

Death and Rebirth

An Evolutionary Story of North America Long Ago

Dramatic script for use around Easter or Earth Day (October 2010)

CAST – 11 adults, teens, or responsible older kids

- _____ * **DEATH**: Speaker/Narrator (adult/teen)
- _____ * **LIFE**: Speaker/Narrator (adult/teen)
- _____ * **VISUAL ARTIST**: drawing in action (adult/teen artist)
- _____ * **DANCER**: dancing in action (adult/teen dancer)
- _____ **PLANT**
- _____ **DINOSAUR**
- _____ **LITTLE MAMMAL**
- _____ **TURTLE**
- _____ * **Director / Stage Manager** (adult/teen)
- _____ * **House Lights**: (adult/teen)
- _____ • **Sound Effects** (gong, thumping low keys on piano, etc.)

Note: The person in charge of Sound Effects should outfit a group of (possibly all) **elementary age youngsters** to sit near stage and direct them to make sound effects as scripted.

MATERIALS

- **Flip chart or white board, easel, markers** for “Visual Artist” to draw the story in progress
- **Costumes** for Plant, Dinosaur, Little Mammal, and Turtle
- **Rope** large enough to create an outline of North America on the floor
- **Blue cloth** long enough to reach from Arctic Ocean to Gulf of Mexico on floor
- **White sheet** to represent snow covering the whole continent after the meteor impact.
- **Asteroid** (crumpled brown paper bag with self-illuminating light within it?)
- **Box** to put the blue cloth, white sheet, and asteroid into
- **Fern fronds** and **conifer branches** and **grass** (hay, or tall landscaping grass stems)
- **Basket**, filled with the plant materials
- **Dinosaur toys or stuffed animals** (especially **Triceratops**)
- **Sack** or **pillow case** to hold dinosaur toys
- **Sound-effect equipment** (Gong, piano, drums, percussives) + kids learn **SONG**:
<http://thegreatstory.org/songs/north-america.mp3>

SUMMARY: The two narrators (**Death** and **Life**) are the only **speakers** the entire program. A **rope** is laid down on stage in advance with the outline of North America, and a **flip chart** with blank paper is onstage for the **Visual Artist** to sketch on during the program. **Dancer** will periodically dance the description of geographic and geological changes within the continent outline. The **other characters** will wordlessly enter and exit, according to the narrators’ call-outs (so the characters themselves do not need scripts).

This script was created by Connie Barlow of thegreatstory.org from a script by Jon and Heather Cleland-Host of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Midland, MI. Jon and Heather led an earlier version at the fellowship in spring 2010. It was later rewritten into a simpler version by Connie Barlow, originator of “Coming Home to North America” experiential scripts, at <http://thegreatstory.org/NA-ritual-choices.html>. For the MS doc version, contact Connie@thegreatstory.org

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STAGE LAYOUT:

Up front, stage right, North America is depicted on the floor by a single **rope** laid out, no bigger than the white sheet. Make sure that the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico shows as a visible lump in the rope, because the asteroid will strike there. Stage left is the **flip chart or white board**, with **broad marker pens**.

Ensure that the actors have their **costumes/face painting** done, including the narrators' costumes, and that the **blue cloth, white cloth, and asteroid** are in the **box** that **DANCER** will manage; that the **sack of dinosaur toys** is onstage behind where its actor (**Dinosaur**) will stand; and that **plant cuttings** are in the **basket** where **PLANT** will stand.

Feel free to modify the script as needed, and annotate with playful stage directions.

All narrators and actors begin off-stage

●● **SOUND EFFECTS** ●● *to signal the beginning of the program*
Kids sing the 2-line simple [SONG](#)

This is the story of . . . North America . . . North America, its story now.
This is the story of . . . death and rebirth . . . death and rebirth, a story now.

[Listen to AUDIO at <http://thegreatstory.org/songs/north-america.mp3>

[DEATH walks to the podium or microphone, then will stay near there the entire play.]

DEATH: Welcome to North America! Today we will **reenact the actual birth** and early evolution of **our continent**, based on how **scientists** understand that story. Our **continental home** has an amazing history. Learning its story offers us a deep-time perspective and a **new appreciation** for how North America and its creatures evolved. It will also help us think about **Death and Rebirth** in a new way.

I will be narrating the part of the story pertaining to "**Death and Extinction**." But please do not look upon me as a **villain**. Rather, **appreciate** that death and extinction serve as **catalysts** for new life. I am no more **evil** than is the **darkness of the night** or the waning of the **moon**.

[LIFE runs up excitedly to the microphone, then stays near there the entire play.]

LIFE: I will be **narrating** the part of LIFE! Life is so **exuberant**, so **vibrant**, yes? I will be telling the story of what kinds of **plants and animals** were on this continent long, long ago — and how they **changed**. As narrator for Life, I acknowledge the **creative role** that **Death** plays in the **evolution of life**. Death and Life, or call it Death and Rebirth, or Death and Resurrection: we are, in truth, a **partnership**. Together, we **dance!**

[LIFE playfully invites DEATH to joyously, dancingly resume at the microphone.]

DEATH: Let us **journey together** back through time. Let us use our **imagination**s to view the changes in our **home continent** as the years quickly roll back. We invite you to settle comfortably into your seat . . . **close your eyes** . . . and take a **deep breath**. . . [pause] . . . With eyes closed, let us **venture** back in time together — back to another **era**. . .

*[ALL CHARACTERS enter stage QUIETLY, while Life narrates its part: **VISUAL ARTIST, DANCER, PLANT, DINOSAUR, LITTLE ANCESTRAL MAMMAL, TURTLE**]*

LIFE: With **eyes still closed**, imagine this ground going through changes as we time travel into the past. Panning back just a few centuries, this building is gone, and all the other **buildings** and **roads** and **cars** vanish. Going back several **tens of thousands** of years, even the **first peoples** vanish. There is no trace of **Homo sapiens** at all on this continent. We travel back further still, past the onset of the **Ice Ages** and the **mammoths**, past the comings and goings of so many other creatures. Several million years back in time, there are **no humans** anywhere in the world, not even in Africa. You see, they have not yet evolved. The **clock** turns all the way back and then stops at about **65 million years ago**. This is when **our story begins**.

DEATH: You now **open your eyes** on a scene 65 million years ago. This is a time just **before** the **birth of our continent**. It is a time when **Death** is poised to play a very big role in shaping the **pageant of Life**. Let us invite our **VISUAL ARTIST** to

help us see what the **landscape** looked like back then, while we continue to speak about it.

VISUAL ARTIST takes her/his position along the flip chart, and remains there for the whole play.

LIFE: Let us also invite our **DANCER** to show us by **movement** what was going on 65 million years ago. We are using a **rope** on the **floor** up here to depict the outline of the continent, and our DANCER will dance out the **landforms** within it.

DANCER picks up the folded **BLUE CLOTH** — [or has come on-stage wearing it as part of their costume, as a shawl] — and enters the rope continent, showing each part of the continent as the Narrators talk about it.

DEATH: 65 million years ago, the **eastern** part and the **western** part of what will become this continent of North America are still separated by a **shallow inland sea** . . . (*DANCER unrolls the BLUE CLOTH*). This shallow inland sea stretches all the way from the Gulf of Mexico to the Arctic Ocean. Geologists have given it a name: **The Bearpaw Seaway.**

What about the **mountains**? Well, 65 million years ago, the **Appalachian Mountains** are already old. (*DANCER mimes the mountains on the right side of the cloth*) But the **Rockies** and **Cascades** and **Sierras** are still just a dream. (*DANCER leaps over the cloth and mimes.*)

DANCER returns back to original place in line.

LIFE: Who was alive 65 million years ago? **Who** is living on the land in what will become the continent of **North America**?

PLANT runs/dances into the continent just long enough to scatter branches and fronds, and then returns back to its place in line.

LIFE: **Ferns** and **flowers** and many **conifer trees** grace the land. . . .
. . . And who is towering over the flowers and munching on **treetops**? . . .

DINOSAUR runs into the continent and scatters **dinosaur toys**. Stay there holding the **Triceratops** toy over your head and jump up and down with excitement.

LIFE: Yesssssss! . . . **Dinosaurs!** . . .

Oh, let us hear some **applause** for the grandeur of life back then!

●● **SOUND EFFECTS [kids clap and whoop]** ●●

DEATH: It is a lovely, warm day, 65 million years ago. A **Triceratops** forages nearby, then glances up to see a small point of light, a morning star, appear in the southern sky. . . .

DANCER quickly “flies” the **ASTEROID** around to the front and rightmost part of the stage, and then slowly heads toward the Yucatan Peninsula.

DEATH: This point of light is actually an **asteroid**. It is a space rock larger than many of today’s cities, and it is speeding toward our planet at more than 40,000 miles per hour. The **asteroid** is heading right toward the Yucatan Peninsula of what will someday become Mexico. *Dancer dramatically places the ASTEROID onto the Yucatan.* Boom!

●● **SOUND EFFECTS** ●●

DANCER waves arms and runs around chaotically, while Sound Effects makes noise. Then continues to mime as the narrator describes the destruction.

DEATH: The **asteroid impact** is a thousand times more powerful than today’s entire worldwide nuclear arsenal. The flash of light permanently **blinds** animals within thousands of miles, and the shock wave **deafens** many of them too. A huge chunk of Earth where the asteroid hits is broken into big and little bits and then blasted into space. The hot debris that falls back to Earth ignites **fires** — not just across our continent but around the globe. Death comes quickly to many inhabitants of North America, including **Triceratops** . . .

DINOSAUR crumples to the floor and lies still.

DANCER solemnly returns to the line.

DEATH: Death comes more slowly to other species, but death does come. The searing inferno is followed by **darkness** because **smoke** and **ash** clutter up the atmosphere and **block out the sun** for several years. . .

(HOUSE LIGHTS down)

DEATH: It becomes very cold, and without the sun, plants cannot grow. Without the sun's light, **snow** falls even in the tropics. . . [Note to Death: While **DANCER** is moving the white sheet, keep talking about it snowing . . . dark . . . cold . . . oh so cold . . .]

DANCER takes the white sheet and opens it high and broad in front of **LITTLE ANCESTRAL MAMMAL, PLANT, and TURTLE**. Then **DANCER** walks to the south end of the continent with the other 3 characters sneaking hidden right behind, then crouching down inside the continent, but not on the blue cloth. Meanwhile, after the sheet is in front, **DINOSAUR** quietly rises and picks up all the dino toys except for one and then goes back into the character line.

DANCER then begins to place the white sheet on the floor, so that it covers the whole continent, with the 3 characters just lumps beneath it. Then **DANCER** stands unmoving alongside.

DEATH: Coldness and darkness and death are everywhere. . . . So death comes to most of the creatures on **land**, and to most of them in the **sea**, as well. . . .

LIFE: But this is **not the end** of life. Eventually, the particles of **smoke** and ash have all been swept out of the air inside of **snowflakes**. Sunlight warms Earth's surface once again, and the snow **melts**. . . .

(HOUSE LIGHTS – slowly brighten)

DANCER gracefully pulls off the sheet and returns to its place in line. All 3 crouched actors stay crouched and very still until they hear their name.

LIFE: Life begins to **awaken!!** Although all the big **dinosaurs** and other large animals have died and gone extinct, **little mammals crawl** out of their burrows in the ground. Maybe they survived the dark time by eating frozen **dinosaur corpses** — dino dinners, so to speak.

LITTLE MAMMAL scurries around, finds the dinosaur toy and pretends to munch on it.

LIFE: Let us welcome the **little ancestral mammals** by making **squeaking sounds** like they would.

●● **SOUND EFFECTS [kids squeak]** ●●

LIFE: What about **plants**? Fewer plants than animals go extinct, because plants can survive as **seed** and **spore**. When the **sun** shines again and the **snow melts**, the tiny **spores** of **ferns** are blown all around the planet and they begin to grow everywhere!

PLANT unfurls from its crouch and then dances around the continent, flicking fingers like it is releasing fern spores.

LIFE: Let us **welcome ferns** by **raising our arms and swaying** like fern fronds, while we make **whooshing** sounds like the wind blowing around the spores. . . .

●● **SOUND EFFECTS [kids whoosh and wave arms]** ●●

LIFE: Oh, there are **turtles** too! Turtles survived by **hibernating** deep in the **mud**, and now, with the dinosaurs gone, they thrive!

TURTLE awakens and crawls slowly around, inside the continent.

So **diverse** and so **numerous** the turtles become, especially here in North America,

that scientists will call this time **The Golden Age of Turtles!** Oh, it is a fine time to be a turtle. Let us **welcome** our turtle friends with a turtle hiss. . .

●● **SOUND EFFECTS** [*kids hissss*] ●●

LITTLE MAMMAL, PLANT, and TURTLE all stop moving and sit quietly inside the rope continent.

DEATH: A new landform is beginning to appear

●● **SOUND EFFECTS** [*piano thumps, rising in scale*] ●●

DANCER mimes the rise of the Rockies.

DEATH: **The Rocky Mountains** begin to rise! Forces beneath the Earth and tectonic plates crashing into one another push up the **Rocky Mountains!** . . . And now that the land is rising, the **Bearpaw Seaway** begins to drain away. . . . It drains away . . .

DANCER pulls off the blue cloth and returns to the line.

●● **SOUND EFFECTS** [*piano drags across all notes downward in time with cloth removal*] ●●

DEATH: The draining seawater leaves behind **muds** and sands and **dead sea creatures**, some of whom will become **fossils**.

LIFE: And some of those **fossils**, millions of years later, will be found by **humans** who will evolve long, long after the dinosaurs go extinct. When a **fossil** is dug up and is admired by humans today, and especially when those fossils are put on display in **museums**, that ancient creature is, in a sense, **resurrected**. That extinct creature comes to life once again, but it comes to life in the **minds** and **imaginings** of human beings. Just imagine how **proud** and **excited** the **dinosaurs** are to be **resurrected** and **admired** in **museums!**

DINOSAUR grabs a couple dinosaur toys and joyfully runs and jumps a big circle

around the continent, then returns to its line, miming being "frozen" like a mounted dinosaur skeleton for a minute.

DEATH: When the **Bearpaw** Seaway has drained away, the fragments of land are finally connected, east and west. The land unites into a single continent: **North America is born!** North America is born! *[encourage applause]*

●● **SOUND EFFECTS [kids whoop and piano celebrates]** ●●

LIFE: Or shall we call this continent "**Turtle Island**"? Turtle Island is the name given to this continent by some of its first peoples: the Native Americans. Think about it: Turtle Island was born during the **Golden Age of Turtles!**

TURTLE: *quickly stands up, takes a bow and then sits back down in the continent.*

DEATH: Nothing lasts forever, and that makes everything special. So, at last, **the Golden Age of Turtles comes to an end.** There are still turtles, of course, but not nearly so many of them, and not nearly so big.

LIFE: But right about that time something **new and important** begins. With the big, scary **dinosaurs** gone, our **little ancestral mammal** can evolve into all kinds of creatures to take the place of dinosaurs.

LITTLE MAMMAL *leaps up and mimes "big" and "ferocious" and runs around for "numerous."*

LIFE: Some mammal species grow very, very **big** — and some grow very, very **ferocious** — and some grow very, very **numerous**. This is the **Golden Age of Mammals!** *[applause]*

●● **SOUND EFFECTS [yippee kids]** ●●

LIFE: Little Ancestral Mammal: You and your relatives around the world will become the ancestors of all the mammals alive today. **We are so grateful that you**

survived the meteor impact!

LITTLE ANCESTRAL MAMMAL continues to mime all the names of mammals that Life reads.

LIFE: Right here in North America, over millions of years, some of your descendants will evolve into **squirrels**. Other of your descendants will evolve into **wolves** and **foxes** and **coyotes**. You are also the ancestor of what will become **camels** and **llamas**. Some of you who survived the meteor impact right here on Turtle Island will evolve into **horses!** Your relatives in **Eurasia** will evolve into the first big wild **cats**, and the first **bears**, and the first **rhinoceroses**. Some of your descendants will evolve into creatures that like to **swim** in the sea: **whales** and **dolphins**, **walruses**, and **seals**. Others will learn to **fly**, and they will become **bats**. Some of your little cousins who were living in **Africa** when the meteor impact happened will evolve into **elephants** and others of them will evolve into **monkeys**, and **apes**, and eventually into **humans**.

All this diversity was beginning to happen soon after the **dinosaurs** went extinct. That's why this time is called **The Golden Age of Mammals!** Let's celebrate the Golden Age of Mammals! *[applause]*

●● **SOUND EFFECTS** *[yippee kids]* ●●

DEATH: *[bowing]* Thank you! . . . Thank you! . . . Yesssssss. I will take credit for the **Golden Age of Mammals**. You see, mammals coexisted for millions of years with the **dinosaurs**. But they could never grow big because, well . . . dinosaurs already were the big critters on the block. It was only because a **meteor impact** wiped out the dinosaurs that **mammals** had a chance to diversify, to grow bigger, and to populate the whole Earth.

LIFE: Indeed, that is true. I invite all of the **mammals** in this room to give Death a round of applause. . .

●● **SOUND EFFECTS** ●●

LIFE: But Life itself also had something to do with the **success** of the mammals. Here is why: We all know that **mammals** ultimately depend on **plants** for food. Even the **carnivores** depend on plants, because the carnivores eat mammals who eat plants. So, **PLANT**, please **rise up** and go get a **sample** of the kind of plant that made it possible for really, really **big mammals** to evolve.

***PLANT** retrieves **the grass stems** from the basket and brings them back to the continent, waving them around before sitting down inside the continent and quietly holding them.*

LIFE: Grass! Let's hear it for grass!

●● **SOUND EFFECTS** ●●

LIFE: Grasses made it possible for the really big mammals to evolve. You see, grasses can grow in regions too dry for **forests**. Unlike trees, grasses keep their green leaves right down at a level where all the mammals, large and small, can reach them. So more big mammals can survive on a **grassland** than in a forest, where the leaves are way too high and out of reach.

DEATH: And it is I who continue to help grasses be so successful. You see, in exactly the same way that a **lawnmower** prevents a forest from taking over a lawn . . . [*keep reading, below, while the actors act*]

***DANCER** acts like a lawnmower. **PLANT** holds grasses and looks happy. **TURTLE** crawls out of the way. **LITTLE MAMMAL** scurries away.*

DEATH: Just like a **lawnmower**, all those **mammal teeth** chewing on plants prevent **forests** from taking over. . . .

***LITTLE MAMMAL** pretends to pick and eat leaves off a shrub.*

DEATH: When mammals graze on **baby trees and bushes**, those plants usually die — because the active growing parts of baby trees and bushes are at the **tips** — and

these are the parts that get eaten. But grass grows in the same way that the **fur of a mammal** grows and that **human hair** grows. It grows from the base, hidden **underground**. So it doesn't hurt to grass to mow it or to graze it — just like it **doesn't hurt** for humans or dogs to get their hair cut. Both **hair** and **grass** just keep growing from beneath the skin or beneath the ground!

LIFE: All you **mammals** sitting out there: Touch your **hair** and think about how **grateful** you are that **grasses** learned how to grow in exactly the same way! . . . Ah yes! There is so much to be **grateful** for!

- We can be grateful for **PLANTS** . . . Stand up **Plant**, and take a bow.
- We can be grateful for **TURTLES** . . . **Turtle**, come out of hiding and take a bow.
- We can be grateful for **LITTLE ANCESTRAL MAMMALS**, who survived 65 million years ago . . . We would not be here without them. So take a bow, **Little Mammal**.
- We can be grateful for the **DINOSAURS**, too. Come out here and take a bow, **Dinosaur**. Oh, we love to get scared thinking about you!

DEATH: What about gratitude for the **ASTEROID?** . . .

DANCER *picks up asteroid and dances all around.*

DEATH: It was the **devastation** caused by the **ASTEROID** that cleared the way for the **Golden Age of Turtles** and then the **Golden Age of Mammals!** So ours is not only the story of how North America came to be. It is also a true and wondrous story of death and rebirth.

●● SOUND EFFECTS ●● to signal the end of the program
Kids sing the 2-line simple SONG several times:

This is the story of . . . North America . . . North America, its story now.
This is the story of . . . death and rebirth . . . death and rebirth, a story now.

During song, all actors and narrators bow and exit stage. VISUAL ARTIST *removes easel; DANCER* *removes the North America rope and any miscellaneous props in center stage.*