

# Diné Abecedarian

**‘Alk áą’i’**, long ago.

**Baa**, on account of, before our people emerged to the fourth world, Nihalgai, Glittering world.

**Chahalheel**, darkness happened, and we would adapt to newness, the light, ‘adinííin.

**Ch’ah** and the Western wear—the urban Indian cowboy, and for some, ranching became routine, and we honored the animals since we emerged with them. Now we live to serve the **líí’**, beegashii, dibé, t’ízi, na’a’ho’he, na’a’ho’hebiyazhi.

**Dlqq’**, they watch for in the gardens. The little ones will try to shoot them with stick guns in the blank fields, scattered in dug holes. We play with rocks for fun, our figurines. We structure the dirt into tiny arroyos and canyons.

**Dzil** is what keeps the people protected. Shimá says never drive past a mountain without praying to it. They are alive too. We must respect them, we must talk to them, and we must listen to them.

**‘E’e’áahgo**, when the sun goes down, we pray to end the day. Before dawn, everything is beautiful, and we begin with prayer. The sun rises, we are born again.

**Gah** was the first word my daughter spoke, and I remember your first little stuffed animal given to you in the NICU was a rabbit. As you grew, you touched its ears gently, kissed the tip of its nose, and hugged it when you wanted to give love for the first time.

**Ghaaji’**, in October, means the harvest for the people ends and for their gardens to be cleared, cleaned, and ready for the next season. Leaves dance and the eagle nests are deserted.

**Haadasha’ yit’éego**—How, in the world, did sickness happen again?

**Hwééldi**, was where our people walked to. Carson, the capturer—our people, bounties. Hearts were buried across 450 miles, and who would want to reenact tragedy?

**‘Tiná**, life, is beautiful. We see beauty in all life. Diyin Diné’é warned us to stay living accordingly and value everything in our journey, the good and the bad.

**Jaatlóól** dangle on my ears, turquoise, white shell, and coral strung from shimá's fingertips, and she tells me of stories of amá saní tsoh, when she had to help wash clothes in the waters of Totsoh, using wash boards, the *zh-zh-zh-zh* against cloth and tiny fingertips.

**Kéyahgi**, on the land seeing Shizhe'é interact with Hailee is like a flashback of him and me. His patience is fluid and calm, and Hailee is impatient and a storm of wonder. They tread side by side on the earth, in paces. My father prints the earth in inches and speaks to it in stride;

**Nahadszaan shimá** listens. Hailee steps unorthodox, earth listens and knows she has many more miles to find her own rhythm. Is this what parenting is? Walking side by side with your little one, finding a rhythm?

**K'e**, family and kinship remains sole. When you were born, Hailee, your clans are Táchiinii nilii, bilagáana éi yashchiin, 'Áshììhi da bicheii, bilagáana éi da binalí. That is who you are first, and even in the clan-ship, it's structured as such, maternally.

**Kwe'é**, here, Shimá will say as I'm shaping thin pieces of silver into raindrops. Time is measured by each movement in the silver. You have to possess gifted hands.

**Lq'í**, much

**Lid**, smoke from the charred tip of sweetgrass fills the kitchen, and I articulate my thoughts to the green braid, speaking as if I were in confession, pleading for my daughter's safe return home.

**Má'ii** stories not only teach children a moral, they're proof animals were the first to roam the creational worlds but like us—can be foolish.

**Saad Náá'áldó**, repeat these words again.

**'Olta'** began in 1968 as we were the first tribal college to be established. Cheii Tsoh bináá' dootl 'izh sang with the founders during groundbreaking. They wanted education for their children, to believe in Sà'áh Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón.

**Saánii** told stories of Shash and the superstitions that we cannot step in their tracks, otherwise we offset our balance and become wild and angry like the bear.

**T'áá 'altsogóó**, in all directions, the arrow spins mildly and Hailee watches as the arrow stops, pointing at her. Her deep brown eyes look up at mine, she smiles at the thought of being chosen, the lucky one.

**Tl 'é'ílníí'** at midnight, the owl is perched on a nearby branch, its yellow eye peering for a sign.

**Ts'in** are in my dreams. Ivory and lush, should one ever dream of bones?

**Wóláchíí'**, the ants build empires at the edge of my feet. Two ants are carrying a leaf and I wonder what they use it for? To collect water? For shade? So many questions I want to ask that I don't know the language for.

X makes the sound like *H* in Din é Bizáád. Hailee equals Xailee. **Axhe'hee'** means thank you.

**Yas dóó Zas** sprinkle on the top of my nose. I take a breath in and out realizing the season of storytelling, string games—embracing Spider Woman, hearing Yé'ii Bi Cheii songs on KTNN and shash needing their rest, like the harvest.

**'aZhí**, hear my voice.