



Makwa (Black Bear)

*Maajii-Ojibwemowag (They Begin to Speak Ojibwe) – ANA Language Project
Teacher/Caregiver Supplemental Document*

WAABANONG SET: MAKWA BOOK OJIBWE LANGUAGE WORD LIST

- **Makwa** – Black Bear
- **Makoons** – Baby black bear
- **Miinan** – Blueberries
- **Nashke!** – Look!
- **Aabiding** – Once, one time
- **Bizaan** – Quiet, quietly, still
- **Zegizi** – S/he is scared
- **Bakadewag** – They are hungry
- **Maajaan** – Leave, go away
- **Maanoo** – Don't, don't care, let it be, never mind
- **Minis** – An island
- **Imaa** – There
- **Asemaa** – Tobacco
- **Maamaa** – Mother
- **Dede** – Father

Makwa and the Ojibwe people

Traditional Roles in Ojibwe Culture

Makwa (Black Bear) is a valued animal to the Ojibwe people.

The Ojibwe follows a clan system. Each clan is represented by an animal or bird, with a few exceptions. There are seven main clans and each clan holds a societal role. Makwa has the biggest clan membership throughout Ojibwe nation.

Traditionally, the bear clan are known as the medicine people and as

the protectors (police). The bear patrols the woods and scares away any predators that would harm smaller animals and knows which medicines to eat in order to heal themselves. This is why the Ojibwe pay attention to what the bear eats in order to learn which medicines to use



to help heal the sick. These medicines can be eaten, carried in pouches, used to smudge with, and much more.

Bear clan members will also assume the roles and responsibilities of the protector. An example of this is the Bear Clan Patrol in Canada. This group of bear clan members patrol their community's streets to make sure their people are safe from harm and racist acts of aggression.

How the Ojibwe people honor makwa

If a bear is harvested, there are certain cultural protocols that are followed to honor the bear's life. The Ojibwe people use makwa in many ways.

Traditionally, when makwa is harvested, every part of the bear is used and nothing goes to waste.

The bear hide and paws are often used in different ceremonies. For example, bear claws can be used in traditional regalia. Bear grease is also made from the fat and used topically for different skin and bone ailments. In addition, it helps hair to grow strong.

Elders say consuming bear meat will heal you due to all the medicines that makwa eats. However, in some communities it is taboo for bear clan members to eat bear meat. It is a good cultural practice to ask the local elders of the community.

Cultural considerations & hunting makwa

While tribal members have harvested on average, approximately 45 makwag annually in the decade between 2007– 2017 (GLIFWC Deer, Elk, and Bear Harvest in 1836, 1837, 1842 Ceded Territories of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota 2007–2017 Reports), Ojibwe communities with strong bear clan representation often discourage the hunts. An informal hunting ban on the Lac Courte Oreilles Reservation (LCO), for example, has made bears off-limits for decades. Ojibwe bear clan members were the first to settle the LCO area in the mid-1700s and continue to have an influential voice in cultural and policy decisions. Makwa clan members sometimes utilize things like bear grease (rendered fat) from animals harvested by others. On rare occasions, the LCO Tribal Governing Board issues special ceremonial permits for a one-time bear harvest.

Tribal Black Bear Harvesting:

GLIFWC tribes oversee plans within the ceded territory. A tribal member can harvest within these boundaries as long as they possess a ceded territory license to harvest bear. To find out more about tribal management of bear harvesting, check with local tribal conservation departments or GLIFWC's harvest regulations page: <https://data.glifwc.org/regulations/bear.php>

Extra Resources

GLIFWC Ojibwe Treaty Rights Understanding and Impact: <https://www.glifwc.org/publications/pdf/OTRUI2006.pdf>

Beargrease rich in tradition, by Charlie Otto Rasmussen, GLIFWC *Niibiin* 2016, Page 15: <https://www.glifwc.org/Mazinaigan/Summer2016/flipbook/files/inc/23376475ba.pdf>

Ojibwe People's Dictionary, Ojibwe language Resource: <https://ojibwe.lib.umn.edu/>

KBIC Health– Ojibwe Medicine. Good information on Ojibwe views of healing and wellness, clan systems, and other teachings: <https://www.kbichealth.org/ojibwe-medicine>

Bear Grease Information



Rendering bear fat

All the plants, medicines, and nutrients that the bear consumes are stored in its fat. This is essential for the bear to be able to sustain itself during winter hibernation. It is also why bear fat has a number of uses such as: joint pain, sealant, conditioner, etc.

Fun Fact: Some Ojibwe communities call the month of March: Makoons gaa-nitaawigiwaataawid Giizis, which translates to the month when the bear cubs are born. It is also said that when it is foggy in late January/Early February, that is when the bear cubs are being born.



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