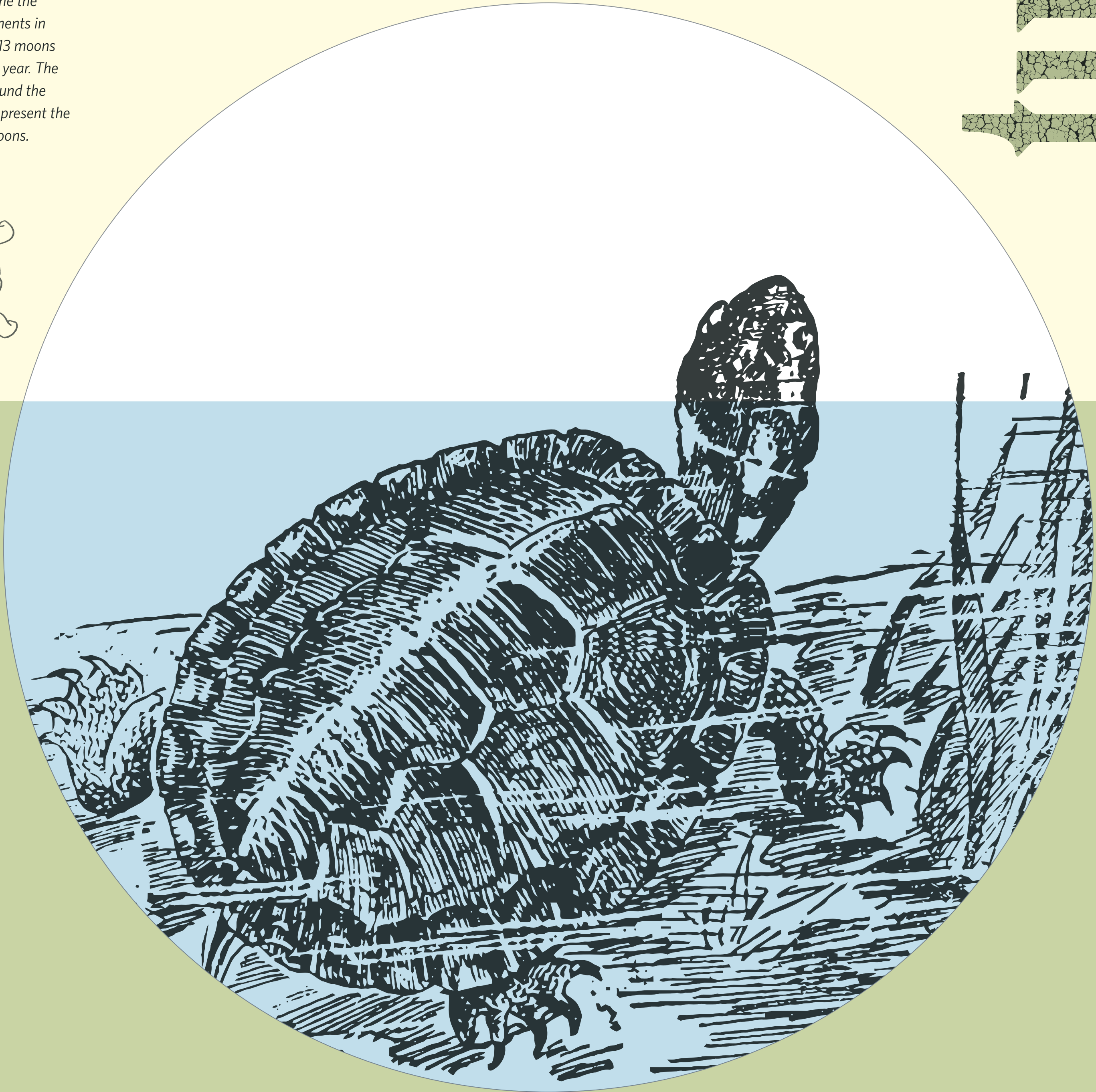
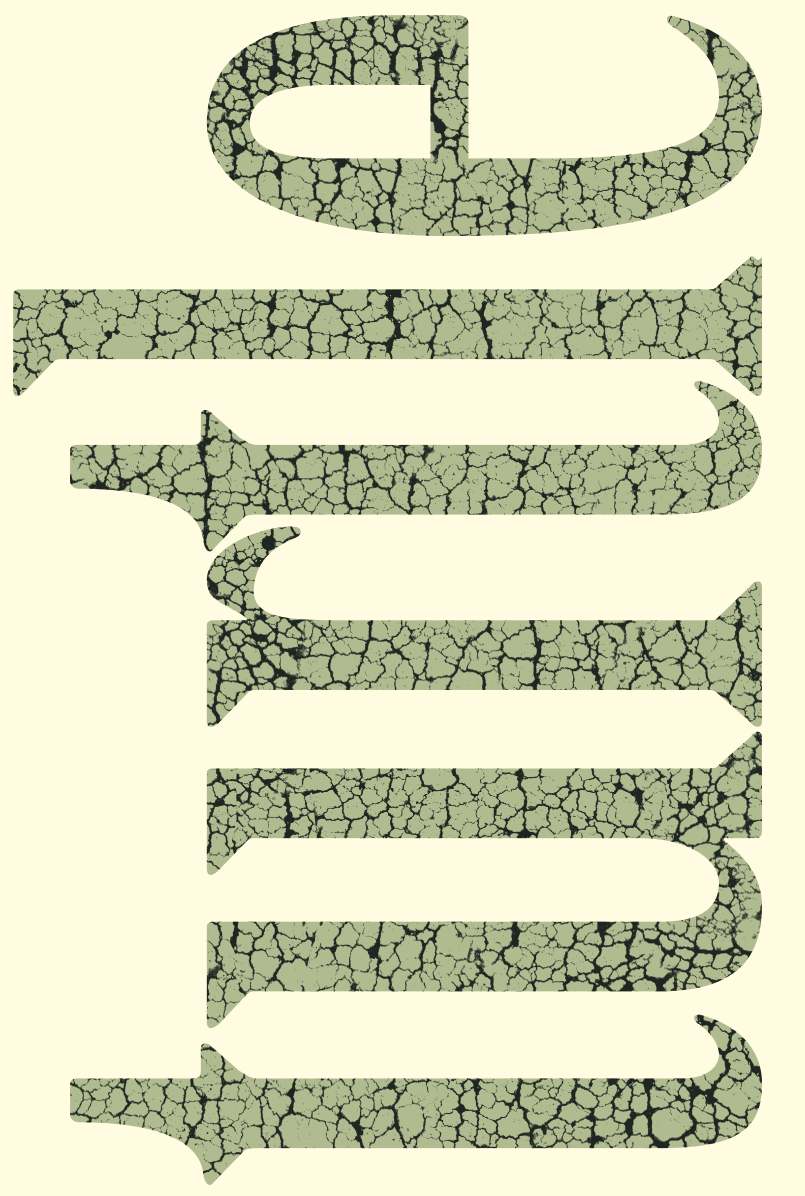
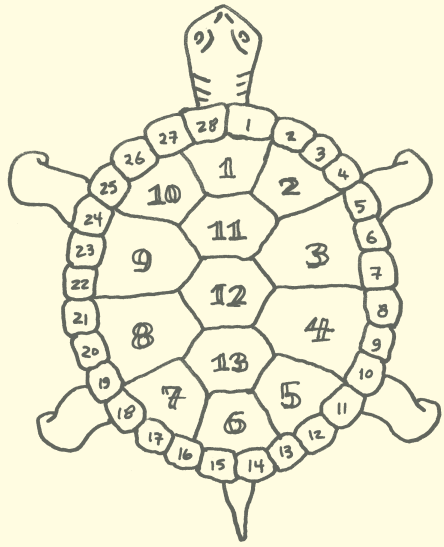


Many Native Americans and First Nations descendants share the knowledge of the 13 moons on the back of every turtle. As children they are taught to examine the segments—13 large segments in the centre represent the 13 moons which make up the lunar year. The 28 smaller segments around the lower edge of the shell represent the 28 days between new moons.



It was one of those days when Nanabozho (a shape-shifting trickster of changeable gender, a co-creator of the world, and a mythological culture hero of the Anishinaabe people) was in a strange mood. He had just awakened from a deep sleep that was disturbed by the noisy quarreling and scolding of the blue jays. She was a bit cranky; her sleep was disturbed and besides that, she was hungry. His first thought was to go down to the village for something to eat.

Entering the village, she came across some men cooking fish. They had their camp located close to the water and Nanabozho spied many fish cooking over a fire. Now, being very hungry, he asked for something to eat. The men were happy to give her some, but cautioned her that is was hot. Not heeding their warning, he quickly grabbed the fish and burned his hand. She ran to the lake to cool it off in the water. Still unsteady from the deep sleep, he tripped on a stone and fell on Mishekae (turtle) who was sunning on the beach. At that time, Mishekae was not as we know her today. She had no shell and was comprised of soft skin and bone.

Turtle complained loudly to Nanabozho to watch where he was going. Now, Nanabozho felt ashamed of her clumsiness and apologized. He wondered, "what can I do to make it up to her?" She wanted to do something to help this friend. "I'll have to sit and think it over," he thought, as he followed the path back to his wigwam.

Sometime later, she returned to the beach and called for Mishekae. Turtle poked her head through the soft beach mud. Nanabozho picked up two large shells from the shore and placed one on top of the other. He scooped up Mishekae and put her right in the middle, between the shells.

Nanabozho took a deep breath and began. "You will never be injured like that again," she said slowly. "Whenever danger threatens," he continued, "you can pull your legs and head into the shell for protection."

Nanabozho sat beside his friend on the beach and told Mishekae his thoughts. "The shell itself is round like Mother Earth. It has a round hump which resembles her hills and mountains. It is divided into segments that are a part of her; each different and yet connected by her."

Mishekae seemed very pleased with this and listened intently. "You have four legs, each representing the points of direction North, South, East and West," she said. "When the legs are all drawn in, all directions are lost. Your tail will show the many lands where the Anishinabek have been and your head will point in the direction to follow. You will have advantages over the Anishinabek," he went on. "You will be able to live in the water as well as on land and you will be in your own house at all times."

Mishekae approved of her new self and thanked Nanabozho for her wisdom. Moving now in a thick shell, she pushed herself along the shore and disappeared into the water.

So, ever since that accident long ago, Turtle has been special to the Anishinabek. To this day, she continues to grace Mother Earth, still proudly wearing those two shells.

—An Anishinaabe Legend