

# "Waynabozho and the Wild Rice"

*One day, when Waynabozho was out walking around, his grandmother called him to her lodge. "Grandson," Nokomis said, "it is time for you to go to some distant place in the forest and fast. Then a dream may come to you to help the people yet to come."*

*But Waynabozho did not like the idea of walking so far.*

*"I will go in my canoe," he said. Then he began paddling along from lake to lake.*

*Waynabozho had not gone far when he saw tall grasses growing from the shallow waters at the edge of the fourth lake he entered. He liked the way that tall grass looked. There were many seeds on that tall grass, and he took a big piece of birch bark and made it into a basket. Then he used a stick to knock off many of those seeds into his bark container. When he was done, he took the seeds back to his grandmother.*

*"Look what I have found," he said. "The tall grass that held these seeds is very fine to look at. Let us plant these seeds along the shores of our own lake so we will have those grasses to look at from our lodge."*

*Nokomis did as Waynabozho asked. She helped him scatter the seeds along the edge of the lake. "Now Grandson," she said, "you must continue on your way. You must go out and fast and hope that something good will be given to you."*

*So Waynabozho set out again in his canoe. He went from lake to lake and then he just leaned back in his canoe and let the boat drift. "I can wait here for a dream," he said. "Why should I trouble myself to walk?" He went without food all the rest of that day.*

*"This fasting is easy," Waynabozho said. "I will surely have a strong dream come to me soon." But no dream came and he fell asleep as he drifted along in his canoe.*

*The next day came and when Waynabozho woke up he was unable to think of anything but food. He felt hungrier than he had ever felt before. As the canoe drifted along he saw some plants growing along the shore.*

*"Boozhoo, Waynabozho," the plants said. "Helloo! Are you hungry? You can dig one of us up and eat the root. Then you will no longer be hungry at all."*

*“Ah,” Waynabozho said, paddling his canoe quickly to the shore. “This must be the vision I was waiting for. I have fasted a very long time. I must do as these plants tell me to do.” Then he began to dig up the plants. He did not just dig up one; he dug them all and ate their roots.*

*But when Waynabozho was finished eating, he began to feel very sick. Just as the plants have said, he was no longer hungry at all. He became so sick that he could not move. He lay there for three days and three nights. Finally, on the fourth day, he found enough strength to drag himself back to his canoe and paddle weakly toward home.*

*But when he was within sight of their lodge, he saw new plants growing from the shallow water of the lake.*

*“Waynabozho,” these new plants said, “sometimes we can be eaten.”*

*Waynabozho picked some of the seed heads of those plants. He sprinkled some of the seeds back onto the water before he ate. Those plants tasted good and he no longer felt weak and sick after eating them.*

*“What are you called? He said.*

*“We are manomin,” said the wild rice plants. “You are the one who planted us here. Do you not remember?”*

*Then Waynabozho collected many of the seed heads of the wild rice, leaning the plants over and scraping them gently with a stick as he had done before. He made sure to let some of the seeds go into the water as he did this. That is how wild rice is gathered to this day by the Anishinaabe. And as Waynabozho paddled home he knew that he would have much to tell his grandmother. He had succeeded in his quest. He had found something good for the people yet to come.*