

For thousands of years the only inhabitants of New York City were tribes of Indians. Each band had its own name. But they were all known as Algonquians.

These people were tall, handsome, and intelligent. They had a written language. It was not made up of letters, like English. Instead, it used pictures. The writing was often done on the smooth white bark of the birch tree.

The Algonquians also had money, called wampum. Wampum was small beads made from the purple-and-white shells of clams. A bead was about a third of an inch long. It was no wider than a soda straw. Each bead had to have a hole bored in it. It also had to be polished until it was shiny. And all this had to be done with crude stone tools.

Indians used wampum to decorate their clothing. Belts made of wampum were very valuable and beautiful. When one chief wanted to show friendship to another, he would send him a wampum belt. Often a message in picture writing was woven into the belt. If the belt was kept, they were friends. But if it was sent back, there might be war.

The Algonquians had one main god. His name was Manabus. And he was a strange god indeed. Sometimes he seemed to be very good to them. Once, the Indians said, he had made the world again after a great flood destroyed it. He had also taught people how to grow corn and make fire.

But sometimes Manabus was very bad. He would cause great storms. He would steal

fish out of nets. He would disturb a hunter just as he was about to shoot.

The Algonquians also worshiped many lesser spirits. These were called manitous. They lived in mountains, rivers, and streams. They too could be most kind or most cruel.

Finally, each tribe had its own special spirit, called a totem. A totem was usually an animal—an owl, a hawk, a bear, or a wolf. It was supposed to keep watch over the tribe.

The Indians believed that all the spirits liked the smell of burning tobacco. So on all important occasions they smoked a pipe. The men would sit in a circle and pass the pipe around. Each brave would blow a puff of smoke into the sky for Manabus. Other puffs were sent toward the places where the manitous and totems lived. If every puff was just right, the spirits would be pleased. They would do no harm. They might even give special help.

But there came a time when even the gods could not help the Algonquians. For they had a powerful enemy—the Iroquois. And the Iroquois set out to conquer them.

Some Algonquian tribes were almost totally destroyed by the Iroquois. Others fought on and on. Some peaceful Indians, including those in New York City, surrendered. They promised to pay wampum to the Iroquois forever after.

But forever after was not a very long time. The Iroquois remained powerful until after the American Revolution. But then they too lost out—to the white settlers.

## CHECK YOUR READING

1. **The story says that the Algonquians were**
  - A handsome
  - B warlike
  - C lazy
  
2. **Their written language was made up of**
  - A letters
  - B pictures
  - C dots
  
3. **Wampum was made from the**
  - A horns of deer
  - B bones of crayfish
  - C shells of clams
  
4. **If a chief sent back a wampum belt sent as a gift, it meant that**
  - A he was friendly
  - B it was ugly
  - C war might follow
  
5. **Manabus was always**
  - A the main god
  - B a good god
  - C an angry god
  
6. **The Indians believed that the manitous lived**
  - A under the rocks of the cooking fire
  - B in mountains, rivers, and streams
  - C on an island far across the water
  
7. **Which of the following might be a totem?**
  - A An arrow
  - B An apple
  - C An owl
  
8. **The Indians believed that all the spirits liked to smell burning**
  - A birch bark
  - B tobacco
  - C cornsilk
  
9. **The Iroquois were**
  - A an enemy tribe
  - B a group of new gods
  - C a band of white men
  
10. **The Indians of New York decided to**
  - A move to another part of the country
  - B fight until they were destroyed
  - C pay wampum to the Iroquois