hasa Galyeen. As the warrior continued to shoot, Galoosa T'imges became more satisfied that he had truly taught his student well, for Hasa Galyeen did not give up so readily even when he was hurt. As he was thinking these thoughts, a loud cheer went up from the men in the canoes. They had discovered that it was not Hasa Galyeen who continued to fight. They knew it was his mother, for when she went to replenish her arrows, she had to turn first before she made her way back to their house. What had happened was that when his mother saw that her son was **fatally** wounded, she stripped off her clothing and exchanged them with his regalia. She then quickly refilled the quiver and ran to replace him at his defence post.

## Study Questions

1. Write these words in your notebook, then in your **Thesaurus** or the **Glossary** find a synonym for each and write it beside that word.

function	status	environment
survivor	terrain	transactions
vibrant	distinct	exhilarated
prowess	pathetic	laboriously
replenish	vulnerable	contaminating

2. What is the **setting** for this adaawak?

3. In a paragraph of about six to ten sentences, write your **first impression** of Hasa Galyeen. Choose examples of his actions which gave this impression.

4. Why was this family alone in their village?

5. List some of the things he did as a toddler which showed that Hasa Galyeen would be an outstanding learner.

6. From where did the Nisga'a get their information before there were books?

7. Would you like to have the opportunity to learn the things that the Nisga'a learned when they were the only people in K'ali'aksim Lisims? Give four reasons for your answer.

8. (a) Why do you suppose his mother advised Hasa Galyeen not to wear the ermine robe?

(b) Why do you suppose she stayed home?

9. When Hasa Galyeen saw his gift, what else could he have done? Give a reason for your answer.

10. Rewrite the feasting section of this adaawak. Use today and your community centre as the setting.

# K'aahlheetgum K'ets'kw

*This traditional Nisga'a story has been adapted for this text by Niiitkw'ililtkw.*



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*Gitlaxt'aamiks, 1927.*

Jiits Kate and Ye'e Moses were in the kitchen having their morning meal. It felt good to be nearly finished with the preparation of their winter supply of salmon. This year Jiits had to have enough for her son, John's tribal feast. It would be his first. They would be putting away Uncle Arthur's headstone<sup>1</sup>. She and Ye'e were remembering how it was when they were children and the great totem poles were raised on such occasions when they were suddenly brought back to the present by the noise of shouting and what appeared to be a large stampede up the back steps.

**Jiits:** grandmother  
**Ye'e:** grandfather

1. *In most of Canada, a headstone is usually placed, without ceremony, on a grave shortly after a burial. In the Nass Valley, a headstone is placed on a grave at an important ceremony called the "Yukw" often held a year or more after the funeral.*

*Years ago, Nisga'a often raised pts'aan (totem poles) at a Yukw. Because the missionaries believed that the crests on totem poles were gods, Nisga'a began to use headstones instead.*

*What similarities do you see between a pst'aan and the headstone in the photograph above?*

Morris, one of their grandsons, yelled for her as he burst through the door. “They’re teasing me again about that ugly Marissa!” he exclaimed. He was followed by Shauna, Kathleen, Buddy, and little Bretton. They were all laughing and chanting, “Morris loves Marissa! Morris loves Marissa” Morris made an attempt to push Kathleen. She bumped into Bretton who, although she was only three years old, wasn’t going to have any of it. She **retaliated** by going up to Morris and saying, “You love Marissa and I’m going to tell my jijii what you said to me outside!”



*Nisga'a have always told stories. Nisga'a use stories to educate and to entertain.*

Ye'e Moses **intervened**. He stood up, walked to the center of the large kitchen and standing in the centre of the little group said, “**Hawitsim! Hawitsim! Hlaa hugaxdis. Nigidii aamhl wilsim. Hawahlkwhl dimt sa'an layt'ixhl k'yoolhl gathl ligit naa. Gilosim!**” (“Stop it! Stop it! What you are doing is not good! It is not our way; we do not make fun of anyone!” Bretton asked, “How come?” Ye'e replied that if we do, our people believed that we might turn out just like the person we made fun of or that we might lose out in the end if we kept on making fun of someone. Kathleen, always eager to learn asked ye'e what he meant. He replied, “I think you are old enough to hear this *adaawaḱ*; you, too, Bretton, I know you are good at listening very carefully.” “I know”, smiled Bretton, as ye'e invited them over to the kitchen table. She clapped and announced, “I’m going to sit on your knee, hey Jijii?” Jijii nodded. Ye'e began to *adaawaḱ*.

“A very long time ago, there was a community which **extended** quite a ways along the shore of Kalii’aksim Lisims. It was during the time when the Nisga’a still kept slaves. In that **galts’ap**, one of the chiefs and his wife had two sons. One of the sons who was very popular had four buddies who spent an **inordinate** amount of time at his home. They were just a little older than you,” Ye’e said nodding towards Buddy and Morris. “It was during that time in their lives when they began to become restless. They were too big to be children and yet not old enough to be recognized as adults. They did not want anyone to see that they still enjoyed playing children’s games, or that they had not yet perfected some of the skills they would need to become successful hunters, so they did these activities at the home of their buddy.

“Eventually one of them stretched and yawned and said, ‘Well, Guys, I think I’ll cut out early today. Same time tomorrow?’ His buddies, only slightly more **energetic** replied, ‘Yea, see ya.’ ‘Same place!’ ‘We’ll challenge them **Ts’ak** to a game of **Gonhl** tomorrow, so get lots of sleep!’

“Just as he was leaving, he spotted a slave girl going into the first house at one end of the village. Now,” said Ye’e, “slaves were usually given just enough food to keep them alive. If they were fortunate each might be given a whole, dried backbone from a salmon to soak and eat. There is something else which you likely already know,” he added. “Anyone who goes into the home of a Nisga’a is offered food. The youth watched for some time as the slave girl went from house to house, not spending any time at each. Perhaps she was being ignored by everyone. He turned and went back to his friend’s home.

“He had a brilliant idea about this slave girl so, smiling broadly at the chief’s son, he said, ‘Guess what! There’s a really pretty slave girl coming toward your house. I hear she’s looking for a husband,’ he laughed. ‘She’s been to every house so far and doesn’t seem to have been very successful. Why don’t you marry her? Just think how lucky you’ll be. You’ll be married to a slave! Hey, that’s a great idea! Marry her if she comes into this house!’ They all laughed. With **mock reverence** he went over to the place where special treasures were kept. He took down a beautifully woven, cedar bark mat, one designed for use during a ceremony, and opening it **dramatically**, laid it on the floor at the place of honour. This was always at the end of the longhouse furthest from the entrance. The young noble, getting into the spirit of the game, solemnly seated himself in the appropriate place on this sacred mat. His buddy waited behind him for their guest. The other three were near the door giggling to themselves.

“The door covering was pushed aside with a swish and the slave girl stood in the entrance way. Her **silhouette** was **deceptive** for it made her appear to have a smaller-than-normal head. As she came into the house, they could see that she had an **unkempt** appearance about her. However, they noticed that although she was small, she was not timid. When they saw how she carried herself, they had second thoughts about their prank. As he studied their guest, the young noble heard his buddy greet her in a loud voice. He pictured his buddy’s hand being raised **simultaneously** to show the slave girl where she was to be seated. ‘**Giiy, Sigidimnak!**’ he bellowed. The slave girl came forward slowly and with dignity and sat beside the young nobleman.



*A fire was built by the young man's friends. This was a sign to the **galts'ap** that the marriage was really going to take place.*

“As was the custom when one member of an unmarried couple spent time in the home of the other before the marriage contracting and rituals have begun, a great fire was built up by the young noble's friends. This was a signal to the **galts'ap** that there was now no choice but to have a marriage take place. The chief's wife prepared toasted, dried salmon for the couple. It was while they waited for their food that the youth took a peek at his partner-to-be. She appeared to be covered with large, ugly scabs on her arms, legs and face. His stomach turned. He swallowed and took a deep breath. ‘**K'amligihahlhaahl**, what have we done!’ he thought. He looked over at his mother for help. She appeared not to have noticed anything. She was busy dividing the **mihla'am hoon** into serving sized **portions** and placing them on beautifully designed, wooden, serving platters. She smiled as she placed the food before her **petrified** son and his bride. The young noble glanced over to his friends. They, too, looked **alarmed**. By this time the **Sim'oogit** had come home. He acted as if what he witnessed was what he had expected to see. His son became more nervous. When he noticed that his father continued to stare at him, he forced himself to eat.



“When one of his buddies saw that the slave girl’s platter was empty, he went over to **replenish** it. She put her hand on his to stop him and asking him to wait, reached up to her cheek and removed an enormous scab from it. The waiter became quite **queasy** and did all he could not to show how **repulsed** he was by her actions. He barely heard her as she said, ‘Go and give this to the sim’oogit.’ He didn’t even look at it as he **gingerly** placed it before the chief. Only when he heard the explanation, “**Ayuwa!**” did he look down at the platter. On it was the smoothest, the most brilliantly colored, the largest abalone shell he had ever seen. The chief smiled. These shells were precious, especially those which were very large and brilliantly blue-green and silvery with a broad, even edge of bright, rich coral pink.

“Seeing this, the chief’s wife took down a beautifully carved feast dish, filled it with **hlayx** and placed it before her son and the slave girl. They shared the dessert. When the dish was empty, the girl removed what looked like an even larger scab from her body and placed it in there. She signalled one of the boys to come and get the bowl and to put it in front of the **matriarch**. The matriarch was **ecstatic**. Everyone was relieved. This was no ugly, scabby slave. This was a very special guest.

“As the bride and groom finished their meal, a very tall and stately looking stranger stood in the doorway and asked if **K’aahlheetgum K’ets’kw** had been to this house. One of the young men rushed over to her and replied that she had and proudly announced that the chief’s son had immediately married her. ‘**Oo nit, Anxa’a; ji k’uba aama**



*A tall and stately stranger stood in the doorway*

**ga'atdisimh, naxhayina?** (Oh, yes, slave. Be sure to look after her, do you hear?) Then she added, 'My people will be arriving soon. They will be giving gifts of food to this young noble. They will be bringing boxes of oolichan grease, large containers of **hlayx**, and **t'imyit**, and **maay**, and **iss**. There will be many bundles of dried meat, and fat from goat, bear, moose, and sea lion.'

Ye'e paused to remind the children that these were all very precious **commodities**; that whomever possessed them was known to be very wealthy. Kathleen commented, "That means you and Jijii must be pretty rich, hey Ye'e." Ye'e replied, "It's not the same today, Kathleen. Today having a lot of money is seen by many Nisga'a to be a sign of wealth." "I like it the way it used to be," said Morris. Jijii commented, "It was very hard work the way it used to be, but it kept each family very close together. Nowadays many Nisga'a have to go to other places or go to school first before they can find work." Bretton announced, "Ye'e's story isn't over yet, hey, Ye'e?" Ye'e smiled and replied, "No, Brett, it isn't over yet."

"The people had heard of the young noble's good fortune and so were ready when they heard that the people from the village of K'aahlheetgum K'ets'kw had arrived. What they did not expect to see were the great number of canoes. There were so many that they filled the shoreline along which this large village was located. One of the canoes was loaded with skunk cabbage leaves." "What for, Ye'e?" asked Buddy. "It is used for many things," answered Ye'e. "It is used to line the food storage boxes before they are filled with fresh berries. This keeps them fresh for a long time once they are covered and buried."

They are spread out on racks for drying berries. The juice from the berries does not escape that way as they dry. They are good for storage boxes where fresh salmon eggs are cured for winter use.” “But we have lots of it here, Ye’e,” observed Kathleen. “Yes, Kathleen, some of our villages might have been rich with many resources, but some of them didn’t always have everything. That’s why we traded. That’s why some marriages were arranged certain ways,” Jijii told them. The children nodded. The adaawak continued.

“There were canoes loaded with every food imaginable. There were two canoes full of elk hide, marten pelts, and copper. The chief, his wife, and his slaves hurriedly piled up the family’s belongings to make room for this unexpected wealth. And still the gifts arrived. Everyone was overwhelmed. Suddenly the young noble was elevated to the highest **status** in his community.

“The tall, striking stranger was K’aahlheetkw’s mother. Her name was **Huxw Jan**. She was a **naxnok**, a supernatural being. These spirits are sent to us from **K’amligiihahlhaahl**. If we listen to them, they can be of great help to us. Even today, if we listen very carefully, we can hear what it is that **K’amligiihahlhaahl** has planned for us.” Bretton nodded at Ye’e and the others sat very still. “None of the villagers could see Huxw Jan; only the chief, the matriarch and the four young men were able to see her. She and her people lived in a very remote place, a place where there was much game and other resources. That is why they were such generous people.

“The young chief and his new wife invited people from the neighbouring villages. For many days he feasted, giving away much of his new wealth. To show how truly rich he was, he gave away slaves, robes hand-woven from mountain goat wool, richly designed with the crests of his honoured guests, whole seals, and large canoes as well. The guests left the feasts suitably impressed, full, and with many gifts. The young chief was content because he had become a renowned chief.” Ye’e smiled at the children. “**Way hlaa hugaxdis!** / Well, that’s enough for you to think about for now!” he exclaimed.

**Assignment:**

1. Why do you suppose Ye’e told the adaawaḵ about the ugly girl?
2. What lesson did the grandchildren learn from this adaawaḵ? (There are many possible answers.)
3. Thesaurus: Find another word or expression for each of the following: retaliate, intervene, energetic, mock reverence, silhouette, simultaneous, unkempt.
4. Write a brief paragraph using each of the following words: replenish, queazy, commodities, status. It could be a little adaawaḵ in one paragraph. Illustrate your work.
5. Write three “What happened before \_\_\_\_\_” questions; and three “What happened after \_\_\_\_\_” questions about this adaawaḵ. Provide an answer key using complete sentences.
6. Find four pieces of information about abalone. Present this information to your class.
7. What did you learn from this adaawaḵ? Write your thoughts about it.

## Adaawak: Links to the Past



*Belinda McKay*

*Nisga'a culture remains strong because Nisga'a elders remember the adaawak told to them as children.*



*Florence Burton*

### **William Beynon**

*1888 - 1958*

Beynon was said to be part Nisga'a. His mother was said to have been from Gitlaxt'aamiks. He worked with Marius Barbeau, an anthropologist who was collecting information about the First Nations people of Canada. He interviewed some Nisga'a who told him some of their adaawak. He did not speak Nisga'a.

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# Adaawak

**Adaawak** are stories about the history of the Nass Valley and of the Nisga'a people. Some of these stories answer questions about the Nass Valley and the animals and plants that live there. These stories answer questions such as where did the sun come from? Why does the Nass River flow down to the sea? Why is the halibut black on one side? Why do the oolichan swim up the river so early in the spring? These kinds of **adaawak** belong to all Nisga'a.

Other **adaawak** tell about the past of each of the many **huwilp** and **pdeek**. These stories record the activities of people who were members of those **huwilp** or **pdeek** long ago. These **adaawak** do not belong to all the Nisga'a people. They belong to just the one **wilp** or **pdeek**.

By listening to these stories Nisga'a learn about the properties, values and beliefs of each **wilp** and **pdeek**.

## **Adaawak are Property**

**There are thousands of Nisga'a **adaawak**. Some belong to all the Nisga'a people but most are the private property of a single house. Because these **adaawak** are private property not everyone can tell them. Nisga'a have the right to tell only those **adaawak** that belong to their own **wilp**.**

## ADAAWAK and FEASTS

*A chief shows a crest at a feast. The crest might be woven into a piece of matting or regalia, or carved into an amhalayt or other object.*



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*This eagle headdress belonged to the Sgañisim Sim'oogit who lived in Kincolith in the early 1900's.*

*A crest shown at a feast is important. The crest proves to everyone at the feast that the wilp owns the territory or right that goes with the crest. When a chief who is hosting a feast shows one of his crests, he needs to tell the adaawak that explains it. The crest and the adaawak go together. Together, they prove that the wilp owns the property.*

*After the crest has been shown, and the adaawak has been told, one of the guest chiefs must make a speech telling the host that he supports what the chief said. The guest chief agrees the adaawak belongs to the chief who told it.*

*By being at a feast and eating the food provided, guests show their agreement with the host's adaawak. The guests state that the host has the right to the resources of those **ankw'ihwil**.*

*Even though each wilp has many crests, a chief can show only one ayukws at any one feast. What reasons can you think of for this?*



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*"Woman of the Mountains." This mask represents a sigidimnak'. It came from Gitwinksihlkw and was carved in the early 1900's. This mask would have been used to dramatize one of the adaawak of the wilp.*



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*This ladle shows the ayukws of a wilp. It was used at a feast to serve oolichan grease. This ladle was more than 60 centimeters long.*



# TXEEMSIM

*Txeemsim, the  
"Wonder Worker", made  
the earth so that it was a  
better place for Nisga'a.*



Illustration: Linda Hudson

At one time the world was very different than it is today. Many natural features such as the mountains and rivers had not yet been made. People had “magical” powers and shared the world with supernatural beings. At that time these supernatural beings behaved very differently than at any other time in history.

The Nisga'a have many **adaawaḱ** about that time. Many of these **adaawaḱ** are about **Txeemsim**, one of the most important Nisga'a culture heroes.

Txeemsim was sent by **K'amligihahlhaahl** to help the Nisga'a. Txeemsim changed the earth to make it a better place for the Nisga'a. When he found that the Nisga'a lived in darkness he brought the sun to the earth. He made the tides and the mountains and rivers. He made sure the Nisga'a had fish, game and other foods to eat. He brought fire to the Nisga'a.

Txeemsim usually appeared as a person but sometimes he showed up in other ways, such as a “Giant” or a “Raven”.

Txeemsim was kind and friendly to the Nisga'a. He had a good sense of humour. He often played tricks to get what he wanted. He made many mistakes from which the Nisga'a have learned many lessons. After Txeemsim gave the Nisga'a everything they needed, he went away. The **adaawaḱ** tell us that he went to live in a hut, deep in a high valley where he still lives. He has two monsters for hunting dogs and there are lots of animals for food.

# Txeemsim

*Txeemsim threw this mountain into the mouth of the Nass to help protect the river for the Nisga'a.*



Thomas Boston

Before Txeemsim came to help the Nisga'a there was no such thing as the Nass River. Many mountains and other geographical features were different than they are today. Txeemsim changed the Nass Valley to make it a better home for the Nisga'a.

A large mountain **peninsula** sits between Iceberg Bay and Nasoga Gulf. This mountain was put there by Txeemsim. Txeemsim had brought the oolichan to the Nass, and now he wanted to protect the fishing grounds for the Nisga'a. He threw the mountain into the river to help keep other people out.

Txeemsim rested a few miles up the Nass River. He was hungry and wanted to eat some salmon. He made a series of bowls in the rock, then lay down behind them with his mouth wide open. He called the salmon and they jumped from bowl to bowl until finally, they jumped right into his open mouth.

*Until recent times when large nets became easily available Nisga'a very often used traps to catch fish.*



Thomas Boston

*When Txeemsim was hungry he made three bowls in a large rock to trick salmon into his mouth. This place is known as **Antl'axhoons Txeemsim**.*



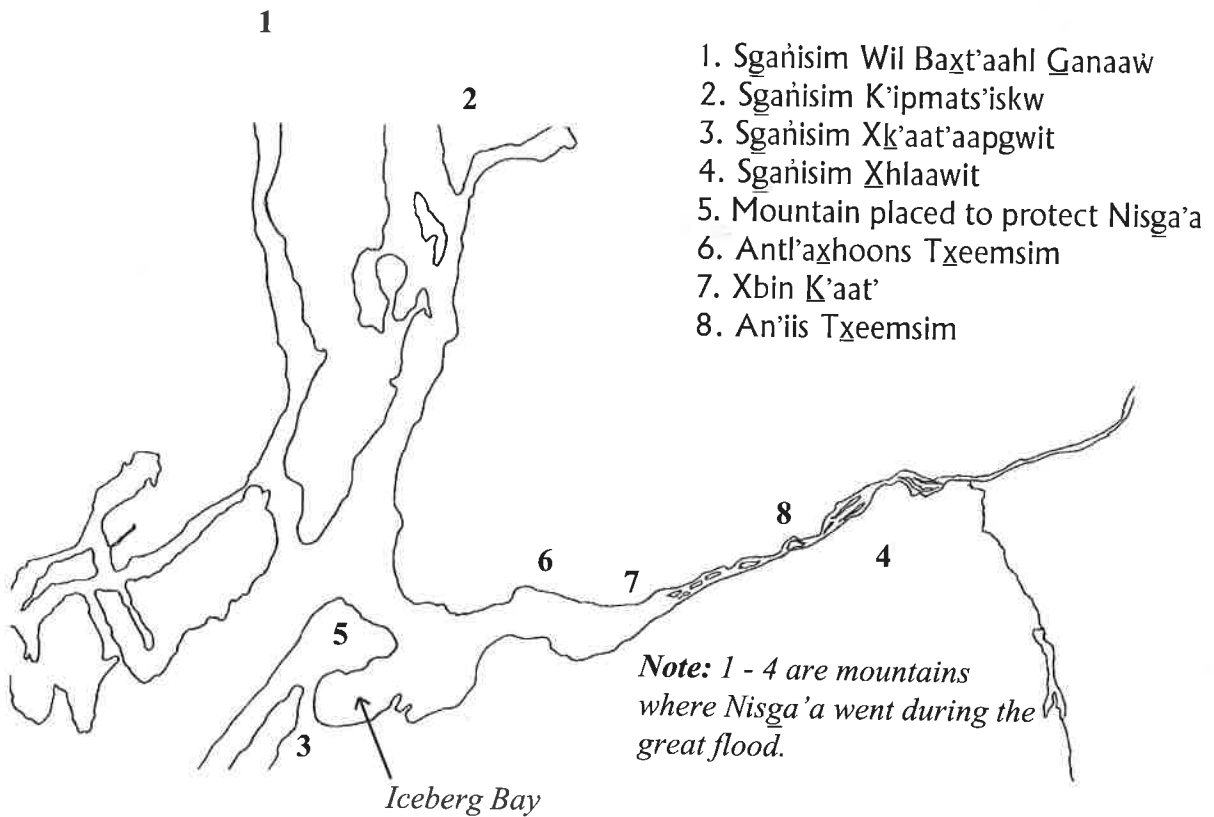
Thomas Boston

*Xbin k'aat', Txeemsim's talking stick.*

At the mouth of Oxnook Creek there is a sharp tower of rock more than three hundred meters high. This is said to be a **talking stick** or **k'aat**, left there by Txeemsim on his journey.

Between Greenville and Fishery Bay there is a deep bowl in a large rock. The bowl is called "An'iis Txeemsim", Txeemsim's chamber pot. There are no trees close to this site. The water in this bowl does not freeze. Txeemsim once told the Nisga'a how to see the future. Green leaves floating in the water **foretell** a prosperous future. Floating ashes foretell a death in the family or great danger.

A number of years ago, several young athletes peered into the bowl. They all saw what looked to them to be a soccer ball. Later, they won a soccer tournament. Even today, some people are afraid to look into this pool.



## ORIGIN OF THE NISGA'A PEOPLE

*There are two stories about how the first Nisga'a were born.*

### **Tree and Stone**

*When Txeemsim arrived at the place called An'iis Txeemsim, Tree and Stone were having an argument about who should give birth first. Txeemsim, touched Tree and she gave birth first. This is why people live a short time and rocks last a long time. This is also why there are no trees in the area around An'iis Txeemsim.*

### **Elderberry and Stone**

*Both Stone and Elderberry Bush were about to give birth. They were arguing about who should give birth first. Stone said that if she delivered first, the people would live a long time but if Elderberry did, their lives would be short. Txeemsim touched Elderberry Bush, said, "Give birth first", and she did.*

*The result of this event is that stones last a long time but people only live a short time. Some people say that our finger nails and toe nails show us what our skin would have been like if Stone had been the first to give birth.*