

K'ETETAALKAANEE

THE ONE WHO TRAVELED AMONG THE PEOPLE AND ANIMALS: READERS GUIDE

BY: MELISSA SANBORN

SUMMARY

K'etetaalkaanee is an epic oral tradition about a young man who leaves home to pursue his destiny of becoming a great healer. A familiar legend among Native American cultures, this Koyukon rendition, as told by Catherine Attla, represents the traditional values of the Athabaskan culture. K'etetaalkaanee, also named Betohoh, has the remarkable ability to transform and speak with animals. He interacts with many creatures along his journey, learning about honesty and fairness, respect for others, hard work, cooperation, and humility.

In the first sequence, Fish Camp, a brief explanation of Betohoh's personality is given. He does not show the respect for nature that his community values should have instilled in him. The kind of child who throws rocks at birds. He sleeps late and works little, a sign of a person who was meant to become a powerful medicine person. So, it should not have surprised his mother when he chose to leave on his quest, but she grieved that he was the last child; they had all left and never returned.

In Camp Robber, sequence two, he learns the consequences of his actions towards those birds. Injuring the patriarch, whom the family relied on for survival, may have caused the entire family to starve. He saw the camp robbers as humans and stayed with their families, using his great power to heal the injury he had caused and dining with them. However, he made a new mistake in this portion, criticizing the scarce meal even though he had no food and was being welcomed in by the family. Humility is another value his people hold dear, and he must learn.

One of the fun aspects of these stories is when K'etetaalkaanees sleeps and awakes the following day; the humans he spent the evening with have returned to their animal form. He continues through his journey, learning critical cultural values, connecting with nature, learning the value of family, and discovering his inner power.

Note: As this book is currently out of circulation, it is hard to locate a copy to read the entire epic. It would be best if you got on the waitlist at your local library to experience K'etetaalkaanees's complete adventures. K'etaalkkaanee, the one who paddled among the people and animals : the story of an ancient traveler

Catherine Attla(1927-2012)



Born in 1927 at Tok Cutoff, Catherine was adopted and raised by her grandparents, who taught her many culturally traditional skills. She was raised speaking her native tongue and taught herself English as a young adult, but her passion was to keep her language and culture alive by teaching to the people and visitors of her village.

In 1944, Catherine married her husband, Steven Attla, and raised a family in her hometown of Huslia. In 1949, they moved with the village 10 miles down the Koyukuk River. In the 1980s, she started recording traditional oral lore and then authoring

multiple books. Her first Sitsiy yugh noholnik ts'in' = As my grandfather told it : traditional stories from the Koyukuk, in 1983. Catherine inspired and supported her family, community, and culture. She had many hobbies and was known for her works as an author and her passion as a tradition bearer.

Discussion Questions

1. In the introduction, Jones & Thompson explain the importance of appropriate translation to honor the culture, language, and Athabaskan people. Which important lessons may have been lost if this great care had not been taken?
2. In the Fish Camp sequence, Betohoh's mother grieves him for leaving, stating that her other children had left and not returned. What might have happened to the other children that stopped their return?
3. What is the significance of Betohoh brushing his feet when approaching the Camp Robber doorstep?
4. Athabaskan cultural values hold high regard to family. How is this value reflected throughout the stories?
5. Name a way K'etetaalkaanee showed disrespect to his animal hosts and what he later realized about the situation. What cultural values may he have taken away from that lesson?
6. Why did all of the animals/people readily welcome K'etetaalkaanee to their table to share the little food they had? What does this behavior tell us about the Athabaskan values and their view of others?
7. In what ways are the lessons Betohoh learns applicable to younger generations and modern-day life?
8. Catherine Attla advocated for the preservation of her Native language. What significance does having both the original Denaakk'e version and the English translation have for education and preservation?