

# TURTLE FAMILIES OF THE WORLD

## CHAPTER 7

Tota Ma was sleeping in her favourite rocking chair when she woke up with a start. She had dozed off while watching Aboriginal People's Television Network. Wari and Sewatis were back in the city after their winter holidays in Tyendinaga. They kept very busy during their visit and Tota Ma was tired! She had fallen asleep and was dreaming about A'nó:wara explaining the seventh challenge, to find out about turtles located around the world.

The television was still on and there was a special show airing about turtles. There were images of baby sea turtles hatching on the sandy shores of Australia. This reminded Tota Ma of distant brothers and sisters, the Aborigines, and their connection to turtles. It seemed that Indigenous people worldwide had many teachings about turtles.

Tota Ma thought about the sea turtle story, a journey of many kilometres and years. The baby turtle hatches from its shell, swims through the seas and oceans of the world, until it comes back to lay eggs on the very same beach it was



born, instinctively finding its way back home. This reminded Tota Ma of young people who often journeyed from her community to find a job, go to school, or to find their own path. She thought that youth needed to remember the sea turtle and its life journey home. Tota Ma understood how strong the sea turtle's call to come home was.

She thought back to when she was younger and had to move to the city to go to school. It was so hard for her to be away from home. She remembered how she used to sit outside at night and look up at the stars, thinking about home and the family and friends that she missed. She was so lonely for home then and realized that sea turtles must feel that way too.



Tota Ma imagined walking into the sea as a tiny baby turtle and spending the next twenty years swimming through the oceans, far from home. How happy that turtle must be when it returns to the beach where its life began, so it can lay eggs and begin the cycle of life over again.

Tota Ma remembered reading about turtles caught in fish nets and beaches that were turned into parking lots, hotels, and resorts. She thought it must be confusing for turtles to travel to their birth place and find their home not there.

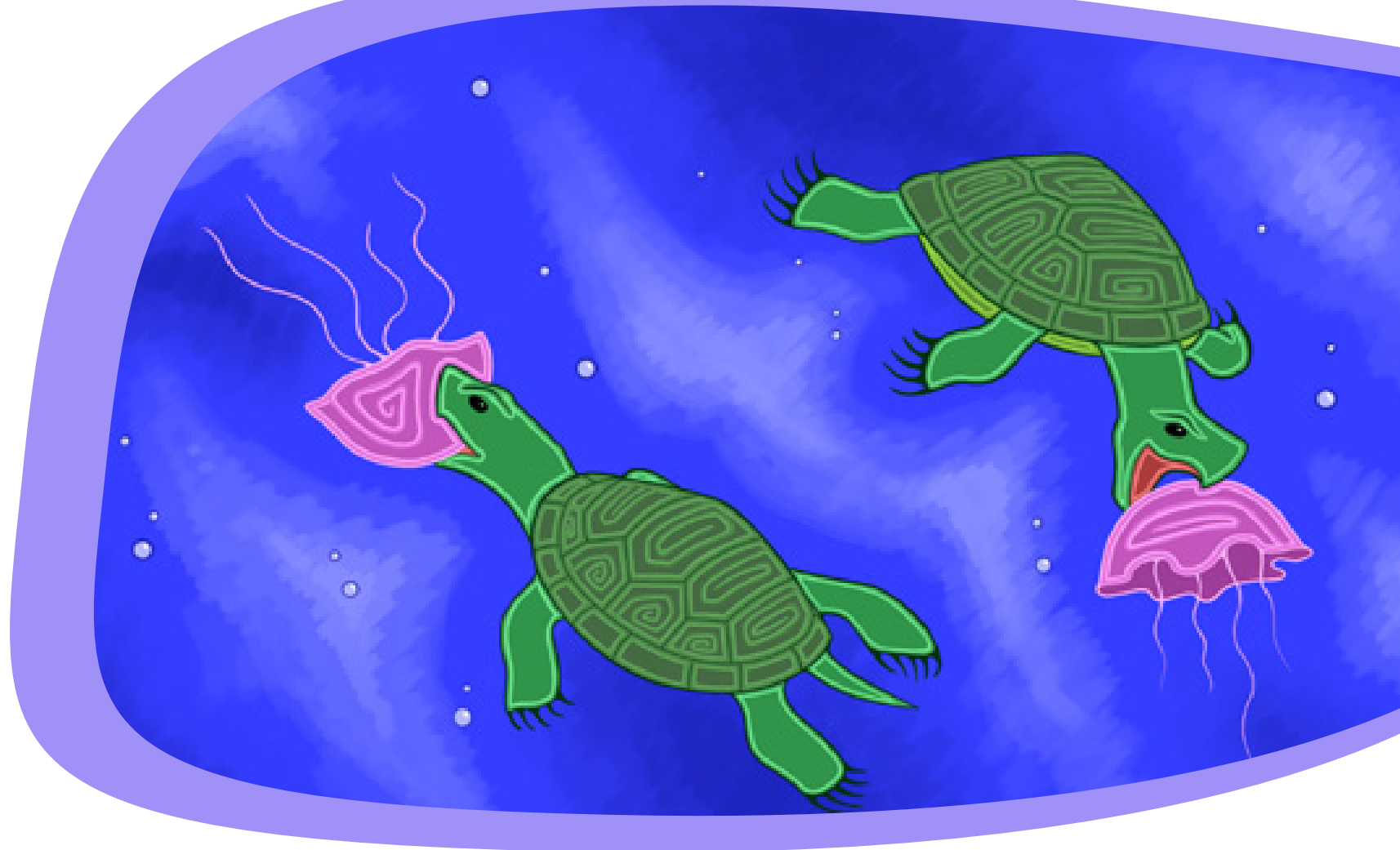
This made her think about something a teacher once told her. She was learning about animals and her teacher said that the turtle is one of the few animals that has a home on its back. She thought

a lot about this. It seemed that the turtle may have a house on its back, but a home is more than just shelter. It is food, a special place to live in, clean water, and shelter too. This was the moment that Tota Ma realized that there is no place like home, even for turtles!

The television show explained that sea turtles are under great stress with the loss of habitat and pollution of the ocean waters. Plastic bags and rings floating in the waters cause many turtles to die when they mistakenly eat the plastic, thinking it is food.

"This is so sad!" Tota Ma exclaimed out loud. "These are similar problems to turtles in my wetland."

The television show continued talking about a sea turtle called the leatherback, who feeds on jellyfish



in the ocean near Nova Scotia. Scientists have found these same turtles in Trinidad in the Caribbean Ocean—a journey of 3 000 kilometres! It made her sad to think about the terrible difficulties turtles must overcome to survive each day.

Later that day, Tota Ma walked through the wet slush to the school and asked for help to find out more about turtles around the world. The librarian helped Tota Ma search for information on sea turtles and tortoises. She found an interesting website and spent some time reading and thinking about sea turtles. She compared them to fresh water turtle species. Tota Ma was excited to share this new information with her grandchildren.

"I did not know that turtles have been around for 225 million years!" she said to the librarian, "or that so many turtles worldwide are in danger from loss of habitat." The librarian seemed surprised because she did not realize either.

Knowing that *A'no:wara* and her turtle relatives have so much knowledge to share, Tota Ma knew that she must try very hard to change her behaviours so that turtles could survive for the future.

That night, Tota Ma went home thinking about the importance of wetland conservation. Suddenly the world seemed so much smaller as she thought about the turtle species around the world and their need for help. If everyone worked together, they could help make a big difference.