

Ekosani Means “Thank You”

Thanksgiving is a time to reflect on our past and present and to find what we feel most grateful for. In this story, Alice and her [Cree](#) neighbor paskus take the opportunity to explain First Nations history and their friendship to Alice’s granddaughter Emily. There are also discussion questions to get a conversation started, a card-making activity, and additional activities to enrich the program.

Props & Preparations

- Print a copy of the story with tips and discussion questions for the group leader.
- Print [large-print copies of just the story](#) and glossary of words and distribute them to participants. Individuals can follow along or even read aloud parts of the story.
- Be prepared to share some of the additional activities to dig deeper into the idea of language and its importance in learning from each other.
- Before the story, share the following information with the group:
 - In Cree, names are traditionally [not capitalized](#). This is why Alice’s neighbor’s name, paskus, is not capitalized. Modern-day Indigenous people can make a personal choice about capitalization for their names, but for our story here, we have stuck to the traditional form in order to start a conversation.
- Words that will be used in the story (there is a [large-print glossary](#) at the end):

paskus (*paa-sk-us*): A Cree name that means “rising”

Tansi (*TAHN-see*): Hello

ekosani (*eh-ko-SAH-nee*): Thank you

Hiy hiy (*hi hi*): Thanks

kâkwa (*ka-QUA*): Porcupine



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As Alice Hanson pulled the piping hot pumpkin pie from her oven, she heard the doorbell ring. “Oh dear, not now!” She hurried to put the pie on a trivet and turn off the beeping alarm alerting her to check on her casserole as well. She was trying very hard to get most of her cooking for Thanksgiving done today so that she could actually relax and spend time with her family. “It’s hard being the favorite grandparent who makes the best pies,” she chuckled to herself as she wiped the sweat from her brow with a tea towel.

At the front door she found her favorite neighbor, paskus (*paa-sk-us*), who was holding a bright red ball.

“Why, hello! What have you brought for me today, neighbor?” Alice grinned as she motioned for her friend to come in.

“*Tansi* (*TAHN-see*), Alice,” paskus said, smiling as she entered the house. “I think this is your granddaughter’s ball. I heard her playing while I was working in the garden, and then this came flying over the fence.” The neighbor laughed, a twinkle in her eye. “She has a really impressive kick!”

“Oh! I am so sorry! I hope it didn’t land on any of your plants. I am watching her this afternoon while my daughter runs some last-minute errands for dinner tomorrow. And I have been so busy baking that I thought I would have Emily play in the yard for a little bit. Here, let me check on the casserole, and then I can make you some tea to apologize.” Alice turned back to the stove, still beeping.

“No need to apologize, but I would love a cup of tea. I have been working all afternoon to plant the bulbs for next spring, and it’s getting chilly out there today.”

“Of course! Chamomile okay?”

As the two women sat down at the table, the back door was pushed open and a little girl with ruddy cheeks and long braided pigtails tumbled in through the door, all smiles.

“Hello, sweetheart. paskus brought your ball back from her garden. Come join us for some tea.”

The little girl sat down at the table between her grandmother and the neighbor. “Thank you for bringing it back! Grandma, is this the yellow flower tea? I love the flower tea.”

“Yes, dear, it is. Oh! I have some cookies that we made this morning as well. Why don’t we share those with my friend?” Alice opened the Tupperware container on the table and revealed a collection of sugar cookies in the shapes of stars, porcupines, and autumn leaves. Her granddaughter had picked the cookie cutters she felt were the best for the holiday.

Alice noticed that her granddaughter was staring at paskus, and she was about to chide her when her Emily began to speak to her neighbor.

“You have the most beautiful dress on! It’s so colorful! You look like a queen. Are you going someplace fancy?”

paskus was wearing a bright red dress with a soft golden pattern printed on the fabric. The sleeves bore large embroidered white flowers, and around the waist was a belt with big bronze discs. Alice had to admit that her friend did indeed look very regal.

“Why, *ekosani* (*eh-ko-SAH-nee*), little one! That means ‘thank you’ in Cree. I am glad you like my dress, but these are just my normal clothes. It makes me happy to get dressed up just for me.”

The little girl’s eyes became wide. “Wow. I wish those were *my* everyday clothes. Why do you dress with so many beautiful colors?”

“You know, when I was a little girl your age, I wasn’t allowed to wear any color at all. I went to a school where we all had to wear black. As soon as I left that school, I began to dress in all the colors of the rainbow again.”

Alice reached out to her granddaughter and squeezed her hand. “Did you know that each color means something to the Cree? paskus is from a group of people who were here in Canada long before others arrived from all over the world. Her clothes are not just beautiful; they are also very meaningful. I bet that paskus could tell you what the colors of her dress mean.”

paskus nodded at the little girl, who remained fascinated by her clothing. Smiling, she explained. “Red represents my people’s struggle to attain freedom, but the flowers, as you can see, are white and yellow. They represent my connection to the earth and dreams of future prosperity. I love to wear this as I garden, as it makes me feel closer to my past and more grateful for my present.”

Emily nodded, solemnly. “I am very sorry my ball went into your garden. I hope nothing was hurt.”

Taking a sip of her tea, paskus shook her head. “No need to worry. Landed safe as a lamb on the grass.”

The girl smiled. “Do you want a cookie? I helped make them. My favorites are the porcupines! I love their spikes—I put pink sprinkles on them.” Emily eagerly lifted the box of cookies to share them with her new friend and was happy to see that she chose one of the special porcupine cookies.

After taking a bite, paskus nodded thoughtfully. “*Hiy hiy (hi hi)*. This is very good. Do you know what the Cree word for *porcupine* is? It’s *kâkwa (ka-QUA)*. We sometimes use their quills to make earrings, like the ones I am wearing.” She was wearing hoop earrings made of beads, and—upon closer inspection by the awestruck Emily—long white quills.

“Oh wow! Those are really cool. Did you make those?”

“I did. And maybe on another day when you are visiting your grandmother, we can all bead some earrings together, if you would like.”

“I would!” Emily munched happily on a cookie and drank her chamomile tea.

Alice and paskus began to chitchat, with Alice occasionally getting up from the table and stirring her soup or removing something from the oven to cool. It was satisfying to know that she would only have to warm up the food the next day. Although Emily was the only child in the house right now, tomorrow there would be at least 10 children of all ages, as well as their parents, all running around the house for the holiday. Alice was already exhausted thinking about it and was grateful to have a friend in her kitchen to brighten her day and make the cooking more fun.

Ever since she and her husband had moved to the neighborhood 10 years earlier when they retired, paskus had been a wonderful neighbor. They had spent long hours talking about gardening, cooking, their children, and now, their grandchildren. It had been a blessing to have a friend as a neighbor for so many years.

Returning to the table again, Alice caught Emily looking at her with a thoughtful face. “Can I ask another question?” she whispered in the loud way children do.

Alice nodded. “As long as you are polite, I think paskus will happily answer your questions.”

Emily turned back to the table, her eyes bright. “Your hair is so different from Grandma’s. It’s just like mine! I didn’t know grown-ups were allowed to wear their hair like this,” she said, tugging on one of her own braids.

Alice had to laugh at this. She had cut her white hair short years ago, because it was such a pain to do every day. Her own daughter also had very short hair, as she also preferred something unfussy that didn't need much looking after. Her granddaughter probably did imagine that most grown-ups had short hair. Meanwhile, paskus had her long salt-and-pepper hair in low braids, tied with pretty ribbons at the ends.

paskus was also chuckling. "When I was a little girl like you, at that school, I had to wear my hair very short, just as short as your grandmother's. My whole childhood, I never got to have long hair and braids, so when I got to be a grown-up, I decided I would not cut my hair again."

The little girl made a face. "Oh! You never got a chance to be a little girl! You had to wear black and cut your hair. I am so glad you get to wear anything you want now." Then she started to look worried again.

"Grandma, will my school make me cut off my hair and wear black?"

Alice looked sad for a moment and then shook her head. "No, sweetheart. Those schools don't exist anymore. That is something we can all be thankful for. No more children will have to be something they are not."

Looking back at her friend, Alice reached out to squeeze paskus' hand. "I am so thankful I get to know you. *Ekosani* (*eh-ko-SAH-nee*). I am lucky to share this land with you."

The End

Discussion Questions

- Alice and paskus come from different backgrounds, but they share a great deal in common, such as their large families, a love of cooking, and a love of gardening. In your own life, what do you think is most important in a friendship?
- paskus and Alice are not just good friends; they are also good neighbors. What does being a good neighbor mean to you? Have you ever lived next door to someone you did not like? What happened? Were fences ever mended? If not, could anything have helped you to be friends?
- At the end of the story, we can see that Alice has learned some Cree words in her time being friends with paskus. What are your thoughts on sharing a common language? How would you feel about learning a new language in order to be able to understand others better?
- As we age, sometimes we lose language. How else could someone communicate with their loved ones?
- Alice's granddaughter asks questions other adults might feel nervous or shy asking. What value do you place on understanding others?
- What stories about your childhood would you like to share with your family or friends so that they might understand you better?
- This Thanksgiving, what are you most grateful for?

Card Writing Activity

Show your friends and family how thankful you are for them by creating a card for them. You can use one of our card templates as a starting point, or use your own card-crafting class. Then, use any mix of the words listed below to share your gratitude and celebrate how, when we try, we can be kind and authentic to each other and to ourselves.

Please note: these are general words. Similar to how other languages have regional dialects, so too do the Cree. If you are interested in exploring Cree dialects more in depth, this [blog post](#) will be a useful supplement.

Glossary of Words and Pronunciations

Ekosani (*eh-ko-SAH-nee*) Thank you

Ekosi (*eh-ko-SEH*) Okay; that's it; amen

Mino kisikaw (*mi-no ki-si-KAW*) It is a good day.

Nimoshom (*nee-MO-shoom*) My grandfather

Nohkom (*NO-comb*) Grandmother

Tansi (*TAHN-see*) Hello

Kisâkihitin (*gi-SAH-gih-tin*) I love you.

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Need more words? Try this expansive [Cree language dictionary](#), an interactive Cree [language lesson](#), or this guide to [building complex sentences](#).

Additional Activities

1. Learn more about the Cree language:
 - [Animal names](#) in Cree and a video of some [pronunciations](#)
 - A video lesson in [Cree pronunciation](#)
 - A [Cree pronunciation and spelling guide](#)
 - [Cree names](#) and their meanings
2. Watch a film. The National Film Board of Canada has collected [19 films](#) that focus on the Cree people, ranging in length from five minutes to 90 minutes and everything in between. Choose a film to share that suits your audience's interests and available time.

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