

Pushing Up the Sky

by Joseph Bruchac

illustrated by Teresa Flavin



Genre

A **play** uses a cast of characters. Look at the characters in *Pushing Up the Sky* and think about which role you would like to play.

What would happen if you could touch the sky?

Snohomish

The Snohomish people live in the area of the Northwest that is now known as the state of Washington, not far from Puget Sound. They fished in the ocean and gathered food from the shore. Their homes and many of the things they used every day, such as bowls and canoe paddles, were carved from the trees. Like many of the other peoples of the area, they also carved totem poles, which recorded the history and stories of their nation. This story is one that was carved into a totem pole made for the city of Everett, Washington, by Chief William Shelton.

Characters

Speaking Roles

NARRATOR

TALL MAN

GIRL

MOTHER

BOY

FIRST CHIEF

SECOND CHIEF

THIRD CHIEF

FOURTH CHIEF

FIFTH CHIEF

SIXTH CHIEF

SEVENTH CHIEF



Non-speaking Roles

Animals and Birds—as many as group size will accommodate. Animals familiar to the Snohomish would include Dog, Deer, Elk, Mountain Goat, Bear, Mountain Lion, Rabbit, Weasel, Wolf, and Fox. Birds would include Hawk, Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle, Jay, Seagull, Raven, Heron, and Kingfisher.

Props/Scenery

The village can be suggested with a painted backdrop showing houses made of cedar planks among tall fir trees and redwoods, with the ocean visible in the background. Potted plants can be added around the stage to suggest trees if desired.

Bows and arrows held by Boy in Scene I can be from a toy set or made from cardboard.

The poles held by people and animals in Scene III can be rulers or long tubes of cardboard.

Costumes

People, including the **Narrator**, can wear blankets or towels. **Chiefs** wear them around their shoulders, and other humans wear them wrapped around their waists to suggest the robes often worn by people of the Northwest. Cone-shaped hats (worn by Snohomish women) may be worn by girls playing human characters.

Depending on their number and type, the **Animals** can be suggested by face paint or with decorated masks made from paper plates.

Scene I: A Village Among Many Tall Trees

(Tall Man, Girl, Mother, and Boy stand onstage.)

NARRATOR: Long ago the sky was very close to the earth. The sky was so close that some people could jump right into it. Those people who were not good jumpers could climb up the tall fir trees and step into the sky. But people were not happy that the sky was so close to the earth. Tall people kept bumping their heads on the sky. And there were other problems.

TALL MAN: Oh, that hurt! I just hit my head on the sky again.

GIRL: I just threw my ball, and it landed in the sky, and I can't get it back.

MOTHER: Where is my son? Has he climbed a tree and gone up into the sky again?

BOY: Every time I shoot my bow, my arrows get stuck in the sky!

ALL: THE SKY IS TOO CLOSE!



Scene II: The Same Village

(The seven chiefs stand together onstage.)

NARRATOR: So people decided something had to be done. A great meeting was held for all the different tribes. The seven wisest chiefs got together to talk about the problem.

FIRST CHIEF: My people all think the sky is too close.

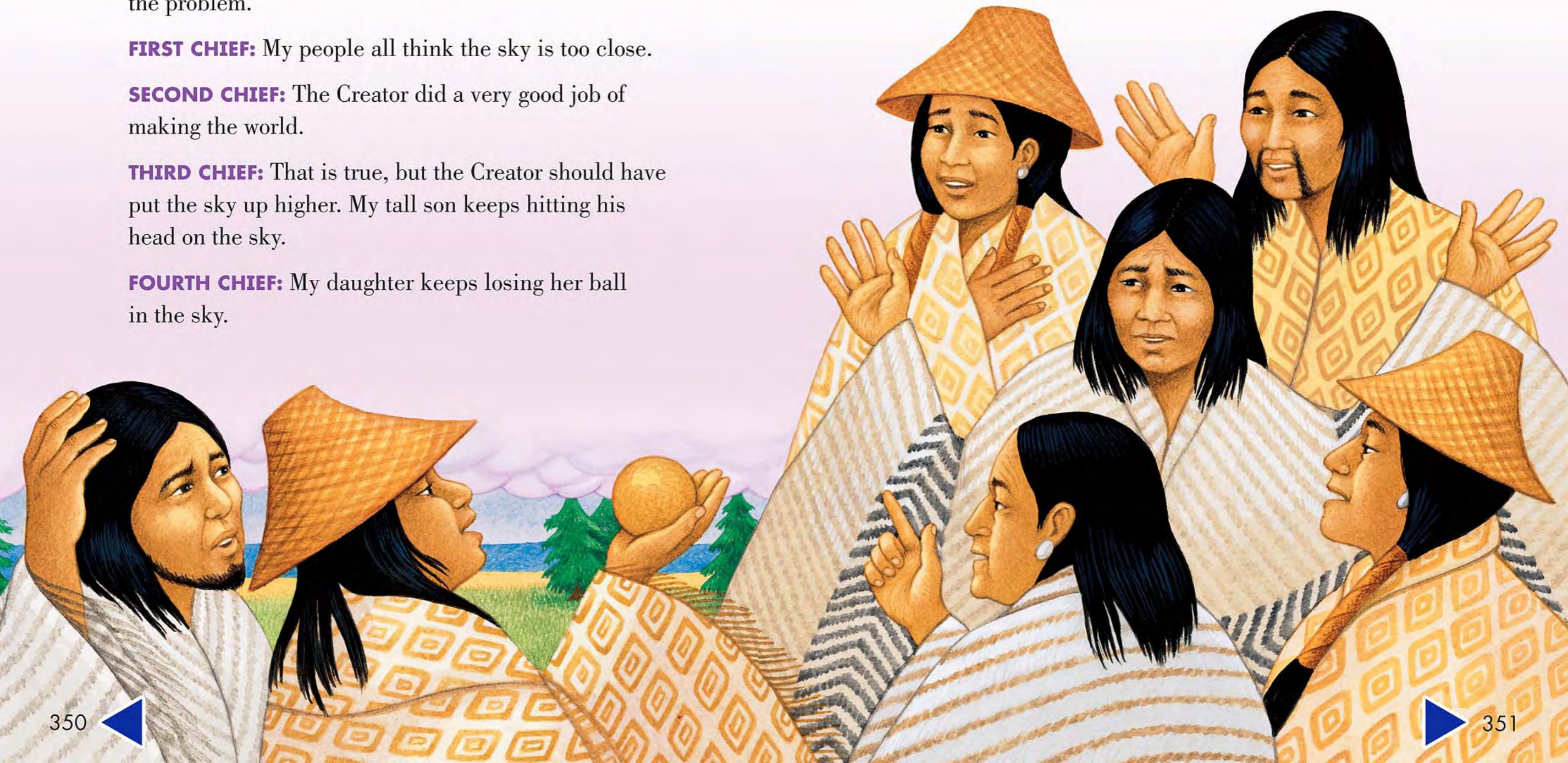
SECOND CHIEF: The Creator did a very good job of making the world.

THIRD CHIEF: That is true, but the Creator should have put the sky up higher. My tall son keeps hitting his head on the sky.

FOURTH CHIEF: My daughter keeps losing her ball in the sky.

FIFTH CHIEF: People keep going up into the sky when they should be staying on the earth to help each other.

SIXTH CHIEF: When mothers look for their children, they cannot find them because they are up playing in the sky.



SEVENTH CHIEF: We are agreed, then.
The sky is too close.

ALL: WE ARE AGREED.

SECOND CHIEF: What can we do?

SEVENTH CHIEF: I have an idea. Let's push
up the sky.

THIRD CHIEF: The sky is heavy.

SEVENTH CHIEF: If we all push together, we can
do it.

SIXTH CHIEF: We will ask the birds and animals to
help. They also do not like it that the sky is so close.

SECOND CHIEF: The elk are always getting their
antlers caught in the sky.

FOURTH CHIEF: The birds are always hitting their
wings on it.

FIRST CHIEF: We will cut tall trees to make poles.
We can use those poles to push up the sky.

FIFTH CHIEF: That is a good idea. Are we all agreed?

ALL: WE ARE ALL AGREED.

Scene III: The Same Village

*(All the People, except Seventh Chief, are gathered
together. They hold long poles. The Birds and
Animals are with them. They all begin pushing
randomly, jabbing their poles into the air.
The sky can be imagined as just above them.)*

GIRL: It isn't working.

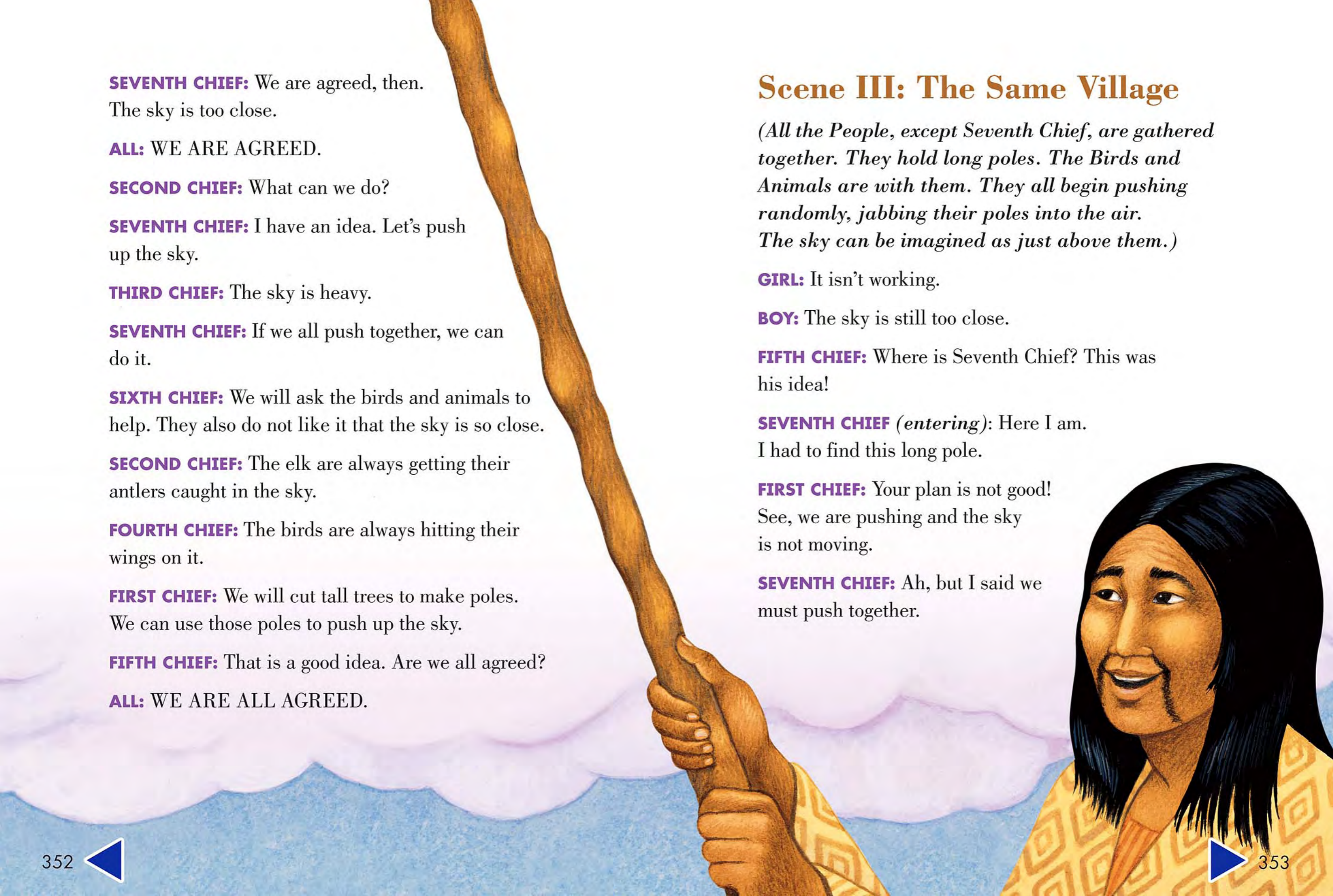
BOY: The sky is still too close.

FIFTH CHIEF: Where is Seventh Chief? This was
his idea!

SEVENTH CHIEF (*entering*): Here I am.
I had to find this long pole.

FIRST CHIEF: Your plan is not good!
See, we are pushing and the sky
is not moving.

SEVENTH CHIEF: Ah, but I said we
must push together.



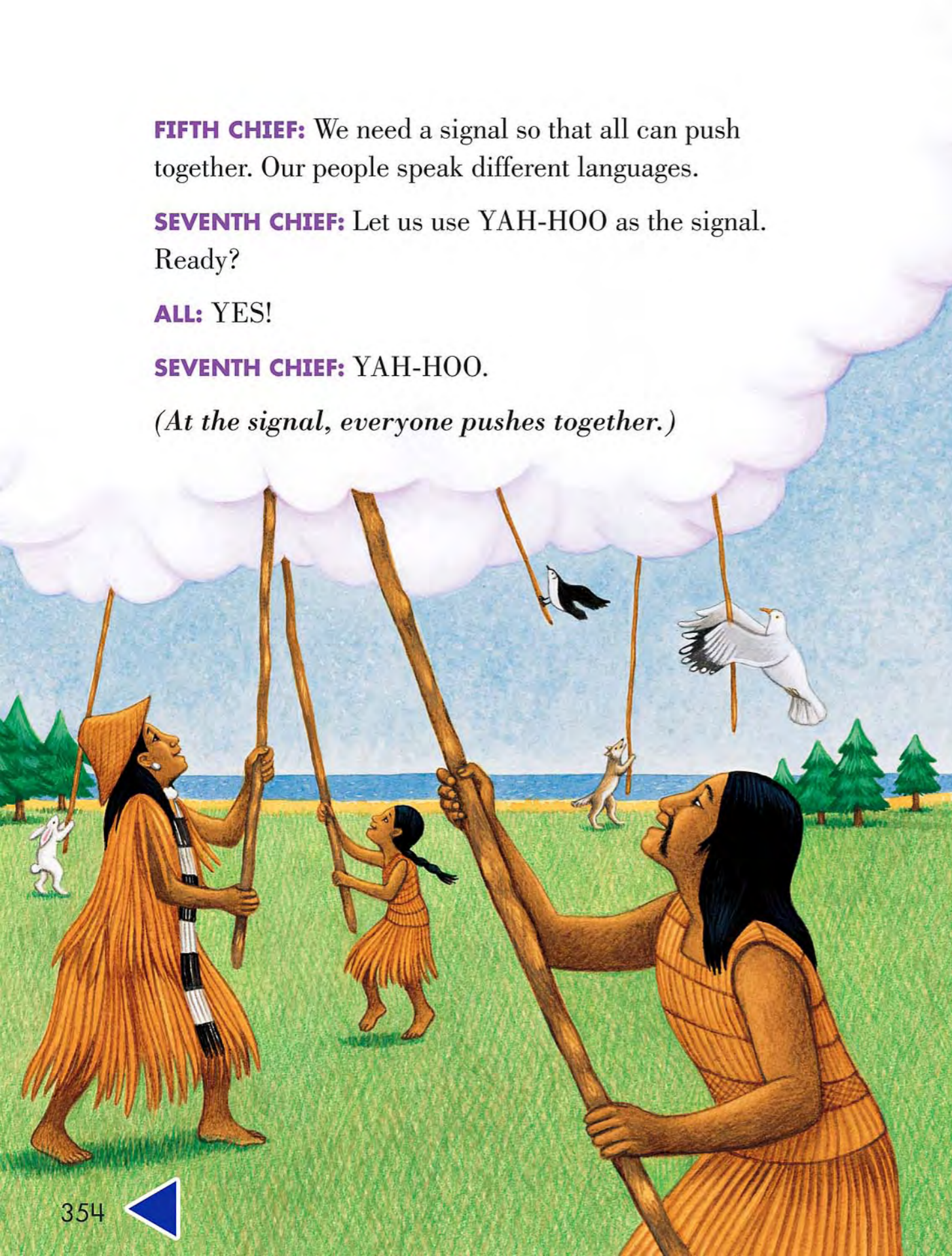
FIFTH CHIEF: We need a signal so that all can push together. Our people speak different languages.

SEVENTH CHIEF: Let us use YAH-HOO as the signal. Ready?

ALL: YES!

SEVENTH CHIEF: YAH-HOO.

(At the signal, everyone pushes together.)



ALL: YAH-HOO!

SEVENTH CHIEF: YAH-HOO.

(Again everyone pushes together.)

ALL: YAH-HOO!

TALL MAN: We are doing it!

MOTHER: Now my son won't be able to hide in the sky!

SEVENTH CHIEF: YAH-HOO.

(Again everyone pushes together.)

ALL: YAH-HOO!

BOY: It will be too high for my arrows to stick into it.

SEVENTH CHIEF: YAH-HOO.

(Again everyone pushes together.)

ALL: YAH-HOOOOO!

FIRST CHIEF: We have done it!

NARRATOR: So the sky was pushed up. It was done by everyone working together. That night, though, when everyone looked overhead, they saw many stars in the sky. The stars were shining through the holes poked into the sky by the poles of everyone who pushed it up higher.

No one ever bumped his head on the sky again. And those stars are there to this day.

