Boozhoo (hello)! My name is Tommy Sky. I am eleven years old, and I live on the Bad River Reservation in northern Wisconsin. I live with my sister, my mom and my dad. We call ourselves Anishinaabe (ah-nish-ih-nah-bay), meaning the original people. Some people also call us the Chippewa or Ojibwe. In Ojibwe, my reservation is called Mashkiziibii, which means Wetland Medicine River.
My family and I spend a lot of time outside. We like to do things like hunting waawaashkeshi (deer), fishing ogaa (walleye), camping, and gathering manoomin (wild rice) together. I really like doing these things with my family, but my favorite activity is fishing. What is your favorite outdoor activity?

I am pretty excited because it is almost summer. There is no school, and I get to play in nibi (water) with my family and friends. There are so many lakes, rivers and streams where I live. Gichigami (Lake Superior) is my favorite. It is so big. My favorite river is Mashkiigong-zibii, the Bad River. It flows right by my house. I spend a lot of time by the Bad River with my friends. My dad usually comes to watch us.

Summer is also when I get to spend time with my grandparents. They take care of me when mom and dad are at work. I really like spending time with my mishomis (grandfather) and nookomis (grandmother). I love hearing stories about when they were my age. They had to work hard and even carry all their water from a well when they were young. Do your grandparents or family members tell you good stories?

My favorite story is one my nookomis (grandmother) told me. It is the story about the journey of a raindrop. The story is really about the importance of water to the Ojibwe people. In the Ojibwe culture women are considered to be "Keepers of the Water." It's their job to protect the water and keep it clean. Do you know what a watershed is? Nookomis showed me on a map that all water in the area leads to my favorite lake, Gichigami, meaning great water, (see front cover map). She said that our watershed is shaped like a great big bowl. All nibikaaning (waterways) and everything they carry leads into Gichigami. She told me that the quality of our lives depends on the quality of the waters where we live.

Nookomis said that we need to make sure that every little raindrop that comes down from the sky and flows from the little streams high-up in the Penokee Hills brings clean water as it travels downhill and through our reservation into Lake Superior. Water, she said, is the source of life. All animals, plants and people, like my family, need clean water to survive. I tried to imagine what our reservation would be like without any water. I couldn’t think of life without fishing, swimming or seeing all of the different kinds of animals. I began to understand why clean water is so important.

In 2011 Waterwalkers came carrying water from four directions and arrived on the shores of Lake Superior. Waterwalkers call attention to the need to respect our water and keep it clean.

My friend Jackson caught a nice bass.
One day my mishomis took me out to think more about the journey of the raindrop. First we went high up into the Penokee Hills that surround part of our reservation. This is where water starts its journey down through the watershed. We stopped at Caroline Lake, where the Bad River begins. He used to fish with his dad at this lake. He learned everything he knows about fishing from his dad, though some of his stories are probably whoppers!

At Caroline Lake we caught giigoonh (fish) that we would share with our family and eat for dinner. We also saw a wazhashk (muskrat), two maangwag (loons) and a waawaashkeshi (deer). While we were fishing, I asked grandfather about a mine that might be built close to Caroline Lake. I heard my mom and dad talking about it one day, and they seemed worried.

My mishomis told me that a mine could be built very close to Caroline Lake. He told me that the mine could pollute the water that runs down from the hills, and this would not be good for the animals and people who live in the watershed. The animals, the fish and people all need clean water to survive on the reservation.

**Ojibwe language review**

Let’s see if you can remember the Ojibwe words you have learned. Draw a line to the matching words.

- Gichigami
- nibikaaning
- ogaa
- manoomin
- wazhashk
- maangwag
- giigoonh
- waawaashkeshi
- Mashkiikii Zaaga’igan

Loons—maangwag. (Photo by Travis Novitsky)

Deer—waawaashkeshi. (Photo by Travis Novitsky)

Muskrat—wazhashk. (Reprinted from Wikipedia)
The baby Bad River rushes down the Penokee Hills to join the Bad River.

Waynaboozhoo and the Great Flood

Adapted from The Mishomis Book by Edward Benton-Banai

Long ago the world was filled with evil. Men and women lost respect for each other. The Creator, Gitchie Manito, was unhappy about this and decided to cause a great flood to purify the earth. Waynaboozhoo was the only person who survived along with the animals.

After floating around on a log for many days, Waynaboozhoo dived into the water and attempted to grab a handful of Earth to help create a new world. The water was too deep for him, and he could not make it to the bottom. Maang (loon) then tried to swim down to the bottom and grab some of the mud. Sadly, maang could not swim all the way down. The next to try was Zhing-gi-bis’ (the helldiver). He was gone a long time and said he also could not reach the bottom. Zhon-gwayzh’ (the mink) then tried, but could not make it. Ni-gig’ (the otter) and Mi-zhee-kay’ (the turtle) also tried unsuccessfully.

Then the little wa-zhushk’ (muskrat) said he would try. Waynaboozhoo and the other animals didn’t think he could do it, but let him try anyway. After waiting for a long time, wazhashk finally floated up to the surface where Waynaboozhoo grabbed him and realized he was dead. But with him he brought up a handful of mud from the old earth.

Waynaboozhoo took the mud from muskrat’s paw and placed it on the strong shell of Mi-zhee-kay’. The winds from all four directions blew and blew and stretched the mud that was on turtle’s back. The earth grew and grew until it formed an mi-ni-si’ (island) in the water.

Waynaboozhoo then sang a song and the animals danced in a circle on the island as it continued to grow. Finally the winds stopped blowing and the water became still. A huge island sat in the middle of the great water.

Since wazhashk sacrificed his life to create the new world he has forever since had great honor among the animals.

Waynaboozhoo decided that because mikanak held the new earth on his back that he would be able to live in both worlds; land and water.
Mashkiiziibii Baawitgong (Bad River Falls)

For our next stop on the raindrop journey, my mishomis took me to Bad River Falls and told me about spearfishing here when he was my age. He would go out with his father and grandfather like I do and stand in the rapids watching for fish. Mishomis and I went there and walked around. This is where the little raindrop is part of a rushing river rolling downstream. It mingles with millions of other raindrops and races over rocks. He told me about one day when his dad and he were spearfishing here they saw a huge ogaa (walleye) in the water, but before they could spear it, it swam away! I hope someday I can catch a really big fish. That way I could feed my whole family! Nookomis had packed a nice picnic lunch, so we sat on the banks of the river and ate our sandwiches, but we were careful to take our garbage with us. I am not going to throw garbage in the river!

Grandfather reminded me of the wild animals we saw earlier, waawaasheshki (deer), maang (loon) and wazhashk (muskrat), and how they all use the water. If the water is poisoned then they might not be able to live here anymore. This made me think about how much I love these animals and how important the nibi (water) is to them. He also told me about the water song that my grandmother sings. I never knew what the song was for, but now the words make more sense. The song is about how we need to love the water and take care of it for everyone. It calls water the “blood of Mother Earth.”

Waynaboozhoo and the animals on the giant log

Color the pictures from the Great Flood story. (Reprinted with permission by Edward Benton-Banai)
Glorified Wild Rice

2 cups cooked wild rice
2 cups drained crushed pineapple
1 cup miniature marshmallows
½ cup grapes*

Mix all ingredients together and chill for at least two hours. Before serving, fold in 1 cup whipped cream or cool whip and serve. Serves about 10 people.

*N may substitute Maraschino cherries for the grapes

Nookomis’s Glorified Wild Rice

We also helped remove cattails from the rice beds in the Kakagon Sloughs. There is a new kind of cattail that isn’t supposed to be there. It has pushed out our rice plants. I think they call it an invasive plant. Well, those all have to be pulled up by hand, so we had to really work hard for several days trying to get rid of those invaders. If we didn’t, our manoomin beds would no longer be there.

Besides wild rice, fish in the lakes and rivers can be hurt. Our tribe cares a lot about the fish in the Bad River and in Lake Superior. I know because I visited our tribal hatchery last spring. They raise millions of baby walleyes there. I saw all the eggs in special jars with water going through, and then we saw great big ponds where the babies, called fry, are placed to grow before being put back into the river. My people have always eaten wild rice and fish. Those are part of every feast and celebration. If our fish are sickened with pollution or because the water gets too warm, then we could not eat them anymore.
Next, my mishomis and I stopped by Gichigami on the way home. I love being on my favorite lake. Our people call it Gichigami which means “Great Water.” I always like to look across and see Mooningwanekaaning (Madeline Island). Madeline Island is one of the original places that the Ojibwe people lived and still is a sacred place today. They came there looking for the “food that grows on the water,” which is wild rice.

Grandfather stated that all water that we saw in the watershed today flows into Gichigami. We need to protect it and keep it clean. I remember overhearing my friend’s dad, who is a great fisherman on Lake Superior, talk about something called mercury. I had no idea what mercury was or why it was in the lake. I asked my grandfather what it was.

He told me that mercury is one of the harmful materials that could come from mining and other sources, like big smoke stacks. Mercury in our waters can hurt the fish that live in those waters and make them unsafe for us to eat. He said if people eat fish with lots of mercury in them they can get really sick. It is important when fishing to read warning signs about fish with mercury. He walked me to a sign, and we saw a map showing the amount of mercury in the lakes. To protect ourselves we need to protect our waters.

Mishomis told me that our people, the Anishinaabe (ah-nish-ih-nah-bay), need clean water to fish, rice, hunt and gather for today and many years to come. He again told me how important it is that every raindrop is pure because it gives us and everything around us life. My day with my mishomis and nookomis was really fun, and I learned a lot! You should always take the opportunity to spend a day with your grandparents or any other family members.

Nibi crossword puzzle

**ACROSS**
2. Ojibwe word for fish.
3. What is the food that grows on the water?
5. Who told Tommy about mercury and pollutants in our water?

**DOWN**
1. Ojibwe word for Lake Superior.
4. Who told Tommy about the Keepers of the water?

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Kayakers enjoy a break on a Lake Superior beach.

Sandy beach along the shores of Lake Superior.
Everybody lives in a watershed

I have shown you around the Bad River watershed, but everybody lives in a watershed somewhere. That’s why it’s important for all of us to take care how we treat our water.

You may live in a city and not by a river like me, but you use water in your house, and rainwater runs through your streets and flows down storm drains. Sometimes, if we use chemicals, like to clean our cars or spray our lawns, those chemicals can run into the street and go down the storm drain, polluting our ground water. So we all have to take care of our water!

Wetlands vs. Watershed

What is a wetland? Wetlands are low-lying areas between dry land and aquatic systems such as rivers, lakes or oceans. Once thought to be useless, wetlands really do many important things, such as holding extra floodwater, purifying water and giving plants and animals a place to live.

What’s the difference between a wetland and a watershed? Well, you’re probably not sitting in a wetland right now, but you’re definitely sitting in a watershed. A watershed is an area that drains to a common waterway, like a creek or stream — which then drains to a larger body of water, like Lake Superior.

Wetlands provide a link between watershed and water. Wetlands filter the water running into the stream, river or ocean, cleaning it of toxins that could cause pollution in major waterways.

As you color the picture, see if you can name these plants and animals by matching the number to the correct name below.

Circle 11 things that are wrong with this picture. Everyone needs to do their part to keep Gichigami clean.
After my day with my grandfather and all the places we have been, I realized the importance of protecting the whole watershed. I can now imagine a raindrop flowing throughout these nibikaaning (waterways). I understand how the water quality can affect the animals, plants and even people like me. I now believe that the quality of our lives depends on the quality of the waters. I will try hard to use less water and keep the water clean. I will follow the Seven Values my nokomis taught me and that the Ojibwe have followed forever. Those values include wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility and truth. When I told nokomis about my day she reminded me that women are the keepers of the water. Here are some tips that my nokomis and I came up with to help take care of the water.

**Tips to care for nibi**

1. Help clean up the rivers and lakes. Pick up any garbage you see on the ground; help remove invasive species and always make sure you don’t leave trash wherever you go.
2. Do not flush anything down the toilet that does not belong there.
3. Turn the water off when you are brushing your teeth.
4. Carry your own reusable water bottle rather than buying a new one everywhere you go.
5. Respect the water around you; give thanks that it is there for you.
There are many ways to take care of our water. One way is to honor and respect the water with a water ceremony in the spring, like some of our women do each year. We also study the water. Last summer, youth helped with some of the water studies, taking samples of water for testing and making a list of what we found in the water. We also took the water’s temperature. That’s called getting “baseline data.” I learned that when we were out helping.

The Gichigami watershed

The Gichigami watershed is huge!! (see map) My watershed, the Bad River watershed, is just one small watershed that is part of the Lake Superior watershed. Over 300 streams and rivers empty into the big lake from both the United States and Canada. Gichigami is the world’s largest freshwater lake! It also has 10 percent of the world’s fresh surface water.

These are things my Nookomis told me about the big lake, and because it is such an important resource, we must respect the lake and always take care to keep her waters clean. That means all of us who live in watersheds that empty into Gichigami must keep that water clean too!

Can you find the Bad River watershed on the map? Look for a place called “Odanah.”
What have you learned!!

1. What is the Ojibwe name for Tommy Sky's favorite lake?

2. Where does the Bad River begin?

3. What are the animals that Tommy and his mishomis saw in the watershed?

4. What does the Ojibwe word nibikaaning mean?

5. What are some of the threats to water that Tommy’s Mishomis told him about?

6. What land areas filter water in a watershed?


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What's wrong with the picture, page 9

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Let's see what you have learned, page 12

1. Gichigami  2. Caroline Lake  3. giigoonh (fish), wazhashk (muskrat), maangwag (loons) and waawaashkeshi (deer)  4. waterways  5. mercury, mining, pollution  6. wetlands  7. Bad River watershed

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Menawaa!

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Thank you for listening to my stories. I hope you come back next time!