



# from The Navajo ORIGIN LEGEND

Retold by Washington Matthews

**O**n the morning of the twelfth day the people washed themselves well. The women dried themselves with yellow cornmeal; the men with white cornmeal. Soon after the ablutions were completed they heard the distant call of the approaching gods.<sup>1</sup> It was shouted, as before, four times—nearer and louder at each repetition—and, after the fourth call, the gods appeared. Blue Body and Black Body each carried a sacred buckskin. White Body carried two ears of corn, one yellow, one white, each covered at the end completely with grains.

The gods laid one buckskin on the ground with the head to the west: on this they placed the two ears of corn, with their tips to the east, and over the corn they spread the other buckskin with its head to the east; under the white ear they put the feather of a white eagle,

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1. **the approaching gods** the four Navajo gods: White Body, Blue Body, Yellow Body, and Black Body.

under the yellow ear the feather of a yellow eagle. Then they told the people to stand at a distance and allow the wind to enter. The white wind blew from the east, and the yellow wind blew from the west, between the skins. While the wind was blowing, eight of the Mirage People<sup>2</sup> came and walked around the objects on the ground four times, and as they walked the eagle feathers, whose tips **protruded** from between the buckskins, were seen to move. When the Mirage People had finished their walk the upper buckskin was lifted; the ears of corn had disappeared, a man and a woman lay there in their stead.

The white ear of corn had been changed into a man, the yellow ear into a woman. It was the wind that gave them life. It is the wind that comes out of our mouths now that gives us life. When this ceases to blow we die. In the skin at the tips of our fingers we see the trail of the wind; it shows us where the wind blew when our ancestors were created.

The pair thus created were First Man and First Woman (Atsé Hastin and Atsé Estsán). The gods directed the people to build an enclosure of brushwood for the pair. When the enclosure was finished, First Man and First Woman entered it, and the gods said to them: "Live together now as husband and wife."

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**2. Mirage People** mirages personified.

**Key Ideas and Details (a)** What is the wind's role in the Navajo ceremony? **(b) Speculate:** Why might the Navajo have viewed the wind as a source of life?

**Integration of Knowledge and Ideas (a) Summarize:**

Summarize the steps of the Navajo creation ceremony.

**(b) Analyze:** What does the ceremony show about Navajo attitudes toward order and ritual?

**Integration of Knowledge and Ideas** What do the qualities these mythmakers saw in nature show about the human traits they valued? In your response, use at least two of these Essential Question words: *environment, landscape, profound, cultivate*.

*[Connecting to the Essential Question: What is the relationship between literature and place?]*