

Script for

# “Coming Home to North America Ritual” for 2 narrators and 12 to 20 participants

(participants do not read scripts; they simply act out parts)

written by Connie Barlow, August 2003

This version was first performed at Indralaya Retreat Center, Orcas Island, WA

**[print and cut apart the “parts” pdf for audience participants]**

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## **FOR ADULTS AND/OR CHILDREN AGE 6 AND OLDER**

**TIME: 1 – 1.5 hrs**

**NOTE:** Of all adult versions of the North America Ritual, this is the one that the narrators have the most control over, as no-one but they ever reads script. The “audience” simply acts out the parts being read. This is the only version that one can guarantee to complete in an hour, if the narrators keep up a steady pace (and “thank” the actors, urging them to leave the stage if any act out too long). It is also good for large groups because nobody with a weak voice will be reciting anything; only the narrators recite.

### **Setting and Props:**

- Use a long ROPE to trace the outline of the North American continent, including Mexico, on the floor. The two narrators will sit/stand in the Arctic for reading the script and orchestrating the whole event. The rest of group will sit in semicircle at the south and sides. Make sure there is a good pathway for animals to enter and leave via the Bering Land Bridge with Asia, and also by way of South America.
- A BLUE CLOTH to signify the Bearpaw Seaway; a WHITE CLOTH for the glaciers.
- You might want to have a FLIP CHART to write the geological epochs and times on as the story advances. (Connie uses a 60 million year clock she made.)
- Bring a BELL or chime, and maybe recruit some DRUMMERS; bring recorded MUSIC to play as people assemble and during the part where people are adorning faces with clay paint, or ask drummers to play.

- **COSTUMES** For face painting, bring local or purchased powdered CLAY, and mix with a little water into a mud consistency. Maybe bring some scarves or other props. • A RATTLE of some sort is nice to give to Rattlesnake. Use your imagination! People tend to feel less self-conscious acting if they have some element of costuming.

- See if lights can be DIMMED or use candles for the closing part, when participants enter the continent as their humans selves.

### **Narrator Role:**

1. PRINT out 2 COPIES of SCRIPT FOR NARRATORS: one for you (narrator #1) and one for a partner (narrator #2). <http://www.thegreatstory.org/NA-2narrator.pdf>
2. PRINT a copy of the PARTS SCRIPT and then cut it into pieces to distribute to single or groups of actors. <http://www.thegreatstory.org/NA-2narrator-parts.pdf>. (Make sure that you staple together the several parts for whatever characters come on stage two or more times.) A nice way to do it is to put them face down on the floor, arranged left to right from most active to least active, then invite people to come forward and choose a script in accord with how active they wish to be.
3. FAMILIARIZE yourself with other versions of the North America ritual that have scripted out the beginnings (65 million years ago) and ends (13,000 years ago), so that you can extemporaneously deliver these key parts. Also, survey the number of people in the group and determine which version of HUMAN ending is most appropriate for that size.
4. WELCOME, GREET, and establish context, and help people feel comfortable in participating. Let people know that this ritual is scripted because, as yet, we tend to know so little about the DEEP TIME story of our continent, that we must first learn the events before we can, at a future date, bring more of our own creativity into it.
5. DISTRIBUTE THE PARTS for acting. Connie sometimes does it by putting them face down on the floor, with more active roles toward the left, and less active to the right, so you can advise people to choose which end to select from, depending on their zeal for role playing. You can also simply ask, "Who loves cats?" "Who would like to play bear?" "Who wants to be a plant?"

### **INTRODUCTION.**

- WELCOME people and generally let them know what to expect. And how long, so some may wish to use the bathroom during the event. Give people permission to NOT choose a part, if they wish, or to team up with others. Depending on size of group, the most enthusiastic participants may have a chance to choose a second character too.

- Explain the importance of learning the DEEP TIME STORY OF THIS CONTINENT. How Thomas Berry has said that we need to learn our story at all levels: the Universe Story, the Earth Story, our bioregional stories, our continental story, just as we have learned our cultural, political, and religious stories. Explain how this ritual was written by Connie Barlow and is available on her website for others to use and adapt in their own ways. It is based on

the science story of the continent told by Tim Flannery in his 2001 book, *The Eternal Frontier: An Ecological History of North America and its Peoples* and on Connie's 2001 book, *The Ghosts of Evolution*. The hope is that by learning this deep time story, those of us who are not "native Americans" can find hope and guidance for becoming native to the this continent, as many creatures have done before us.

- Explain the ROPE and the geographical layout, and the importance of entering the stage from the direction that the character actually is supposed to come from. Explain the role of CHARACTERS, and how these will be chosen.
- DISTRIBUTE CHARACTER ROLES. (NOTE: In the narrator script, RED denotes a character that someone is supposed to act out as you read, so pause when you announce their name, and invite them into the rope. At the end of their part, you will say something like, "Welcome, Turtle, welcome!" and invite the audience to repeat the welcome.
- ALLOW TIME FOR PARTICIPANTS TO PREPARE: painting selves with clay, choosing scarves, maybe finding some props outdoors. Be sure to give rattlesnake a rattle. Drummers or recorded music during that time.
- NARRATORS TELL THE STORY OF WHAT WAS GOING ON IN NORTH AMERICA 65 MILLION YEARS AGO: (You can learn the whole story of what to say by referring to the 8-character, original version of this ritual.) Here is the outline that Connie uses to keep her on track:

**BELL OR CHIME TO BEGIN RITUAL. And make sure you use a bell or chime to honor all extinctions when they happen.**

**#1:**

- begin our story 65 million years ago, Cretaceous Period of the Mesozoic Era
- no North America: Asiatica on the West (Beringia), Euramerica on the east
- Bearpaw Seaway runs down the center of the continent
- Appalachians are already old; there are no Sierras, Rockies, Cascades
- South America is isolated from all other continents.
- no polar ice, greenhouse conditions
- dinosaurs! Mammals are no bigger than a squirrel.
- flowering plants almost all small; no grasses yet
- Then, off the Yucatan Peninsula, a METEOR IMPACT!

## **PERCUSSION SOUND**

**#2:** DESCRIBE DESTRUCTION (the sky rains fire, as rocks exploded into the sky catch fire from the friction of returning to earth.) North America is torched! Smaller particles stay in the upper atmosphere, and are joined by tiny particles of ash as volcanoes are triggered around the world. The sun is blocked for at least six months, maybe 2 or 3 years. There is utter darkness at noon. Photosynthesis ceases. Plants die, but will resprout from seed and spore, so there is no mass extinction of land plants. But for animals who cannot wait out the dark, cold, and hungry times, the situation is different. Dinosaurs and the great reptiles of the sea go extinct, along with many other creatures.

- The CENOZOIC ERA BEGINS at this moment of lowest diversity (like today, when the Ecozoic Era is beginning)
- Who survives? And how does North America begin to recover?

**#1:** This is how North America recovers its plant life:

### **• NO MASS EXTINCTION OF PLANTS**

• **FERN SPORES** arrive by wind on the scorched landscape, coming from all directions. Come on up here Fern! For hundreds, even thousands, of years, in many regions of the continent there are no land plants except for ferns. **"Welcome, Ferns, welcome!"** [encourage audience to repeat the welcome]

• Meanwhile, **GINKGO** trees spread slowly south from Arctic, as few other trees are available to colonize the scorched landscape. Let's watch Ginkgo spread south now. **"Welcome, Ginkgo, welcome!"**

**#2:** This is how North America recovers its animal life.

- **No land creature** larger than a **TURKEY** survived the meteor impact anywhere in the world, and North America was hit harder than anywhere else.

- **LITTLE MAMMALS**, no bigger than a rat, huddle in **BURROWS** throughout the darkness and cold, waiting for the sun to return. These survivors are fortunate to have evolved as nocturnal creatures, so darkness round the clock is no problem for them. Perhaps the mammals survived best around hot springs, where they could stay warm underground, yet venture out into the surrounding cold for several years — to feast on frozen dinosaur dinners! **“Welcome Little Mammals, welcome!”**

**#1:** What about the **water realm**?

- Life forms in the **oceans** were devastated (as the marine food chain is based on microscopic plankton, which collapses rapidly with no sun).

- **FRESHWATER** environments are not as hard hit as the oceans, even in N.A., because food chains in freshwater are based on detritus – and a lot of detritus washed into rivers and lakes post-impact. For example, freshwater **garfish** and paddlefish did just fine — though all 30 species of freshwater **mussels** in North America went extinct 65 million years ago.

- **SALAMANDERS**– Lungless salamanders, like hellbenders and mud puppies, did very well despite the crisis. Today, nowhere in the world is as diverse in lungless salamanders as our central Appalachians. **“Welcome, Salamanders, welcome!”**

- In contrast, **WHIPTAIL LIZARDS & RACE RUNNER LIZARDS** (common lizards) on land all went extinct. Stay where you are lizards, as we are going to have to wait 30 million years to reacquire you from survivors in South America. Nevertheless we can honor your passing now with the sound of a chime. **chime**

**#2:** The most excellent aquatic survivor, who feasted on worms who feasted on detritus, was the **TURTLE!** (Explain how turtles survived the meteor impact, burrowing in mud; breathing thru their cloaca (their butt). When good conditions returned, turtles simply rose out of the mud and found a landscape vacant of dinosaurs – so they thrived! **“Welcome, Turtle, welcome!”**

**#1:**

Stay up here **TURTLE**, as there is more to your story. Today’s **softshell and painted turtles** are true survivors of the K/T impact. But the **alligator snapping**

**turtle** evolved *after* the meteor impact: the alligator snapper originated and evolved to its huge size in North America in just 100,000 years following the catastrophe. Snapping turtles were unique to North America for most of their evolutionary history, expanding their range to include South America beginning just 3 million years before the present. But that's getting ahead of our story.

- What we need to know now is that 64 million years ago North America enters "The **GOLDEN AGE** of Turtles." At no other time in history, and nowhere else in the world, have turtles ever been so abundant and so diverse. The fossil record in Montana records that **16 kinds** of N.A. turtles survived the impact, and 3 other kinds soon immigrated in from elsewhere.

**#2:** "Stay here **TURTLE** while **LANDFORMS** does something for us. Come forward Landforms. It is now about 60 million years ago, still the Golden Age of Turtles, but something is happening with landforms . . ."

- 60 million years ago (Landforms enters) – The **ROCKY MOUNTAINS** begin to rise 60 million years ago, enough to drain away the BEARPAW SEAWAY around the Dakotas. "North America is born!" [**drumming?**]

**#1:** Let me explain why we asked you, Turtle, to remain. [Tell the Iroquois creation myth, culminating in their name for North America: "**TURTLE ISLAND!**"] Thus indigenous story (Turtle Island) and the science story come surprisingly close here. [Solemnly:] "*We honor you Turtle, for whom this great continent is named!*"

**#2: INTRODUCE CLOCK,** now that North America is born 60 million years ago, we will be going through the geologic epochs, in order: Paleocene, Eocene, Oligocene, Miocene, Pliocene, Pleistocene, and the present: the Holocene.

**#1: 55 million years ago, the EOCENE begins** – It has been 10 million years since the dinosaur extinction. Some of those little mammals have evolved into big mammals. **RHINOCEROS** immigrates here from where it originated in Asia and will be one of our big North American beasts for another 50 million years to come. Shall we all call out a **welcome** to this new immigrant? **Welcome, Rhino, welcome!**

**#2:** It is still **55 million years ago** – A little marshbird flies into North America. "Come little marshbird!" "Now what might you evolve into???" Generations pass, and the little bird becomes bigger, and bigger, and more ferocious. Finally, it has evolved into America's own **DIATRYMA**: a flightless, ten-foot tall predator that eats

mammals! Soon this terrifying bird will spread to the north and east, invading Europe, and terrifying the mammals there too! So head on over to Europe now, Diatryma!

**#1: 50 million years ago** – The **HORSE** family (Equidae) originates here. Do **I hear a chorus of whinnying and galloping** horses out there among you onlookers?

Horses are joined by the **CAMEL** family (Camelidae), which also originates right here, on this continent. Yes, that is right, camels are native to North America, and will remain so for some 50 million years. There are no grasses yet, so camels and horses are browsing on shrubs and flowers, not grazing on grass. Later, some camels will evolve into **deer**-like creatures on this continent.

**“Welcome, horses, welcome!” Welcome, camels, welcome!**

**#2:** Let's move the clock to: **40 million years ago** – the **DOG** family (Canidae) originates right here too. The ancestors of all wolves and foxes and dogs throughout the world evolved right here in North America, on Turtle Island. Oh, what a beautiful beast you are! *Do I hear a **chorus** of dogs and wolves greeting this first ancestral canid?*

**#1: 40 million years ago** – If there be dogs, then let there be **CATS**! Unlike, dogs, however, cats evolved not on this continent but in Asia, and then immigrated here. These are not true cats, however: these are Nimravid cats. They are big creatures, big predators! Some will evolve enormous canine teeth, like the much-later sabertooth cat. *Do I hear a **chorus** of cats greeting this first ancestral almost-cat?*

**#2:** Let's turn the CLOCK to **35 million years ago**, when we will witness a wondrous arrival from the south. Imagine a **storm** down there in South America, which is still isolated from all other continents, surrounded by ocean. Some riverside trees are washed into raging rivers, roots and all, and washed out to sea. Who is clinging to the roots and branches? Why, I see **WHIPTAIL LIZARDS & TREE FROGS**! Ocean currents sweep that jungle tree toward the north; rain keeps it supplied with fresh water. Hooray! That tangle of plant and animals is washing ashore, along the southern coast of our own continent. These are the ancestors of all the tree frogs that now greet the spring at nightfall. Let us call out a welcome to these new arrivals! **Welcome LIZARDS, welcome! Welcome TREE FROGS, welcome!**

**#1:** I see a big black bird down in Australia, flying, flying, all the way to North America, by way of Asia. Who might that bird be??? **RAVEN!!** Raven is the only Australian native that has taken up residence in North America (and Europe, and Asia, and Africa too!) ***Do I hear a flock of crows greeting Raven????***

**#2:** We come to **32 million years ago**. It is no longer the Eocene. It is now the **OLIGOCENE epoch**. Climate cools and many **TURTLES** go extinct. *Come forward Turtle, and let us honor you, as some of your kind drop into extinction, becoming only memories. chime.*

**#1:** We're still at the **cold Oligocene** some **32 million years ago**. Remember that three important mammal families have already originated right here in North America. Anyone remember who those 3 families are? [horses, camels, dogs] It is time for a fourth family of mammals to originate here, a family that will one day spread around the world. This is the family that, through coevolution, helps to make North America the "**CONTINENT OF NUTS.**" How so? It is the **SQUIRREL** family who originates in North America! And squirrels help nut trees (oaks, beeches, hickories) co-evolve by burying nuts for the winter. *So let us all give praise to the power of COEVOLUTION. Welcome, SQUIRREL, welcome!*

**#2:** [Explain "Climatic Trumpet", and ask for **TORNADO** to come forward, and whirl up and down thru the center of the continent.] Because North America's mountains run north south, instead of East-West, cold and warm air masses crash into one another. 90 percent of world's tornados happen right here in North America, thanks to our unique geography. *Do I hear wind out there to accompany this tornado?*

**#1:** Okay, we've been stuck at the beginning of the cold Oligocene for a long time, so let's move the clock to **30 million years ago**. Who is that slithering across Beringia from Asia into Alaska and then south????? Why, it is **GARTER SNAKE!** And alongside garter snake is the ancestor of what will become **RATTLESNAKE!** Poisonous snakes that warn mammals away by the sound of their vibrating tail will originate right here, and then never leave the western hemisphere. Rattlesnakes are uniquely ours! ***Welcome snakes, welcome!***

**#2:** Let's turn the clock to **24 million years ago**. We need help from **LANDFORMS** once again. We are still in the Oligocene. Remember the Rocky Mountains? Well the soft sedimentary rocks that were once muds and sands on the bottom of the Bearpaw Seaway and then were uplifted into mountains have already eroded away. Those mountains have vanished, while the rock-solid Appalachians linger on. Not to worry:

it is time now to **resurrect the Rockies**. Praise! The Rocky Mountains are born again!

**#1:** Let us turn the clock to **23 million years ago** – **CAT** *please come forward. One of your kind is about to go extinct. NIMRAVID CATS* go extinct in North America! **Chime.** (Pause for quiet, and send cat back to its seat, then continue...) For 6 million years, until true cats (family Felidae) migrate here from Asia, there will be no cats in North America. So from 23 to 17 million years ago, we have what scientists call a "**Cat Gap**" on this continent. There are members of the dog family, but no cats!

**#2:** We now come to a new epoch. **20 million years ago**, we enter the **MIOCENE epoch**. The Miocene is warmer than the Oligocene, but the significant event is that climate becomes very much DRIER. What big evolutionary achievement happens as the climate dries?

**#1: GRASSES** originate! Like nut trees coevolving with squirrels, grasses coevolve with the big plant-eating mammals. So please come back up here: **RHINO, HORSE, & CAMEL**. You big beasts are coevolving with the grasses, one of the newest and most sophisticated plant families. Because of grasses, and how well they feed you, the Miocene is called by scientists **The Golden Age of Mammals**.

And you, GRASSES, your secret to success on the vast grasslands of America is not only being adapted to **drought**, but you sequester your delicate growing cells – not at the tip of twigs like shrubs and herbs do, but beneath the ground. Your leaves of grass grow only from the base, while all your stems spread out underground, where they cannot be harmed by the teeth of grazing mammals. And 20 million years hence, you will find yourself extraordinarily well adapted to **lawn mowers**, with whom you continue to coevolve. **Welcome Grasses, welcome!**

**#2:** [come in right after LAWNMOWER] *Oh, let us all say together, "PRAISE CO-EVOLUTION, PRAISE!"* [REPEAT]

It is still **20 million years ago**, still the MIOCENE EPOCH, "**The Golden Age of Mammals**". The **BEAR** family, Ursidae, which originated in Asia, begins to send bears into North America for the first time. One kind will evolve here in North America into the biggest mammalian land carnivore of all time: the giant, short-face, long-legged bear: **Arctodus simus**! Oh Great Bear, let us see you stand and reach up to your full height! Bare those ferocious teeth! *Shall we all welcome the bear family into North America?* **Welcome, BEARS, welcome!**

**#1:** Let us turn the clock to **17 million years ago**. It is still the MIOCENE, the Golden Age of Mammals. True **CATS**, the felids, are now beginning to arrive in North America from Asia, ending the long "cat gap." Some felids will evolve into truly ferocious creatures, with long **sabertooth** teeth. And more cats will periodically keep coming over from Asia. For example, a cat just like the **African LION**, except bigger, will become a resident here for many years, and will remain here until the most dangerous creature of all arrives: two-legged creatures, who, unlike any other, can magically kill from a distance, and who can tame fire! But, that is for later in our story! For now, let us welcome the true cats, the FELIDS: **Welcome, CATS, welcome!**

**#2:** It is still the Golden Age of Mammals, still **17 million years ago**. Oh, I have very exciting news to report, news of a new and magnificent immigrant! Who is that lumbering across Beringia from Asia, trumpeting with joyful anticipation? Why, it is the **ELEPHANT** family, which arose in Africa many millions of years earlier. Finally, the elephant family makes its first successful journey into North America, where it will soon evolve species completely native to this land. Oh this first elephant is the **MASTODON!** Let us all call out or bellow greetings to these arriving elephants!

**#1:** Let us move the clock to **15 million years ago**. It is still the Golden Age of Mammals, and I am happy to announce that a family of plant-eating mammals that originated on this continent, and only on this continent, a few million years earlier, is now evolving into many different forms. This is family ANTILOCAPRIDAE! (Pause as Pronghorn runs forward.) This is the **PRONGHORN** family – not a deer, not a goat, not an antelope, but a unique family of lovely creatures born right on this continent: PRONGHORN! **Welcome Pronghorn, welcome!** *[Stay up here pronghorn; there is much more to your story.]*

**Unlike** horses, and camels, and dogs, and squirrels who also originated here, Pronghorn will never leave. Pronghorn will never head west into Asia. Antelope in Africa are completely unrelated to our own pronghorn.

But right now, some 15 million years ago, some members of family Antilocapridae are evolving not just one pair of **horns** on their heads but sometimes two or even three sets, growing right out of the snout as well as the forehead.

**Sadly, only one species** will remain when **humans** begin to tell the Story of the North American continent. This is the American pronghorn. It is like a little antelope, and this pronghorn lives on the plains of Yellowstone and the dry west.

**#2:** Now here is a **mystery**: The American pronghorn we humans see today can run **60** miles per hour. And yet the fastest predator in America, the wolf, can run only 40 miles per hour. **Evolution, Praise Evolution!, does not waste** energy like that.

Evolution, Praise Evolution!, does not **overbuild!** So who might have chased swiftness into our little pronghorn some millions of years ago?

Oh I see a very swift **CAT** originating right here in North America and coming up to chase the Pronghorn. This will be the only genus of true cat that ever originates in the Western Hemisphere. This swift cat is the **CHEETAH!** Yes, the cheetah!

Cheetah, at some point you will need to emigrate into Asia and keep going down into Africa to ensure that you do not go extinct, for you will indeed go extinct here in your land of origin. But that is another story.

For now, *let us PRAISE CO-EVOLUTION by welcoming your birth, here in the land of the Pronghorn.!* **Welcome, cheetah, welcome**

**CB •** Let us move the clock to **10 million years ago** – It is time to check in with the **DOG** family again! Come forward Dog! Finally, our very own dog family, which you remember, originated right here, sends **wolves and foxes** westward across the Beringia and into Asia, where they will then spread into Europe and Africa too. Let us wish the Dog family success as it goes forth on its great adventure to other lands: **Go forth, Dog, go forth!**

**#2:** We move a million years forward to **9 million years ago**. Who is that darling creature swimming up and down the rivers of Beringia, coming in from Asia, heading deeper and deeper into our continent? Why it is **BEAVER!** **Welcome, Beave, welcome!**

**#1:** We now come to **5 million years ago**. This is no longer the Miocene, but the **PLIOCENE epoch**. And right about now, something wondrous is happening with **LANDFORMS**. Down there in Arizona, the landmass is rising higher and higher. A mighty river runs through the rising plateau: the Colorado River. And this river is determined that a little uplift not bend it from its established course. Instead, the river cuts down and down through the rising sedimentary rock. The **GRAND CANYON** is born. **Welcome, Grand Canyon, welcome!**

**#2: Five million years ago**, as the Grand Canyon forms, it is time for more gifts from Asia! **DEER** enter North America for the first time, coming into our continent across Beringia . **Welcome, deer, welcome!**

**#1:** Towering over the deer entering North America is another new immigrant. It is time for the **ELEPHANT** family to send us another gift. The elephant family, which gave us mastodons during the Miocene, is now sending us **MAMMOTHS**. First come

the huge mammoths that will become our **Columbian Mammoth**. Later, when the ice ages begin, will come the **Woolly Mammoth**. **Welcome Mammoths, welcome!**

**#2:** We are still at **5 million years ago**, and I have some very sad news to report. TWO EXTINCTIONS are about to occur. I ask two life forms to please come forward to be honored: **GINKGO & RHINO**. [Pause for them to solemnly come into the continent.] Both Ginkgo and Rhino will live on in the Eastern Hemisphere, but they must now go extinct in North America. *Let us have a moment of silence, as the chime sounds their departure.* **Chime.**

**#1:** Let us turn the clock to **3 million years ago**. We are still in the Pliocene Epoch. I see an amazing event about to take place. Come forward: **HORSES** and **CAMELS** and **CHEETAH!** Turtle Island is about to give Asia and Africa some beautiful gifts. Turtle Island is now willing to share your kind with these other continents! Listen carefully before we send you off on your new adventure. It will be very important for you to do well in your new homelands because, sadly, all three of you will go extinct here! So, go forth and multiply HORSE, AND CAMEL, AND CHEETAH. And, by the way HORSE, when you get to Africa, why don't you evolve into a striped zebra! *Let us all wish them well:* **Go forth, Horse, go forth! Go forth, Camel, go forth! Go forth, Cheetah, go forth!**

**#2:** Asia is so grateful for these animal gifts that it is now offering us another gift in return! Coming into our continent across Beringia is another member of the **BEAR** family. This bear will one day be the only bear who can somewhat successfully live with humans. Who might this bear be? **BLACK BEAR! Welcome, Black Bear, welcome!**

**#1:** It is still **3 million years ago**. A very significant event for **LANDFORMS** is about to occur. Come forward Landforms and show us your stuff! Stay right down there in the south, and stretch out your arms. You are **THE ISTHMUS OF PANAMA**, and you are now connecting North America with South America for the first time since the dinosaurs roamed Earth! I'm not sure we should welcome your arrival though, because you are going to be responsible for some extinctions! But first the good news.

**#2:** Stay Isthmus, for you are crucial for this story. Remember that South America long ago sent us LIZARDS and TREE FROGS on rafts of logs and roots. South America is now going to send us some gifts who needed a land connection in order to

make the journey. Let us welcome these immigrants from South Americans who are coming north some 3 million years ago.

First, let us welcome **PORCUPINE, POSSUM, and ARMADILLO!** *Welcome!  
Welcome!*

**#1:** Next, let us welcome some giants. These are plant eaters, but their size and formidable front claws allow them to keep the mighty cats and wolves and bears at bay. These are South America's biggest creatures, **GIANT GROUND SLOTHS!** They are related to tree sloths, but so much slower. They walk pigeon toed, on the sides of their feet — feet evolved to grasp the trunks of trees, not to walk on land.

**Welcome Ground Sloth, welcome!**

**#2:** Please stay, dear Isthmus. It is time to report the **bad news**. South America has been evolving in **isolation** since the time of the dinosaurs. It has a great menagerie of big and little beasts (most of whom look strange to our eyes and whose names are strange to our ears). But it has never before faced competition from the animals of the north. Now, some 3 million years ago, that time has come. A great **extinction** is about to occur in South America. We will see that it is not just human invaders who wreak havoc on a new-found land. Other animals sometimes do this too. Who are these powerful invaders from the north?

**#1:** In order to tell the story of extinction in South America, we need some help up here from some North American animals: Please come forward: **CAT, DOG, BEAR, DEER, CAMEL, ELEPHANT, and SQUIRREL.** [PAUSE, as they assemble in a line on either side of you, facing the audience.]

Please know, dear ones, that because of your prowess, many strange and magnificent creatures, who have been evolving in isolation in South America for 70 million years, will go extinct soon after you disperse to that continent. So please cross the isthmus **SOLEMNLY** and in silence one by one, as I call each of your names. Let us sound the **chime** to mark each crossing.

**Cat:** You will send cougars and jaguars and ocelots down into South America.

**Dog:** You will send wolves and foxes to South America.

**Bear:** You will send bears to South America.

**Deer:** You will send deer to South America.

**Camel:** You will send llamas to South America.

**Elephant:** You will send mastodons to South America. And we will have you represent TAPIRS we send down there too.

**Squirrel:** You will send squirrels to South America. And we'll also ask you to represent RABBITS and RACCOONS and PECCARIES invading South America too.

Soon, all of you will find ways to fit into the ecologies of South America, becoming native to place.

**#2:** It is **2.5 million years ago**. We now enter a new geological epoch, the **PLEISTOCENE**. Oh, **LANDFORMS**, you may be getting tired, but we need you up here again to act out several events for us.

First, at **2.5 million years ago**, the **PLEISTOCENE EPOCH** begins, marked by continental ice advancing and retreating 17 times.

**#1:** Now **LANDFORMS**, we need you to shed the cold and get boiling hot instead. First, stand over there by **Yellowstone** National Park, while the clock turns to **2 million years ago**. Now just blow up – in an explosion so huge that it makes the Mount St. Helens explosion seem like a hiccup. What will remain in northwestern Wyoming will be geysers and hot springs. And you will keep erupting, too. The last eruption of the Yellowstone caldera happened just 640,000 years before we humans begin to tell your story!

**#2:** Finally, **LANDFORMS**, move over to western Washington state, while the clock turns to **1 million years ago**. You are now a little hill of andesite lava that is beginning to build and build into what will become **Mount Rainier!**

**#1:** We come to **400,000 years ago**. You know, something has been missing from America's great grassy plains. Something that is now the very symbol of the American West. Who are these herds of Asian grass-eaters, snorting and stampeding here from Asia across Beringia? [Pause]. Why it is **BISON!** Huge long-horned kinds of Bison. Aren't we surprised to learn that you are a recent immigrant! **Welcome Bison, welcome!**

**#2:** We come to **18,000 years ago**, the peak of the last advance of the Ice Sheets. Oh, **LANDFORMS**, we need you to help us out here one last time. You are glacial ice, and you are advancing down into southern Ohio 18,000 years ago. You shove all sorts of rocks and ice up against an ancient northward-flowing river, forcing that river to turn south. Our modern OHIO RIVER is born!

**#1:** Let us turn the clock to **13,000 years ago**. Something momentous is about to happen: something that will cause many creatures to go extinct on Turtle Island. Something far more powerful than 17 waves of ice advances and retreats. On the

17<sup>th</sup> retreat this momentous event occurs. To act out this event, I request the help of these creatures:

- **GIANT GROUND SLOTH**
- **HORSE**
- **CAMEL**
- **LONG-HORNED BISON**
- **DEER FAMILY** (to represent the giant stag moose)
- **MAMMOTH & MASTODON**
- **DOG** (to represent Dire Wolf)
- **CAT** (to represent Sabertooth Cat, American Lion, and Cheetah),
- **BEAR** (to represent the giant short-face bear).
- and **TURTLE** (to represent giant LAND TORTOISES).

It is time to tell the story of the powerful force that dooms you all to extinction. This is the only creature who can kill at a distance. The swift among you would have little to fear from this creature if you had co-evolved in its presence, but you must know to FEAR it. You must know to run, rather than to stand and hold your ground. Sadly, you creatures here in North America did not coevolve with this creature, so you do not know to flee. Thus, when this creature crosses Beringia from Asia and arrives on this continent, you will all go extinct. **[NARRATOR #2 ACT OUT peoples crossing Beringia and throwing spears at each beast as its name is read.]**

[READ LIST ABOVE AGAIN, SLOWLY, and sound a **chime** as each falls].

And then, when the big plant-eaters and their predators are extinct, the creature who can kill at a distance is hard-pressed to find food. And so it too dies out **[MICHAEL FALLS.]** That is, the culture dies, but not all the people. Anthropologists call this culture THE CLOVIS CULTURE. These were the mammoth hunters, the immigrants from Asia who chipped huge and beautiful spear points. **Yet out of the ashes** of this failed culture **[NARRATOR #2 RISES]** evolve the first cultures truly native to this land: the Native peoples.

***Go now extinct creatures, as we learn of these new cultures of people.***

**#2:** The native peoples of North America do not tell stories of ancestors immigrating across Beringia. The native peoples tell stories of ancestors emerging right here on Turtle Island. In a way, these creation stories are more accurate than a story strictly drawn from science — because being native to place isn't about whether or not one has immigrant ancestors. It isn't about whether one's ancestors walked across Beringia or rafted here from another shore.

It is about HOW WE CHOOSE TO LIVE, right here on this continent and right now. Because we are truly cultural animals. It is our culture that allows us to make clothes and to make fire, and these skills then allowed us to spread from our tropical land of

origin all the way north into the cold Arctic. It is culture that gives us the tools and teamwork to hunt and kill great beasts. It is culture that allows us to remember, to tell stories of times long past, and to teach our young these stories.

**#1:** After the Great Dying, **11 OR 12 THOUSAND YEARS AGO, ASIA** did offer us some replacement animals. Creatures from four distinct families immigrated from Asia to our land. We will celebrate their stories now. As each of you come forward, each entering from Asia, please stay and stand here until all FOUR are together.

**#2: BEAR Family**– The biggest bear of all time, *Arctodus simus*, went extinct here, but this allows GRIZZLY BEAR to enter from Asia. Yes, it is true, Griz has been native to this land for a shorter time than people have been native.

**#1: DEER Family**– The stag moose and many forms of large pronghorns are gone, but the deer family is quick to send over replacements. The ELK and the MOOSE venture here from Asia some 12,000 years ago.

**#2: BISON** – The huge, long-horned bison is gone, but this allows the short-horned bison, the Eurasian wisent, to enter. Yes, it is true: our proud bison have been native to this land for a shorter time than people have been native.

**#1: DOG FAMILY** – Gray wolf originated in Eurasia, and there is evidence that gray wolf was in North America before peoples came, but it was never very populous. Not until our own DIRE WOLF, an American original, went extinct, could GRAY WOLF become abundant. In much the same way today: the lesser coyote, a truly American dog, is abundant only where Gray Wolf has been exterminated. Even though Gray Wolf is a recent immigrant, this wolf is nevertheless returning home – because, remember, the dog family originated here 40 million years ago.

*Let us welcome all FOUR to Turtle Island! **WELCOME! WELCOME!***

**#2:** Let us turn the clock to **500 years ago**. Come forward **HORSE**. This time, you will enter from the east. 500 years ago, **HORSE** sails across the Atlantic on Spanish ships, and returns to its native land. Whole **cultures** of Native American humans will evolve horse-based hunting techniques and spiritual practices on the Great Plains in just two centuries: the Sioux, the Cheyenne.

Alas, the horses are accompanied on those ships by new human arrivals – who bring diseases and attitudes that wipe out some 90 percent or more of the indigenous peoples. Some of us gathered together here may have ancestors who directly or indirectly killed these first native peoples. All of us gathered here find ourselves embedded in the culture that replaced the cultures of those peoples. Let us all stand for a **MOMENT OF SILENCE** as we remember these peoples, these cultures. **Chime.**

**#1:** We now turn the CLOCK TO THE PRESENT. Let us consult the PLANTS to learn some very good news. In a most remarkable story, we welcome back a plant that co-evolved with the dinosaurs, that once formed vast deciduous forests north of the Arctic circle, and that then crept down into much of North America after the meteor impact 65 million years ago. Remember that **GINKGO** went extinct here some 5 million years ago, dwindling in worldwide range eventually to just a few mountain slopes in a remote part of China, nurtured by monks, revered as sacred trees. Then, a hundred years ago, human botanists from the West would rediscover this lost tree: truly, a living fossil!

**Ginkgo:** Let us honor your return! It is only because of humans that you have not gone naturally extinct. And now you can be found along sidewalks and in parking lots throughout our great land. *Let us all say together, **Welcome back, Ginkgo! Welcome back!*** [And then Ginkgo will call back, "Thank you Humans, thank you!"]

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**#2:** *Now it is time to leave our animal, plant, and landform identities behind and go back to our human selves. Let us stand and sing them away, **lighting a candle, dimming the lights, and gathering together** around the continent. [IMPLEMENT THESE ACTIONS.]*

**#1:** *Let us sing our creature identities gone with a few verses of this chant song. Repeat each verse once after me:*

**We celebrate North America, when we remember:**

**The RHInos and the GINKgo trees.**

**The HORSEs and the DIRE wolves.**

**The CAMels and the Llamas too.**

**The Felid and NimRAHvid cats.**

**The Sloths and the SHORT-faced bear.**

**The MAMmoths and the MASTodons.**

**The Cenozoic MA-mmals.**

**#2:** It is now our turn as human immigrants **to become NATIVE** to North America, just as **bison and gray wolves** became native, just as **moose** and **elk** became native, just as **beavers and tree frogs** became native, just as **black bears and grizzlies** became native, just as **raven** became native.

It is now time to HONOR OUR OWN ANCESTRIES, our own paths of migration.

**#1:** PLEASE STAND and come into the CONTINENT WHEN YOUR ANCESTRY IS CALLED. SOME OF US WILL RISE MORE THAN ONCE. Please note that for any of us with MEXICAN HERITAGE: MEXICO IS PART OF NORTH AMERICA – so come into the circle as European ancestry or indigenous ancestry or both.

### **CHIME FOR EACH**

**#2:** Let us begin with the **FIRST PEOPLES**. Any of us with Native American Heritage, please step forward to be honored. Please **rise up from the ground** of Turtle Island in your native bioregion and, one by one, speak to us of your ancestors. A **chime** will signal our recognition of each people.

**#1:** Let us now go through the continents one by one, to honor our newer immigrant ancestors.

- **South America or Central America, native or immigrant**
- **Polynesia, including native Hawaiian**
- **India**
- **Middle East**
- **east Asia, from China and Japan on south to Indonesia**
- **Africa**
- **Europe, or most recently, colonies of Europe.**  
[call out the names of the country]
- **missed any ancestry?**
- **a moment of SILENCE to honor our unknown ancestries.**

**#2:** And let us hear the chime for each of these deep time ancestries that all of us share:

- **the first HOMINIDS in Africa**
- **the first PRIMATES**
- **the little MAMMALS that made it through the meteor impact**
- **the FISH that crawled out onto land**
- **the BLESSED BACTERIA!**
- **the STARS who fused the very atoms of our bodies**
- **the elder atoms within all of us: HYDROGEN, 14 billion years old**
- **the GREAT MYSTERY from which this universe emerged**

**#1:** Let us all come together into the continent, in silence, then speak out of the silence as we are moved any commitments or contributions we bring to the well-being of this grand continent, which we call home. [Allow time for people to speak as moved.]

**#2:** CLOSING SONG "We are one, round round round. We are one walking holy ground, round round." [or some other song of your choice]