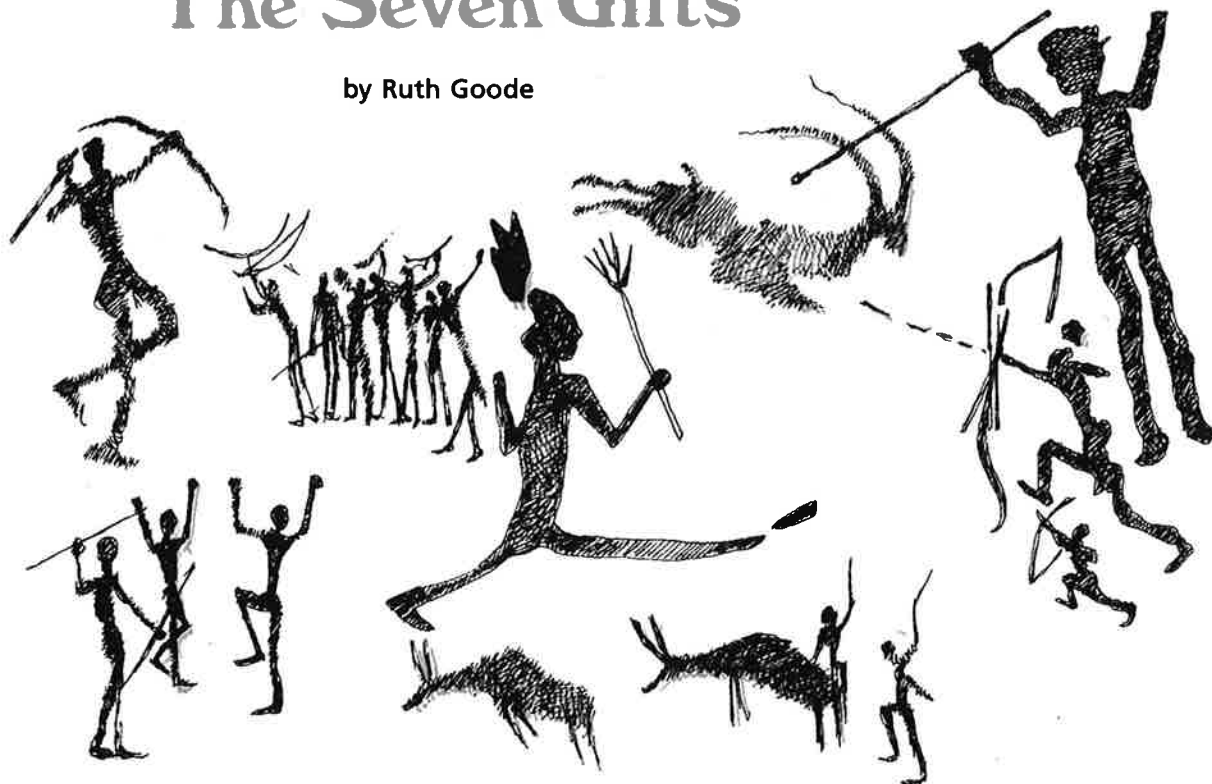


# The Seven Gifts

by Ruth Goode



- 1 The tale of humanity's beginnings takes us far, far back through time to a world dramatically different from the world we know today. Gazing back across hundreds of centuries we come to a time known as the Ice Age, a time when nearly half the world was locked in ice.
- 2 The caps of ice that cover the north and south poles today spread right down over the Temperate Zone then, nearly halfway to the equator. In places the ice was a mile thick, and these ice-bound regions could support no life. In Europe the only land where life was possible lay mainly to the south, around the Atlantic and Mediterranean shores, and even this land was cold, bleak, and forbidding. Grey lichen lay in patches on rocks, and tough grasses grew sparsely on the plains. There were no

woodlands, no forests, only occasional clumps of ragged shrubs and stunted trees.

3 Some of the first people like ourselves to live in this world dwelt here alongside some of the largest, fiercest animals in the earth's history. The reindeer, musk ox, elk, and bison that fed on the lichen and the grasses were not particularly dangerous except in stampeding herds. But there were also cave bears and cave lions, the huge woolly rhinoceros with two deadly sharp horns thrusting up from its snout, the hairy mammoth like a big humped elephant with enormous tusks curving to the sides of its body. There were ravaging wolf packs and scavenging hyenas that would fight fiercely when cornered.

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- 4 In such a world, how could people survive? Nature gave them no warm fur pelts against the cold, no swiftness to escape an enemy, no tusks or fangs for fighting. If they crept into a cave for shelter, the lion or bear that made its lair there would tear them to pieces. Compared with the animals around them, men and women were poor, feeble creatures. They were thin-skinned, two-legged, unprotected against a bitter climate and a host of natural enemies. They had no books to tell them what to do, no histories of earlier people to learn from. They had no warm houses, no cloth for clothing, no wagons for carrying, no plants in gardens, no cows for milk, no iron for implements and weapons. Such things lay thousands of years away in the future, and these people could not even imagine them.
- 5 Yet these distant ancestors of ours made a life for themselves in this rugged land and survived its dangers, for like fairy-tale heroes they had certain remarkable gifts—seven in number.
- 6 Their first gift was that they stood erect, with head held high. They could see over tall grasses and rough, rocky ground. They could turn head and body and, with one swift glance, look in any direction to track the animals they hunted or to escape the animals that hunted them.
- 7 Their second gift was linked to their first, and that was their two legs. They might not outrun any animal, but they could outwalk them all. They could track the game steadily and patiently for great distances, keeping the beasts moving, keeping them from grazing, until the animals and not the people were exhausted.
- 8 From their upright posture also came their third gift, their arms. The beasts had only forelegs, useful for running. But human beings had arms that could bend to many tasks. When they walked, their arms were free to carry and use a weapon, to transport the kill back to camp instead of having to eat their fill on the spot and then go hungry until the next successful hunt (as the animals did).
- 9 Their fourth gift was their hands. The forelegs of animals ended in hoofs or claws, useful only for running and fighting. But the hands of men and women had four slender and flexible fingers and a short, strong thumb that moved opposite to the fingers. This meant that they could hold things. They could pick up a stone and use it as a hammer, a cutting tool, or a weapon.
- 10 Their fifth gift was their vision. Both eyes were set at the front of the head and looked in the same direction. Because of this they could see in depth. They could judge distances with great accuracy. They could also focus their eyes on an object held up close and could see it sharply and clearly in every detail.
- 11 The sixth and greatest gift was their human brain. The brain of these people was as large and as fully developed as our own. They could remember experiences from the past and learn from them for the future. They could plan, question, reason. They could discover ways to do things and to make things that would help protect them from the dangers of their world.
- 12 Their seventh gift was a gift of that intelligent brain: it was the power of speech. Although the beasts could also communicate with each other by voice (using calls, signals, and warning cries), only people could communicate in words. Only men and women could call to their fellows to bring something, lift something, cut something. Only they could express themselves well enough to accomplish difficult tasks together. Only they could say where they had been, what they had seen and done. Only they could instruct their children in the complicated skills they must master, could explain beforehand about dangers they must avoid. They alone could pass on to the young the wisdom and experience of the old.
- 13 Those seven gifts stood between the people of the Ice Age and the many perils of their difficult world. There were other creatures that had one or several of these abilities, but no creatures on earth had them all, except humans.
- 14 And so humanity survived. Because of the seven gifts that permitted them to conquer a hostile environment, the people of the Ice Age lived to produce children and to become the forebears of today's men and women.

## How Well Did You Read?

Write the letter of the best answer.

- 1 When does the story take place?
  - a Hundreds of centuries ago
  - b Several hundred years ago
  - c At the start of the Atomic Age
- 2 What was the world like then?
  - a A lot like Africa today
  - b Dramatically different from today
  - c Neither a nor b
- 3 Why was the setting important to the people in the story?
  - a It provided a life of hardship and danger.
  - b It provided a life of comfort and ease.
  - c Neither a nor b
- 4 Which words tell about the places described?
  - a Warm lands with many forests and trees
  - b Cold lands with some grass and ragged shrubs
  - c Wet lands with many lakes and rivers
- 5 What is the main idea of this story?
  - a The animals in the Ice Age were dangerous.
  - b The people of that time had no books to tell them what to do.
  - c The people of the Ice Age had certain gifts that helped them to survive.
- 6 Which of the following details helps to support the main idea of the story?
  - a The people were physically weak.
  - b Their brains enabled people to remember, learn, and plan.
  - c In places, the ice was a mile thick.
- 7 What is another good title for the story?
  - a Humanity Endures
  - b The Animals of the Ice Age
  - c The World We Know
- 8 How was the people's vision effective?
  - a They could see very well at night.
  - b They could judge distances accurately.
  - c They could see behind them and in front of them at the same time.

- 9 How were the people's hands especially useful to them?
  - a They could use their hands just as the animals used their hooves and claws.
  - b They could use their hands to pick up, hold, and carry things.
  - c They could use their hands only for running or fighting.

## Learn about Words

### Vocabulary

- A** You can often tell the meaning of a word by reading the words around it.

Look at each number in parentheses. Find the paragraph in the story with the same number. Then find the word that fits the given meaning. Write the word.

- 1 thinly; here and there (2)
- 2 lived (3)
- 3 weak (4)
- 4 tools; utensils (4)
- 5 easily bent; not stiff (9)
- 6 dangers (13)
- 7 unfriendly; full of dangers (14)
- 8 ancestors (14)

- B** A word may have more than one meaning.

Look at each number in parentheses. Find the paragraph in the story with the same number. See how the word in **heavy type** is used in the paragraph. Decide whether it has meaning **a**, **b**, or **c**. Write **a**, **b**, or **c**.

- 9 **bitter** (4)
  - a unpleasant-tasting
  - b expressing grief and regret
  - c painfully cold
- 10 **host** (4)
  - a very large number
  - b keeper of an inn or hotel
  - c plant or animal that supports a parasite

## Word Study

C Many English words come from the Latin language and contain Latin roots. For example:

act = to do (as in *action*)

volv = to turn (as in *revolve*)

mob, mot = to move (as in *mobile, motion*)

Knowledge of Latin roots will sometimes help you unlock the meanings of new words. Read the sentences below. The word in **heavy type** is a clue. It will help you find the right Latin root to complete the partial word. Complete the word and write it in full.

- 11 I couldn't turn the re\_\_ing door with my arms full.
- 12 Her pro\_\_ion to principal was an important **move** forward.
- 13 Jenny won't **move** unless you give her some \_\_ivation.
- 14 We hoped the president would do something in re\_\_ion to our letter.
- 15 That \_\_or **does** the part very well.
- 16 This is a very in\_\_ed problem, with many twists and **turns**.
- 17 The baby is very \_\_ive, **doing** new things every day.
- 18 If the \_\_or is dead, the car won't **move** at all.

D I've been feeling **weak** this week.

Words that have the same sound but different spellings and meanings are sometimes called homonyms. For example: *weak* and *week*. Each sentence below contains a pair of homonyms in parentheses. Write the word that makes sense in the sentence.

- 19 Pedro is his uncle's only (air, heir).
- 20 Chipper ran off when we left the (gate, gait) unlocked.
- 21 They rented a (suite, sweet) of rooms in the hotel.
- 22 We bought the life jackets on (sail, sale).
- 23 Queen Victoria's (reign, rain) lasted sixty-five years.
- 24 Eight prisoners were crowded into a small (cell, sell).
- 25 Mr. Kaplan wrote his name on the (bored, board).
- 26 This place would be a good (site, sight) for our camp.

E Pups are **little** dogs, not **big** ones.

Words with opposite meanings are called antonyms. *Little* is an antonym of *big*. In each row of words below, there is one word that means the opposite of the word in **heavy type**. Write that word.

- |                     |             |              |
|---------------------|-------------|--------------|
| 27 <b>turbulent</b> | exciting    | calm         |
| 28 <b>bleak</b>     | cheerful    | dismal       |
| 29 <b>reluctant</b> | eager       | slow         |
| 30 <b>tedious</b>   | interesting | boring       |
| 31 <b>probable</b>  | likely      | unlikely     |
| 32 <b>flimsy</b>    | sturdy      | feeble       |
| 33 <b>amateur</b>   | talented    | professional |

## Use Your Imagination

Pretend that you were one of the Ice Age people. Imagine what one day of your life would be like. Write it down. Share your story with a classmate.