How Michif was Lost

Based on a story by Jeanne Pelletier
This series is a departure from other books about Aboriginal or traditional stories. It includes five stories. As readers go through the series, they will notice that the narrative and artwork gets progressively darker. The series starts with trickster stories, then moves to a Whiitigo and Paakuk story, then jumps to a story about selling one’s soul and personal redemption, and finally to a Roogaroo story.

This project came to life from the stories of our Elders, and as such, original transcripts of the stories, prose renditions by Janice DePeel, and biographies of the storytellers and project team are available on the Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture: www.metismuseum.ca/browse/index.php?id=13100

**Stories of Our People/Lii zistwayr di la naasyoon di Michif Series:**

*How Michif was Lost*

*Chi-Jean and the Red Willows*

*Whistle for Protection*

*Sins of the Righteous*

*Attack of the Roogaroos!*

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Based on a story by Jeanne Pelletier
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PROUD PAST
BRIGHT FUTURE!
One day the forest was alive with excitement. Mother Nature, or Li’waw di la tayr or Pimachiwin as she was also known, was having a party. Before long all of the forest buzzed with news of three special guests who had been invited.
They were the cousins Chi-Jean Nanabush, and Wiisakaychak. All three were clever tricksters or Chakapesh, and all three had a way with Mother Nature.
Mother Nature loved Nanabush's company because of his wonderful singing voice.

Mother Nature relished spending time with Wiisakaychak because he was a wonderful fiddle player.

Mother Nature enjoyed Chi-Jean's company because of his great dancing ability.

Mother Nature loved Nanabush's company because of his wonderful singing voice.
The three cousins agreed to meet at a crossroad on the way to the forest Mother Nature called home. Wisakaychak was the first to arrive since he always ran. He had only just arrived and already he was impatient.

I wonder where my little cousins are? They'll be coming, but to make sure they know I'm here, I'll whistle.

Shwi shwho. Shwi shwho.
Nobody heard him so he tried again.

Still no one heard him. He waited a moment then whistled a third time.

This time he heard someone whistle back...

...which told Wissakaychak that Chi-Jean was coming. Wissakaychak looked and saw Chi-Jean dancing his way toward him.
It was Nanabush flying to meet them, and he had something to tell them.

After only a few minutes the two heard a sound: “shhh shhh shhh.”

They greeted one another and waited for Nanabush to arrive.

I’m not going to Mother Nature’s party. She tells stories about us and I don’t want to go there. Besides, she’ll ask me to sing and I’m not in a singing kind of mood.
Don’t go? Don’t be ridiculous. Nanabush, of course you’ll go! Come and stay with us. Think of the wonderful food Mother Nature will serve.

This appealed to Nanabush’s stomach. He agreed that Mother Nature was a good cook, and he liked eating. Boy did he like eating!
Wiisakaychak and Chi-Jean then left for Mother Nature’s home, but Nanabush decided to take a short cut and beat his cousins to Mother Nature’s. A tall hill stood between Nanabush and Mother Nature’s forest, so he decided to climb the hill. He climbed half way up the hill when he became tired and stopped a minute. That’s when he realized that he wasn’t climbing a hill; he was climbing a mountain! He decided he would make the stones dance with a song his European brothers taught him.

Yo do lady hoo!
Only a few pebbles fell, so Nanabush sang a little louder.

From behind he heard a big noise.

Turning around he saw a huge rock coming toward him. Then he saw many rocks coming toward him, all falling at once.

Nanabush quickly flew up into the air, using his arms like wings.
Nanabush whistled urgently...

Wiisakaychak was sitting on the ground whistling to his cousin, unable to see that a huge rock was barrelling down the mountain towards him.

...and Wiisakaychak moved just in the nick of time.

Nanabush landed on the ground and grabbed a big stick.

He then walked around the bend in the road, dragging both his feet and the stick.
In an instant Nanabush transformed himself into a tiny little person, jumped into Wiisakaychak's bag and enjoyed his ride to Mother Nature's house.

After all the excitement Nanabush was quite tired and needed to rest, so he came up with a plan.

Wissakaychak and Chi-Jean looked at one another.

Oh, I hurt my back.

A big stone fell on me. That's why I'm dragging my feet. I'm so sore. I'm just so sore.

How am I going to walk?

Okay, you can jump into my bag.

In an instant Nanabush transformed himself into a tiny little person, jumped into Wissakaychak's bag and enjoyed his ride to Mother Nature's house.
Even when Chi-Jean and Wissakaychak neared Mother Nature’s house, they didn’t wake him and tease him about falling asleep and snoring.

...so they didn’t say anything when they heard “chhhh chhh chhh chhh chhh chhh” and then “chhh chhh tick chhh chhh tick” and “errrr errrr” coming from the bag.

Chi-Jean and Wissakaychak felt sorry for Nanabush...
When they arrived at Mother Nature’s house she invited them into her home and welcomed them. Her conversation was pleasant and soft as she spoke in Michif.

Oh mes koozin, mes koozin, mes koozin.
Did you bring your fiddle Wiisakaychak?

Just then Nanabush crawled out of Wiisakaychak’s bag...

Did you bring your dancing shoes Chi-Jean?

Oh yes, and I even have new jigging steps I’ll dance!

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...and transformed himself to his normal size.

Nanabush was irritated that she called him "sleeping beauty," but he didn't say anything.

And what will you be doing this evening?

Okay, maybe you should rest awhile before you come and eat.

Nanabush felt insulted again. Mother Nature knew he loved to eat.
Mother Nature and each of her guests got a plate and had their meal together.

I've been cooking in anticipation of your arrival. I cooked lii boole*, lii patate, lii gaalet, and apray, lii bayng and fried chokecherries. They are all ready.

* To learn Michif, visit www.metismuseum.ca/michif_tools.php
They drank tea and they filled their dishes some more. There were lots of people at the party.

My meal and my plate are too hot. I will let it cool off and I’ll play some music.

He got his fiddle and he started to play.
It was really good fiddle music. Chi-Jean heard the music and he couldn't stop his feet from moving.

Chi-Jean danced to Wiisakaychak's fiddle tune. It was very good.

My soup is too hot as well. I'll just wait and I'll dance a bit.
So he dumped out the soup but he took both plates and ate the food. The only thing he didn’t touch was the fried chokecherries. Then Nanabush went and got his own plate of food, but still he didn’t try the chokecherries. He ate and ate some more. Finally, he had a full stomach and felt satisfied and happy.
When the music stopped Chi-Jean stopped dancing. When he looked at his feet, there was smoke rising off of them – he had been dancing so hard and so fast. Soon they were going so hard and so fast that Wiisakaychak broke the neck of his fiddle, and all the hair had gone off of his bow. Nanabush joined his cousins and sang. Wiisakaychak played fiddle and Chi-Jean danced for a long time.
Now Wiisakaychak and Chi-Jean decided to eat, which gave Chi-Jean a chance to rest his feet and Wiisakaychak time to fix his fiddle. Nanabush kept singing different songs and then he remembered the song he’d sung on the mountain earlier that day. He was a really good singer and an even better yodeller.
As Nanabush sang, Chi-Jean and Wissakaychak saw that their bowls were empty. They asked Mother Nature if their plates had been set aside. The plates couldn’t be found and no one had moved them. Nanabush stopped singing when he heard his cousins’ raised voices.
“What happened to our food?” Wiisakaychak asked Mother Nature as Nanabush approached. All eyes turned to Nanabush.

You ate it, you ate our food!

Nanabush knew what Wiisakaychak had done with his cousins’ food but he didn’t say anything.

No I didn’t! Wiisakaychak, you were playing your fiddle so hard you didn’t know what you were doing. You were eating at the same time you were playing. And you Chi-Jean were jigging so hard you didn’t notice you were eating. I didn’t eat your food.

Mother Nature knew what Nanabush had done with his cousins’ food but she didn’t say anything.
Mother Nature looked at Nanabush and began to get very angry. She thought he was calling her an old lady.

Nanabush knew his cousins were angry at him so he began to sing.

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Everyone was silent when Mother Nature finished speaking. That was okay because the party had ended and it was time for everyone to leave. Chi-Jean was the first cousin to go. He said good-bye to Mother Nature and Wiisakaychak and Nanabush.

She ran to Nanabush and grabbed him by the neck.

You're a bad cousin!

You're not supposed to call anyone names, especially me. I did everything nice for you. I like your singing but not this song. You take this song back where you got it from and don't sing it here anymore.
Nanabush was the last to leave. He hugged Mother Nature so hard she began to choke and gasp for air.

When Wiisakaychak left he said good-bye to Mother Nature and to Nanabush.

That’s for saying that I ate my cousins’ food. I heard the words you spoke in Michif to them. You told them I ate all their food. You told a lie.
Nanabush let go of Mother Nature’s throat. Tears glistened in her eyes, and they never spoke another word to one another. To this day, Mother Nature has never spoken Michif.

You’ll never talk your language, but someday you’ll remember it.
COLLECT ALL 5 STORIES OF THE
STORIES OF OUR PEOPLE/
LII ZISTWAYR DI LA NAASYOON
DI MICHIF
SERIES

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Chi-Jean and the Red Willows
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The stories used in this guidebook are written and illustrated by Métis authors and illustrators. Each story brings traditional and contemporary Métis culture to life. They honour the past and present. Métis children often see themselves in these publications. Non-Métis students will see and connect with the universal themes and relate them to their own lives while learning about Métis culture. Most importantly, this resource is about engaging readers in the history and traditions of Métis culture through literature.

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The Gabriel Dumont Institute (GDI) is celebrating its 35th anniversary. GDI offers university, skills training, apprenticeships, and adult upgrading through programs and services. GDI has graduated over eleven hundred Métis teachers through the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program. Dumont Technical Institute has thousands of certificate and diploma graduates. GDI Training and Employment offers career counselling and apprenticeship advice in offices across the province. The Gabriel Dumont Scholarship Foundation has awarded over 1.5 million dollars in scholarships to Métis students in Saskatchewan. GDI has an award-winning Publishing Department that has produced over 160 resources. GDI has one of the most extensive Metis collections at its library branches in Regina, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert.

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