

Grade 3: Unit 1, Week 3 Building Communities

Read Aloud: **Potlatch for Kwiskwis** by H.H. Cardigan

Wonderful Words: *honor, faint, carving, predictable, hesitate*

Kwiskwis means Little Squirrel; it is a word from the Molalla tribe. Descendants of the Molalla tribe now live in western Oregon.

Potlatch for Kwiskwis

The day had finally arrived! The little fishing village buzzed with excitement, but no one was happier than Kwiskwis. Today her clan would hold a potlatch in her honor. There would be great feasting and many gifts. There would be singing and dancing. She would get to wear her best dress. And most important of all, tonight Kwiskwis would be given her grown-up name.

“I’ll see my friend Weesa,” Kwiskwis said to herself. She had met Weesa at a potlatch his family gave two years before and hadn’t seen him since.

Kwiskwis’s father, Standing Elk, was the chief of the village. Years before, he and his wife, Bird-That-Sings, had decided to hold a potlatch when his daughter wove her first basket. Sometimes the host of a potlatch would give away everything he owned. Later, the guests would return the honor by holding their own potlatches.

Kwiskwis had finished weaving her cedar-bark basket almost a year before. Since that time, the family had been preparing for the potlatch. Most of the gifts had been made by hand, and everyone in the village had helped. Now, at last, everything was ready.

Kwiskwis touched her string of shells. They were her prized possession.

“Do we have to give away everything?” she asked with some concern.

“Not always,” said her father. “But we might. This basket signals a great event in your life. That is why we are giving you your new name tonight. And besides, you remember the nice things you got at the potlatch in Weesa’s village.”

Kwiskwis could hardly forget. She still wore the fine cape made of goat’s wool that she had been given. Kwiskwis also thought about the food, the dancing, and all the other festivities. Her family had been given so much. Now they were returning the gifts, and giving even more if possible.

Weeks before, messengers had paddled their canoes to all the villages in the area, inviting people to the potlatch. Even dogs had been invited! Soon gifts began to arrive at Kwiskwis’s village from all over. Each present was a sign that a family had agreed to come.

On the morning of the potlatch, Kwiskwis heard some faint music and ran to the door. She saw canoes approaching over the misty waters. Their guests were singing as they paddled toward the shore!

Kwiskwis saw her friend Weesa climbing out of a canoe. She ran over to him.

“I’m getting my new name tonight,” Kwiskwis told him. “But I don’t know what it will be.”

“My name will be Red Deer,” said Weesa. “My father saw a deer the color of cedar on the day I was born. But I won’t get my name until next year.”

Weesa and Kwiskwis helped the guests unload their things. The women began to prepare fish stew for the first feast. Weesa and Kwiskwis helped by pulling stems from a heap of fresh strawberries.

Soon everyone was dipping clamshells into the large bowls of stew. For the next few days all the guests would eat well there.

“I’ll race you to my father’s house, Weesa!” Kwiskwis said. “It’s the one with the tallest totem pole.”

“This is my mother’s totem pole,” Kwiskwis explained. “The animal carvings show the history of my family.”

“We have one, too,” Weesa said.

“My father says one day there may be a carving on the pole that stands for me,” said Kwiskwis.

“I wonder what animal you will be named for,” said Weesa. Kwiskwis was thinking the same thing.

The events at every potlatch followed a predictable order. This schedule never changed. On this, the first night, there would be gift-giving and dancing.

Bird-That-Sings helped Kwiskwis put on her costume. Kwiskwis closed her eyes. What would her new name be? She hoped it would be something beautiful. She pictured herself as a leaping fawn, then a graceful swan.

“Can’t you tell me what my new name will be?” she whispered to her mother.

Her mother smiled. “You’ll find out soon enough.”

People from each village performed a dance. Kwiskwis shouted and clapped her hands for Weesa’s village. Then halfway through the night, it was time for the naming ceremony. Kwiskwis was nervous. What if she didn’t like her name?

Standing Elk stood in the center of the room and spoke. “My daughter has woven her first basket, and now she must have a grown-up name. From now on Kwiskwis will be known as Fox-That-Laugh!”

As everyone cheered, Kwiskwis remained silent. Fox-That-Laugh! That wasn’t a beautiful, graceful name!

Bird-That-Sings came over to Kwiskwis. “What is the matter?” she asked her daughter.

“Nothing,” said Kwiskwis sadly.

Bird-That-Sings said, “We named you Fox-That-Laugh because we always wanted a daughter who was clever and quick and happy. Like the foxes we saw playing in the woods before you were born.” Kwiskwis smiled with new understanding.

“Let’s watch the gift-giving,” suggested Bird-That-Sings.

Bird-That-Sings and Fox-That-Laugh watched with great interest and pride as each rug and beaded basket they had made was accepted by a guest. Wooden chests, fishing nets, masks, furs, jewelry, even a long, carved canoe, changed hands over the next two hours.

The last gift of a potlatch was always a beautifully made blanket. Whoever accepted it would hold the next potlatch.

Standing Elk picked up the blanket and offered it to Weesa’s father, Running Wolf. He strode forward without hesitation and took it. Everyone cheered. The feasting then began.

A few days later, as Kwiskwis watched the departing guests, Weesa came over and handed her a small package. Inside was a carved wooden fox. And it looked like it was laughing!

“I started carving it when I met you. You reminded me of a laughing fox,” Weesa said. “Good-bye, Fox-That-Laugh. Until next year.”

Kwiskwis touched her string of shells. “Please accept this gift, Red Deer,” she said, removing the necklace and placing it around his neck. “My heart is happy, dear friend.”

“Not Red Deer yet,” said Weesa. “Not until next year.”

“Good-bye then, Not-Red-Deer-Yet,” said Kwiskwis. She waved as Weesa ran off to join his family.

honor

Define: To **honor** is to show respect and appreciation.

Example: There was a celebration in **honor** of the PTA president.

Ask: What are reasons to **honor** some one?

faint

Define: When something is **faint**, it is not clear or strong.

Example: My favorite dark blue shirt was washed so many times that it is now a **faint** light blue.

Ask: If you hear the **faint** barking of a dog, is the dog close or far? How do you know?

carving

Define: A **carving** is a picture or design that is cut into the surface of something.

Example: The wooden box was decorated with beautiful flower **carvings**.

Ask: Why can't you erase a decoration that is a **carving**?

predictable

Define: **Predictable** is when you know something is going to happen before it does.

Example: I guessed what was going to happen at the end of this **predictable** movie.

Ask: What stories have you found to be **predictable**?

hesitate

Define: To **hesitate** is to pause or wait because you are unsure.

Example: Tom's **hesitation** showed as he slowly walked to the microphone.

Ask: If you saw an animal that you did not recognize, would you **hesitate** or would you walk up to it? Why?