

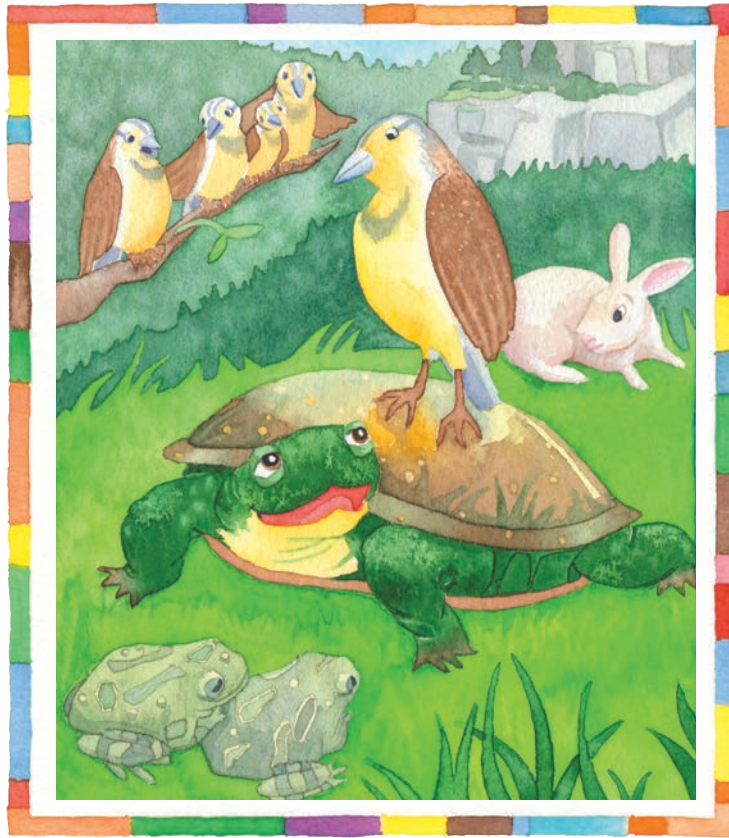
A folk tale told around the world

How the Turtle Cracked Its Shell



As told by Myrna Estes

Illustrated by Annette Frei



A talkative turtle wishes he could fly.
When his wish comes true, will he find it
wiser to keep his feet on the ground?

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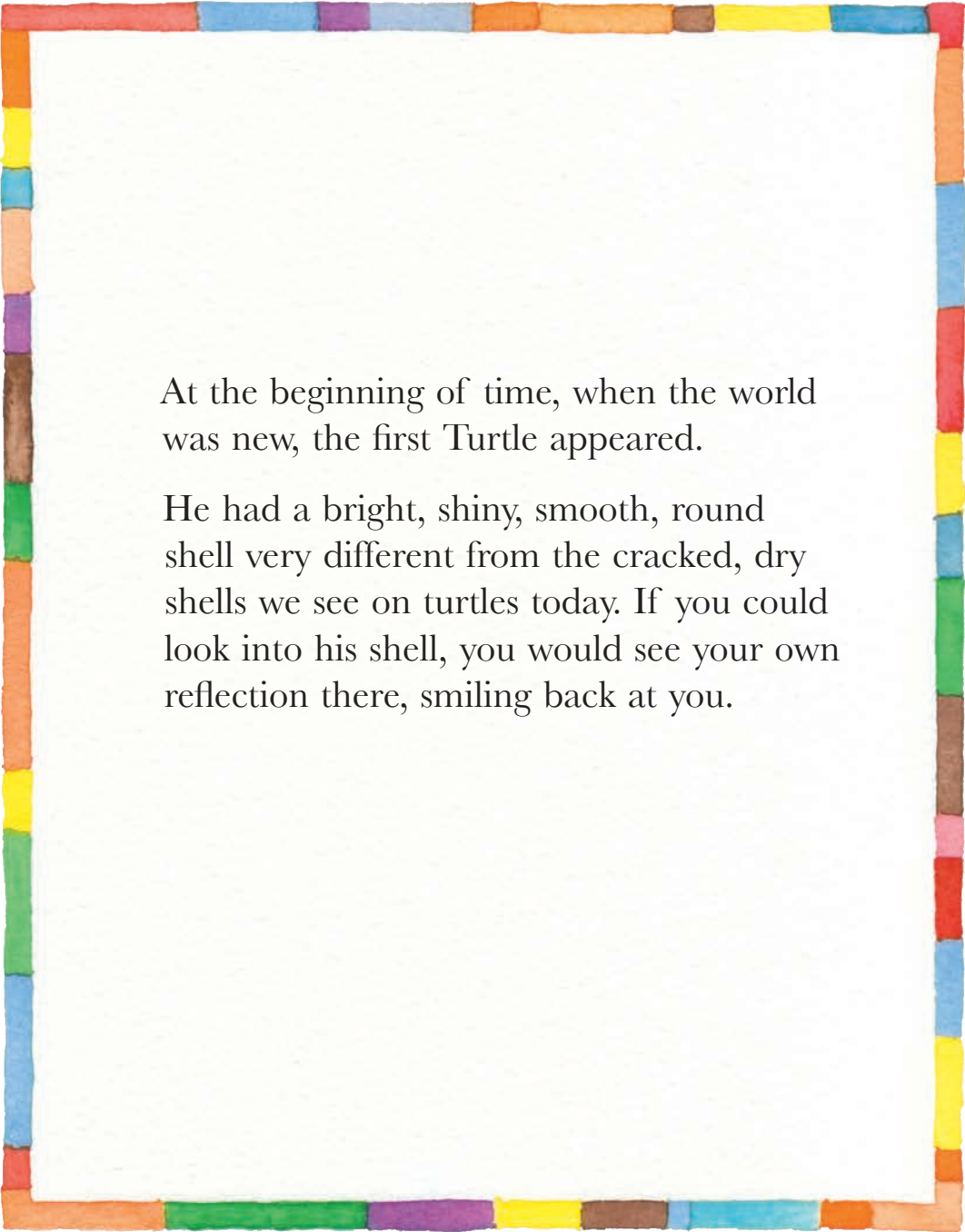


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At the beginning of time, when the world
was new, the first Turtle appeared.

He had a bright, shiny, smooth, round
shell very different from the cracked, dry
shells we see on turtles today. If you could
look into his shell, you would see your own
reflection there, smiling back at you.



Turtle liked his shiny shell, but not as much as he loved the sound of his own voice. He learned the languages of all other animals so he could talk to any animal that would listen. That's how he became friends with the birds.

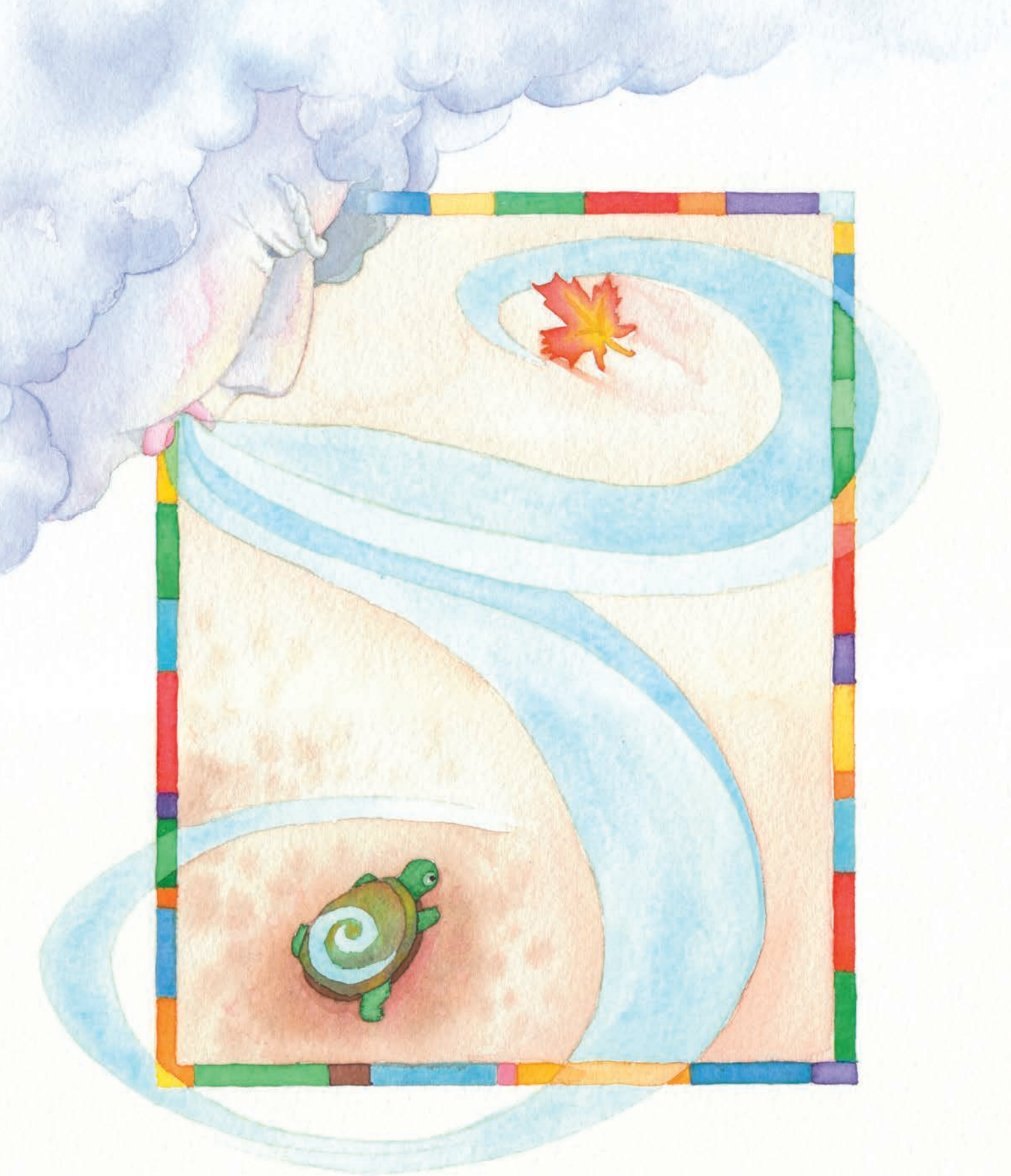
The more time Turtle spent with the birds, watching them fly about, the more he longed to join them.

He made up a little song and sang it over and over:

*A smooth and shiny shell have I
but my dearest wish would be to fly.*







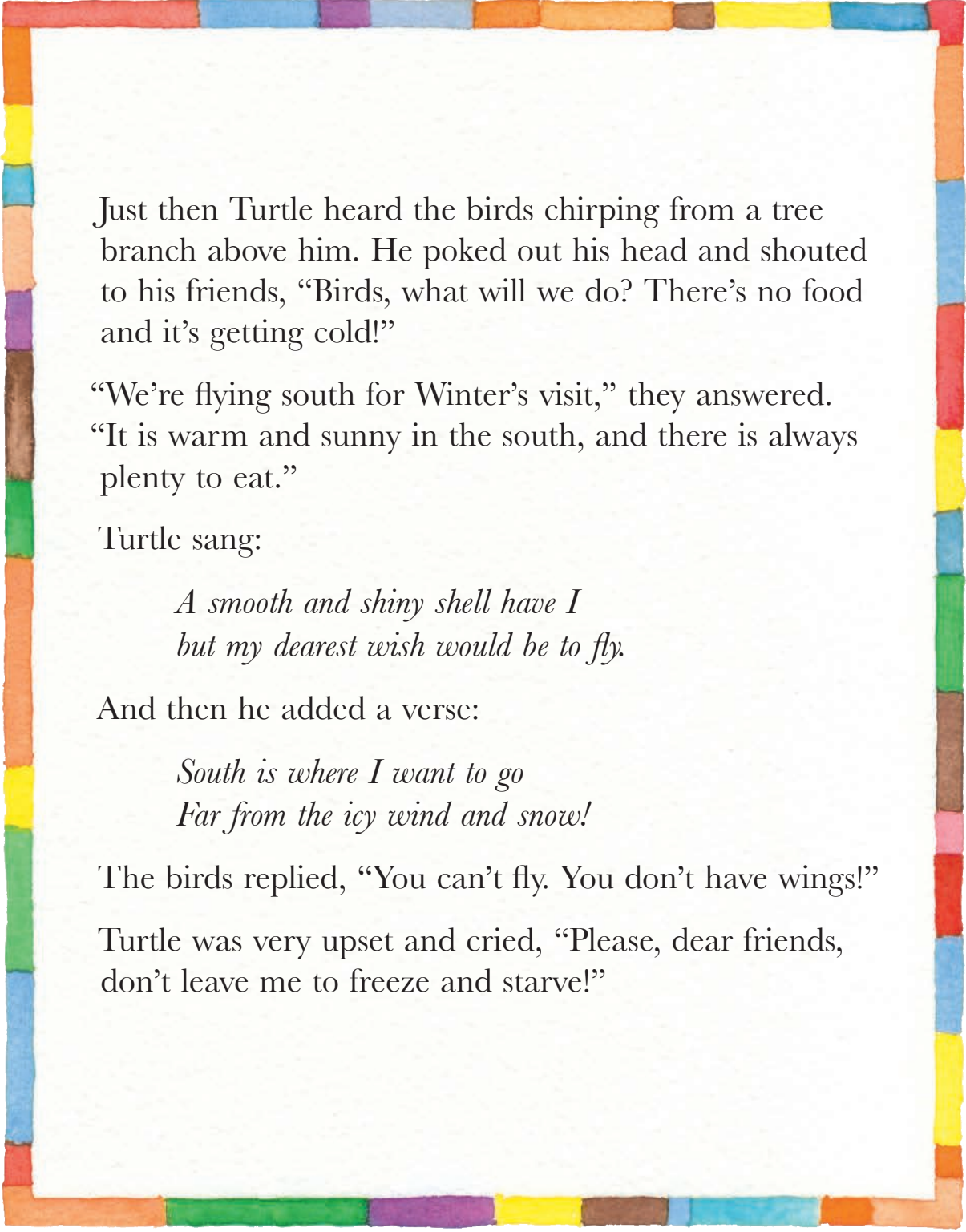
One autumn day, Turtle went out looking for something to eat. He looked high and low, but couldn't find any food! You see, Winter was coming to visit, and all the food had gone to sleep.

"Oh, what will I do?" cried Turtle. "I'm going to starve!"

A chilly wind crossed his face. He pulled his head and legs into his shell to protect himself. "Oh, what will I do? I'm going to freeze!"







Just then Turtle heard the birds chirping from a tree branch above him. He poked out his head and shouted to his friends, “Birds, what will we do? There’s no food and it’s getting cold!”

“We’re flying south for Winter’s visit,” they answered. “It is warm and sunny in the south, and there is always plenty to eat.”

Turtle sang:

*A smooth and shiny shell have I
but my dearest wish would be to fly.*

And then he added a verse:

*South is where I want to go
Far from the icy wind and snow!*

The birds replied, “You can’t fly. You don’t have wings!”

Turtle was very upset and cried, “Please, dear friends, don’t leave me to freeze and starve!”



The birds took pity on him. Two flew to the ground, picked up a strong stick with their claws and carried it to him.

The birds said, “We will carry you south, but listen very carefully, you must promise to do exactly as we say! We will each hold an end of this stick. You will hold the middle with your mouth. We know how much you love to talk, but whatever you do, do not open your mouth. You will fall down, down, down, until you hit the ground!”

Turtle promised, singing gleefully:

*Don't you worry, I'll hold on tight
I'm ready to take my first flight.*







The birds flapped their wings and flew up, up, up, into the sky! Turtle held on tightly with his mouth, just as he promised. He loved flying! There was so much to see.

Before long he began to wonder, “What is the name of that lake below us?” and “How much longer until we get there?”

He wanted to ask the birds his questions, but he couldn’t talk with his mouth closed around the stick.



He blinked his eyes...but the birds just kept on flying.

He waved his legs...but the birds just kept on flying.

He tried mumbling...but the birds just kept on flying.



Finally, Turtle couldn't take it anymore.

He opened his mouth and said,

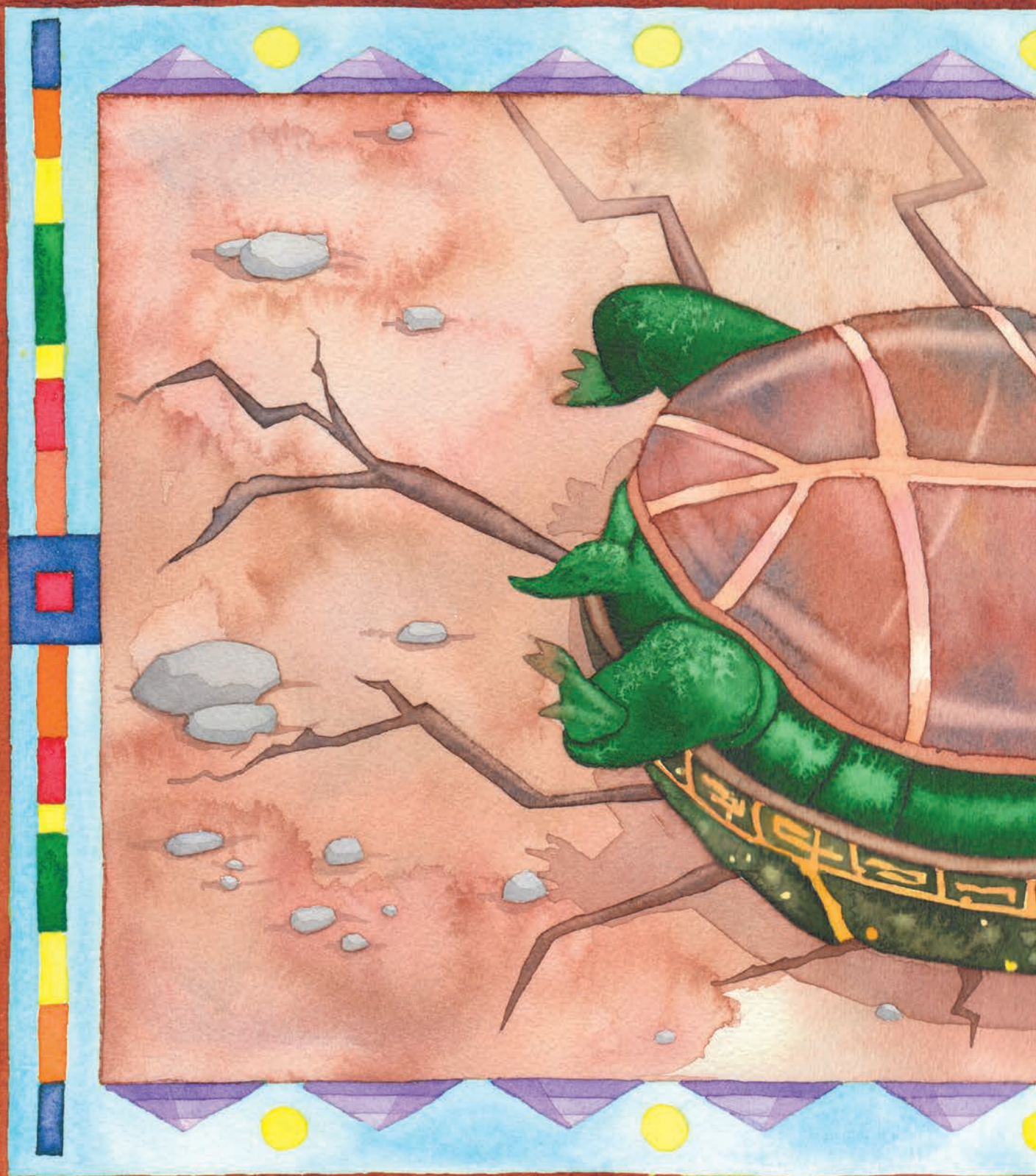
"Why don't you
pay ...
attention...
to meeeeeee....?!"

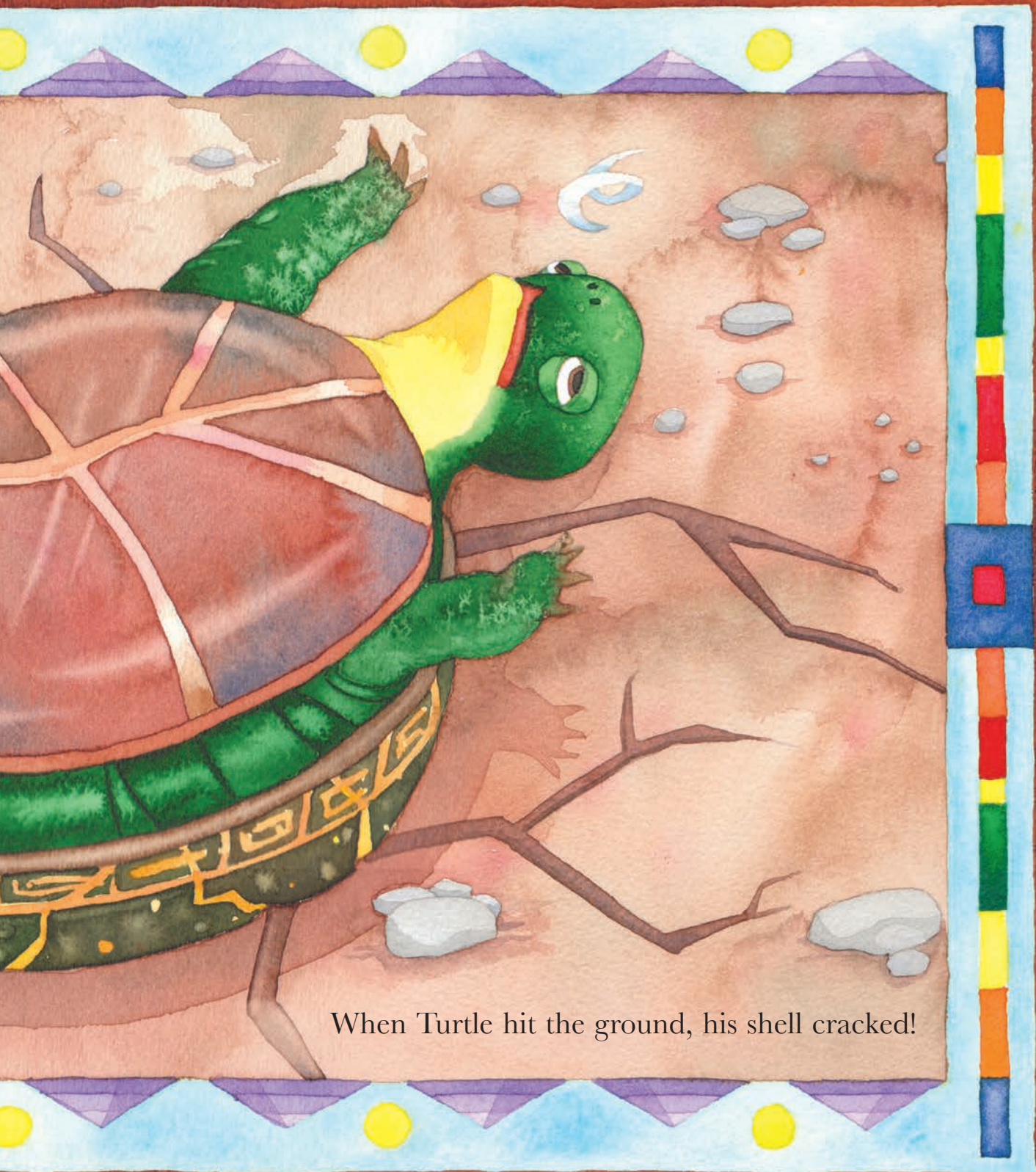


That was all the birds heard, because as soon as he opened his mouth to speak, he let go of the stick and began to fall, down, down, down!

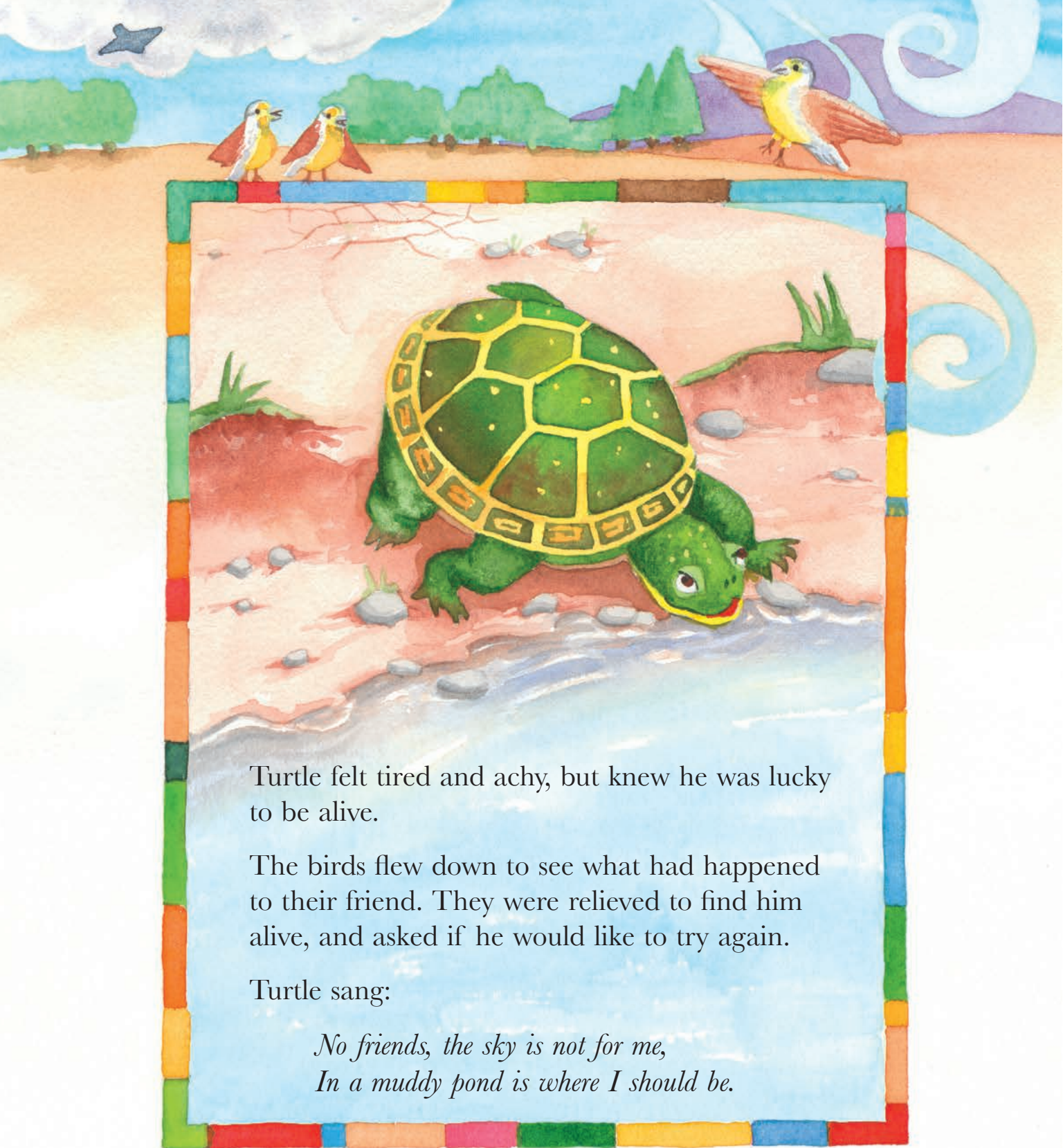
He was so frightened that he pulled his head and legs into his shell to protect himself.







When Turtle hit the ground, his shell cracked!



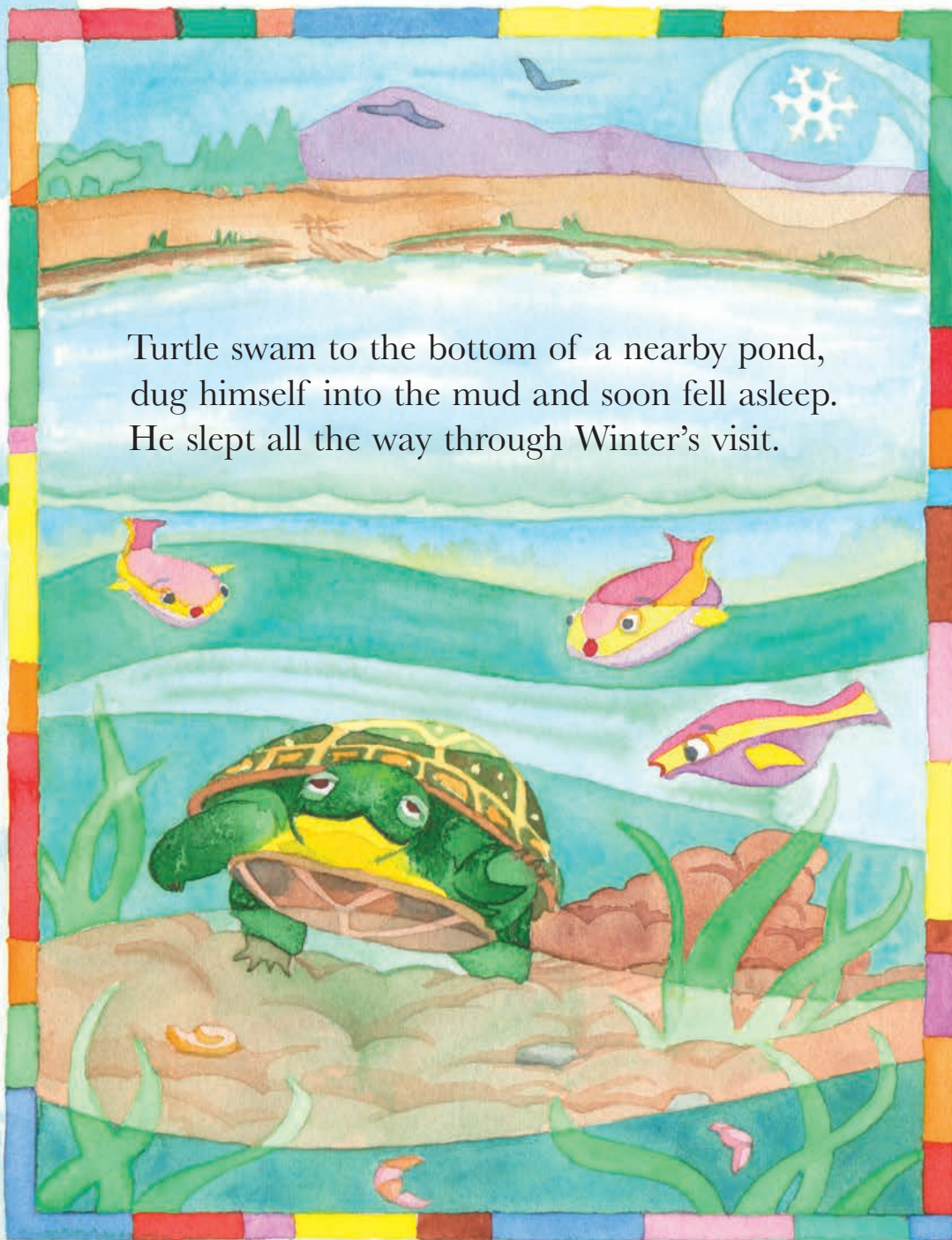
Turtle felt tired and achy, but knew he was lucky to be alive.

The birds flew down to see what had happened to their friend. They were relieved to find him alive, and asked if he would like to try again.

Turtle sang:

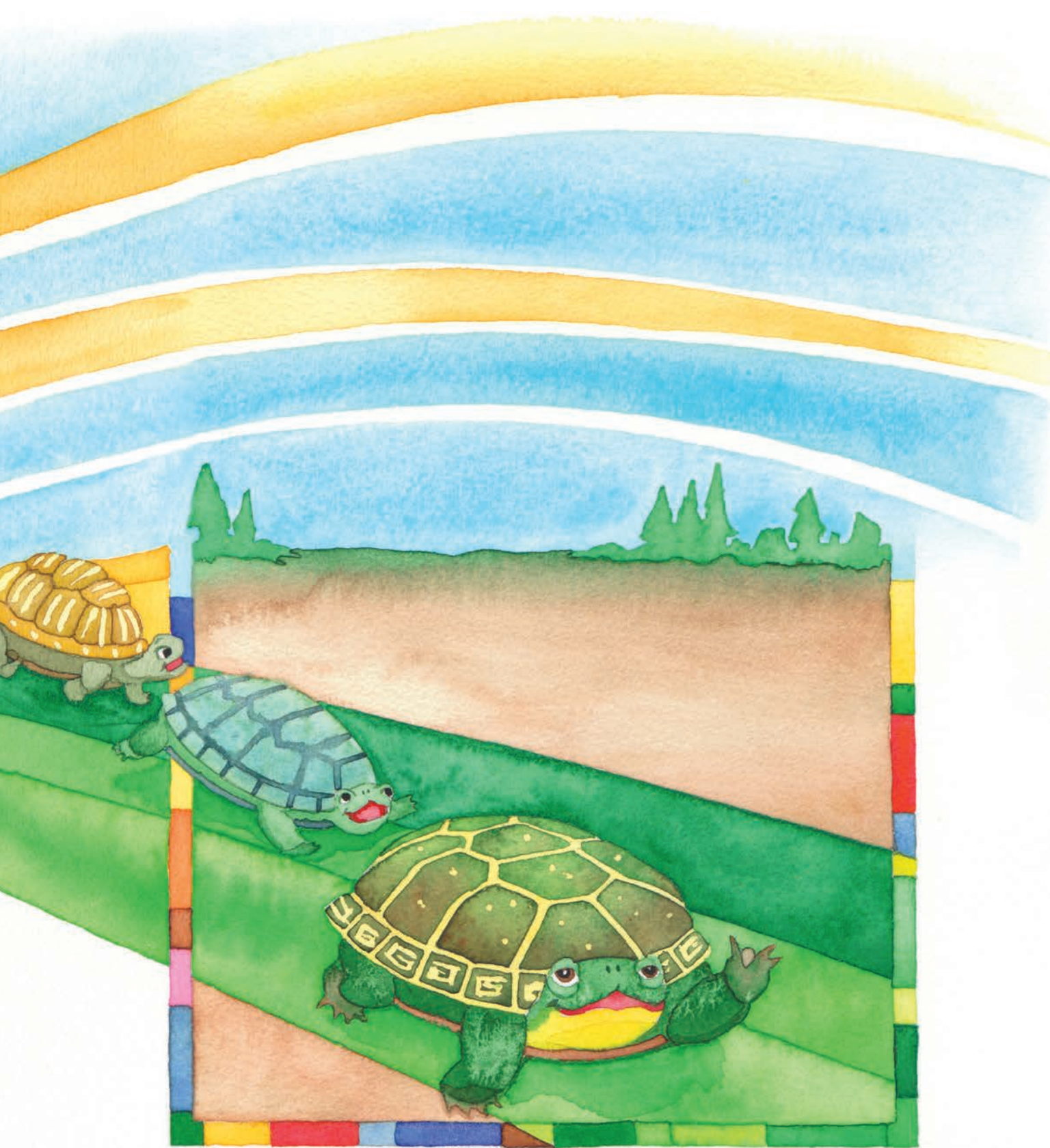
*No friends, the sky is not for me,
In a muddy pond is where I should be.*

Turtle swam to the bottom of a nearby pond,
dug himself into the mud and soon fell asleep.
He slept all the way through Winter's visit.





Now you know why many turtles have
cracked shells to this day!





About the Author

Myrna Estes lives on a little farm in Lenox, Massachusetts, where she loves waking up at dawn, going to her barn and feeding her wonderful old horse, John. After that her chores continue — she feeds the wild birds, rabbits, and any other critter that comes along! Myrna taught first grade for many years, always playing her guitar and singing with the kids. Her students' favorite song was "The Little White Duck." Now Myrna has four white ducks on her farm! "Music and animals are a very important part of my life," she says. "They make every day a happy one!"



About the Illustrator

Annette Frei spent a lot of time, as a child, in her father's meat shop and grocery store in Ferdinand, Idaho. At her disposal were boxes to be cut into robot costumes and a stock room that doubled as a jungle gym. Finding your own fun in a small town was essential, and there her older sister showed Annette how to draw the profile of a girl. That was only the beginning of her artistic pursuits.

In the heat of the Arizona desert, Annette now lives with her husband and two daughters, who offer up great creative feedback.

