

Ikwewag Oganawendaanaawaa Manoomin



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Anishinaabe women are the original caretakers of manoomin (wild rice). For GLIFWC's 2024 poster, Ojibwe artist Amber Waboose, member of the Batchewana First Nation in Ontario, depicts this way of life with Anishinaabekweg (women) observing, learning, and teaching about manoomin growing in the river. The title, Ikwewag Oganawendaanaawaa Manoomin, means "the women take care of the rice," in Ojibwemowin.

In Ojibwe teachings, Anishinaabekweg are depicted without facial features, as are many Ojibwe artworks and dolls. This teaches humility and that all people are equal regardless of their facial features.

The four rays from the sun represent the importance of the number four, which is central to many aspects of life, including the four seasons, four directions, four life stages, the four orders of creation, and the four feast foods, of which manoomin is one. The Anishinaabe creation story features the four orders of creation and are all present in the artwork. The time for harvesting manoomin is a happy and festive occasion. People sing and tell stories while they gather, parch, and husk the rice. The process is labor-intensive but filled with love and care.

The oboodashkwaanishiinh (dragonfly) symbolizes renewal. These little creatures are always found flitting around the water, representing the grandmother manidoog (spirits) who watch over her. Amik (beaver) creates balance as he builds his dams and lodges, and he changes the flow of the river. Sometimes his lodge slows a stream to create the perfect place for a healthy rice bed, and sometimes it makes the water too deep or warm, and the manoomin rests.



Wazhashk (muskrat) is a reminder that the most vulnerable of creatures became the quiet sacrificing hero, giving his own life so that all of creation would have a place to call home. In the Ojibwe Re-creation story, when deep floodwater covered the earth, it was wazhashk who successfully dove to the bottom and returned with a pawful of soil. That small piece of earth he held when he resurfaced was placed on the back of mikinaak (turtle), restoring Turtle Island. He made it possible for the Anishinaabe to continue their way of life.



Finally, the manoomin growth cycle appears in the foreground, mirroring the life cycle of the Anishinaabe. From seed to sprout to the delicate floating leaf and all the way until a mature plant stands proudly above the water and provides seeds for the sustenance of people and creatures and for the next generation of rice. So too do the Anishinaabe stand proudly, knowing the care they give to the manoomin will allow it to keep teaching the people and providing for their way of life for many generations.