

# ANIMAL LEGENDS

**Legends from Australia (Aboriginal), Iceland and  
Canada**

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## Animal Legends

*The Legs of the Kangaroo*

an Australian Aboriginal legend

*The Christmas Cat*

an Icelandic legend

*How Fly Saved the River*

an Ojibway tale from Canada

## The Legs of the Kangaroo

an Australian Aboriginal Legend

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Many are the legends connected with this unique animal. When it arrived in Australia with its companions on the canoe of the Whale its legs were uniform in length. It walked on all four legs, as a dingo walks. One generation was succeeded by another, and still the Kangaroo browsed on the plains, using his legs in the normal manner.

Then came Man the hunter, eager for meat, with threatening spear-thrower and spear that could travel faster than any four-legged animal.

Kangaroo was resting in the shade of a tree when his sensitive ears picked up the sound of something approaching stealthily. He bounded to his feet and saw it was a Man--and that Man had a weapon against which he was defenceless. The only thing to do was to take refuge in flight.

Kangaroo had seen that the strange creature threatening him with a throwing implement had only two legs. He felt confident that his four legs would carry him out of danger without difficulty.

He had underestimated his enemy. Man proved swift and strong. His two legs were longer than Kangaroo's four legs, and more strongly muscled. They carried Man tirelessly for hour after hour. No matter how he extended himself, Kangaroo was unable to increase his lead. He was saved only by the setting sun and the darkness that fell on the earth.

Exhausted by his exertions, Kangaroo fell wearily to the ground. Presently he lifted his head. A bright light had appeared in the darkness. Man had kindled a fire to warm himself in the cold night air. Cautiously Kangaroo edged back, rose to his feet, and tiptoed away from the revealing light of the camp fire. In order to make no sound, he rose on his hind legs and in this manner managed to escape.

Presently he realised that he was using only two legs instead of four, just as Man had done during the long pursuit. It was an unusual sensation. He experimented further, and found he could cover the ground more quickly by hopping instead of walking or running. Using his tail to balance himself, he was able to leap further, much further than a Man could stride. It was such an exhilarating experience that he has kept on doing it ever since.

His forelegs and paws were of little use. They grew smaller, while his hind legs grew longer and stronger, and they have remained like that to this very day.

## The Christmas Cat

*from Iceland*

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*There is a legend, that is 100-200 years old, which says that unless you get at least one new garment to wear for Christmas you "get caught by the Christmas Cat" or "dress the Christmas Cat" as the saying goes. The Christmas Cat was supposed to be some kind of a monster that originally came from the other nordic countries. But still today we talk about it and make sure that everyone has something new to wear on Christmas otherwise you'll get caught. To give you a better picture of the Cat I translated an icelandic poem about this kitty (you'll have to forgive me but I didn't make it rhyme - I'm not much of a poet).*

### The Christmas Cat

You all know the Christmas Cat  
And that Cat was huge indeed.  
People didn't know where he came from  
Or where he went.

He opened his glaring eyes wide,  
The two of them glowing bright.  
It took a really brave man  
To look straight into them.

His whiskers, sharp as bristles,  
His back arched up high.  
And the claws of his hairy paws  
Were a terrible sight.  
He gave a wave of his strong tail,  
He jumped and he clawed and he hissed.  
Sometimes up in the valley,  
Sometimes down by the shore.

He roamed at large, hungry and evil  
In the freezing Christmas snow.  
In every home  
People shuddered at his name.

If one heard a piteous "meow"  
Something evil would happen soon.  
Everybody knew he hunted men  
But didn't care for mice.

He picked on the very poor  
That no new garments got  
For Christmas - who toiled  
And lived in dire need.

From them he took in one fell swoop  
Their whole Christmas dinner  
Always eating it himself  
If he possibly could.

Hence it was that the women  
At their spinning-weels sat  
Spinning a colorful thread  
For a frock or a litle sock.

Because you mustn't let the Cat  
Get hold of the litle children.  
They had to get something new to wear  
From the grownups each year.

And when the lights came on, on Christmas eve  
And the Cat peered in,  
The little children stood rosy and proud  
All dressed up in their new clothes.

Some had gotten an apron  
And some had gotten shoes  
Or something that was needed  
- That was all it took.

For all who got something new to wear  
Stayed out of that pussy-cat's grasp  
He then gave an awful hiss  
But went on his way.

Whether he still exists I do not know.  
But his visit would be in vain  
If next time everybody  
Got something new to wear.

Now you might be thinking of helping  
Where help is needed most.  
Perhaps you'll find some children  
That have nothing at all.

Perhaps searching for those  
That live in a light-less world  
Will give you a happy day  
And a merry merry Christmas.  
I hope yours will be a happy one too

Viggi  
Vignir Jonsson  
Reykjaveg  
Iceland

*This contribution comes from The Multi-Cultural Calendar, a project run by KIDLINK. You can find out more about this excellent group by Gophering to: [kids.ccit.dug.edu](http://kids.ccit.dug.edu)*

## How the Fly Saved the River

an [Ojibway](#) legend from Eastern Canada

The author and artist is Ril Gaiashk.

This contribution comes from G Dufton's Grade 8 Class at Bessborough Dr.Public School, Toronto, Canada. The original artwork and legend hangs in the front hall of the school.



### How the Fly Saved the River

Many, many years ago when the world was new, there was a beautiful river. Fish in great numbers lived in this river, and its

water was so pure and sweet that all the animals came there to drink.

A giant moose heard about the river and he too came there to drink. But he was so big, and he drank so much, that soon the water began to sink lower and lower.

The beavers were worried. The water around their lodges was disappearing. Soon their homes would be destroyed.

The muskrats were worried, too. What would they do if the water vanished? How could they live?

The fish were very worried. The other animals could live on land if the water dried up, but they couldn't.

All the animals tried to think of a way to drive the moose from the river, but he was so big that they were too afraid to try. Even the bear was afraid of him.

At last the fly said he would try to drive the moose away. All the animals laughed and jeered. How could a tiny fly frighten a giant moose? The fly said nothing, but that day, as soon as the moose appeared, he went into action.

He landed on the moose's foreleg and bit sharply. The moose stamped his foot harder, and each time he stamped, the ground sank and the water rushed in to fill it up. Then the fly jumped about all over the moose, biting and biting and biting until the moose was in a frenzy. He dashed madly about the banks of the river, shaking his head, stamping his feet, snorting and blowing, but he couldn't get rid of that pesky fly. At last the moose fled from the river, and didn't come back.

The fly was very proud of his achievement, and boasted to the other animals, "**Even the small can fight the strong if they use their brains to think.**"

***Ojibway - an explanation:***

*The tribes called "Chippewa" (a corruption of Ojibway, itself not the native name) generally call themselves Anishnabeg people. This linguistic/ethnic/cultural group, which is located around the Great Lakes in the U.S. and Canada, is comprised of many tribes and reserves--most of these defined by modern (that is 19th century) treaties with the respective governments of the U.S. and Canada.*

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