

Coyote and the Buffalo

A Uintah/Ouray Ute Tale

Cultural Note

The buffalo was a giver of life to the Ute people. It is a sacred animal and part of the circle of life. Every part of the buffalo was used; nothing was wasted. For example, the hides were used for blankets and for covering the teepee and sweat lodge. The hooves were used for making utensils. When the Utes first encountered African Americans, they referred to them as "buffalo people," because their curly hair resembled the curly hair on the mane of the buffalo.

According to Ute tradition, Coyote stories should only be told during the winter time.

Vocabulary

bounded

groaned

hollered

pierced

yelped

The Native American Indian Literacy Project was made possible by funds from the Utah State Office of Education (USOE). It is a joint effort of the USOE and San Juan School District Media Center. For more information about this project, contact Shirlee Silversmith at (801) 538-7838.

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It was winter, and snow covered the plains. There was very little to eat. *Yourgurnvech*, Coyote, and his children gathered snow and threw snowballs at one another to keep their minds off the growling in their empty stomachs. The *dahgurch* children, crow children, camped not far away, began throwing snowballs at them, too. They laughed and hollered in happiness. Suddenly a snowball hit Coyote square on the nose. "Yeow!" he howled. Coyote and his children studied the snowball. "This isn't snow!" yowled Coyote. "This is made of kidney fat. That's why they're laughing and loving life. They must be eating good over there!"



Coyote sent Darning Needle, a little blue bug, to sneak into the crows' camp to spy on them.

Darning Needle sat very still as he peeked in through a hole in their teepee. The crows had lots of food by the fire. Big pieces of buffalo meat hung from a stick over the fire, and the fat dripped into the fire, sizzling in a most delicious way. Darning Needle scurried back to Coyote's camp and reported, "They've got lots of food over there!"

Coyote scratched his chin. "We've got to get some buffalo, too. Tomorrow, we'll break camp and search for buffalo." He chose Weasel to stay behind and spy on the crows.

Weasel crept very quietly into their camp. He searched until he found some caves where the crows had hidden a whole herd of buffalo! "The crows have hidden all the buffalo at their camp!"

Without making a sound, Weasel led all the buffalo out of the caves. Then he went back to where Coyote and his family were camped and told them the good news.





"I knew it!" exclaimed Coyote. "Let's go hunting!" Coyote and his family set out to make bows and arrows for a great hunt.

They used the strong branches of the currant bush to make the bows and arrows. Old Woodpecker helped chip arrow points out of flint, and they traded with him. Coyote, though, didn't want to trade any of his things. "What's so special about Woodpecker's arrowheads anyway?" he muttered. "Look, I'll use these smooth leaves from quaking aspen for my arrow points. Then I won't have to pay anything for them."

With his arrows ready, Coyote went to bed, excited for the hunt. He tossed and turned all night long. As the sun peeked over the eastern horizon, he hopped up to get the horses ready for the hunt.

Coyote announced, "Each man will hunt for his own family. We will not share our meat."

"But, Coyote, we'll get more if we work together and share everything we get," they suggested.

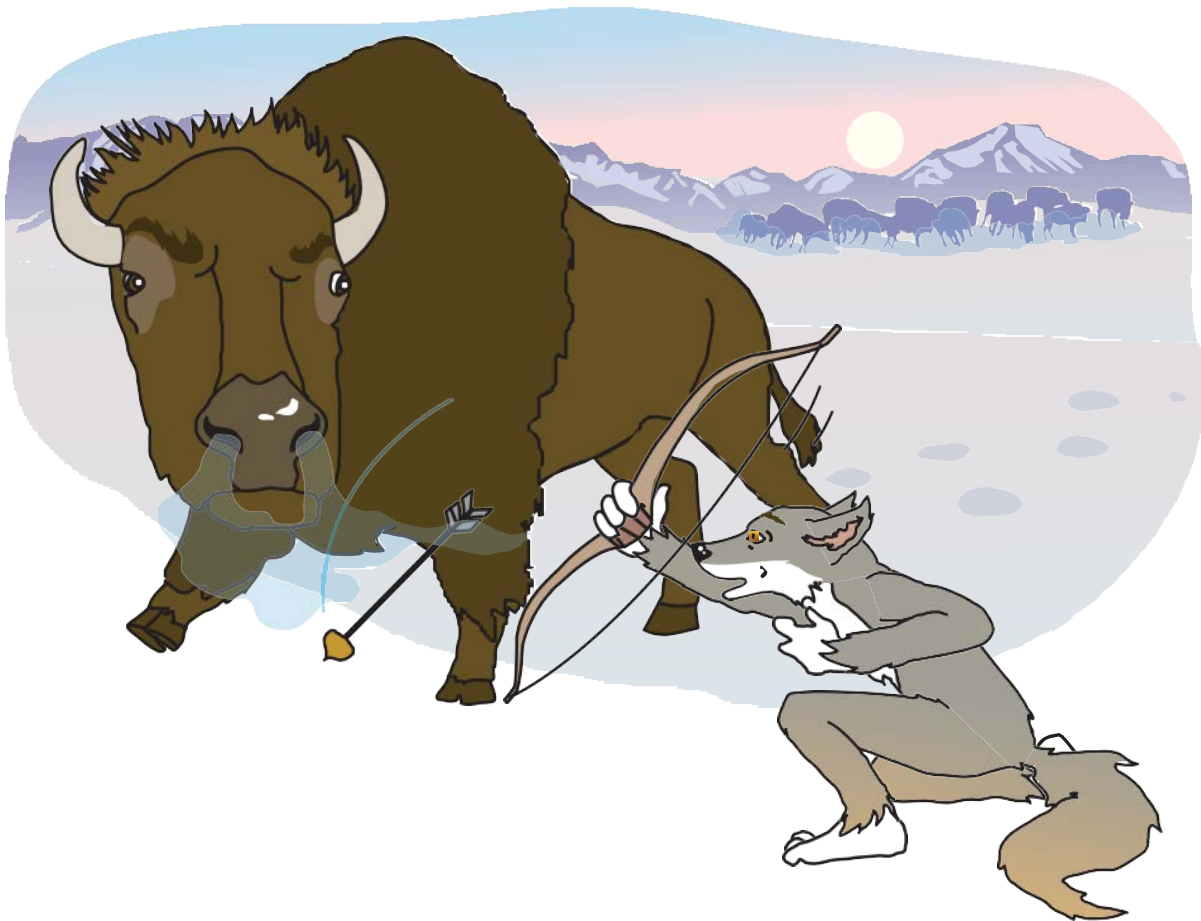
"No way! I can do just fine on my own!" he yelled.

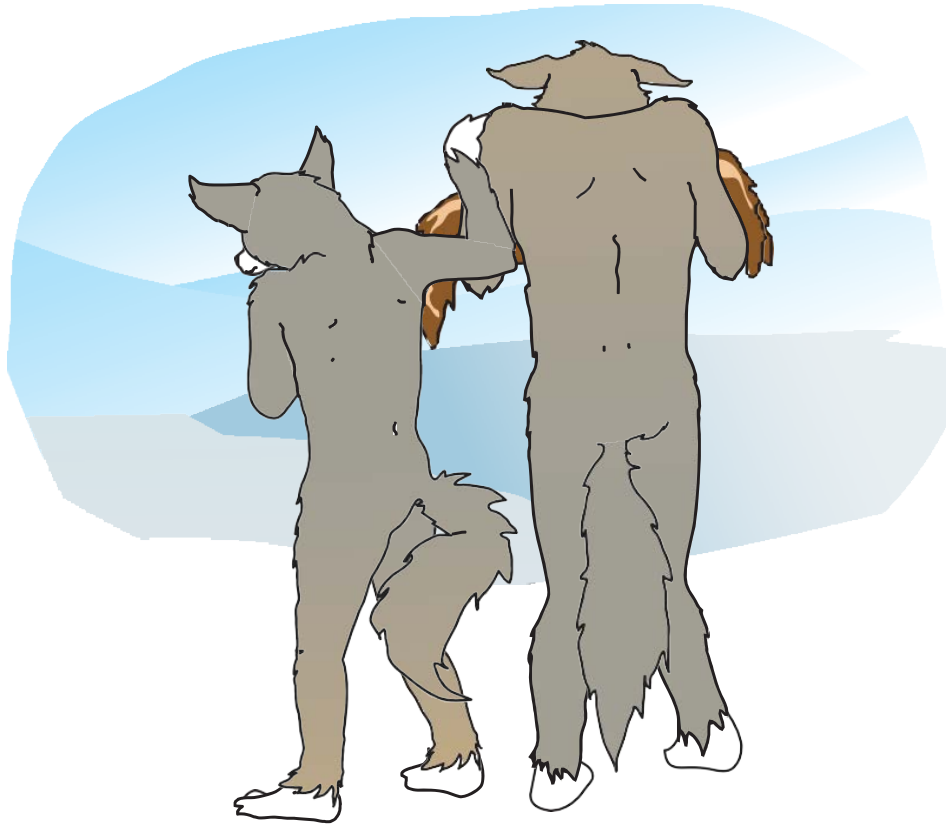
Coyote yelped wildly, "Ay ya a ya!" And the hunt was on!



The buffalo were plentiful. They covered the mountainside like a thick forest of trees. All around, the hunters were getting their buffalo. But Poor Coyote! He shot his arrows left and right, but not one of his aspen arrows pierced the thick hide of the buffalo. The smooth edges of the leaves just bent in half or bounced off the buffalo. "What's wrong?" asked his wife. "Why aren't you killing any buffalo?"

"My arrows!" he stammered. "They're not working like I want them to!"





They watched as the other hunters gathered the buffalo they had killed and butchered them. Coyote's mouth watered at the thought of hot, sizzling buffalo meat. The men looked up from their work and asked, "Coyote, how many buffalo did you get?"

Coyote shook his head and answered, "None, my friend. None at all. My arrows weren't working right."

One of the men looked up and said, "You didn't shoot any? I know you said we wouldn't share, but.... here, have some of mine." Coyote hung his head and walked away, his eyes lowered to the ground. His wife thanked the man for the meat and followed Coyote home.



Coyote went to Woodpecker. He said, "I was wrong not to ask for your help before. Will you help me now?"

Woodpecker said, "I will, but you must trade something for the arrowheads."

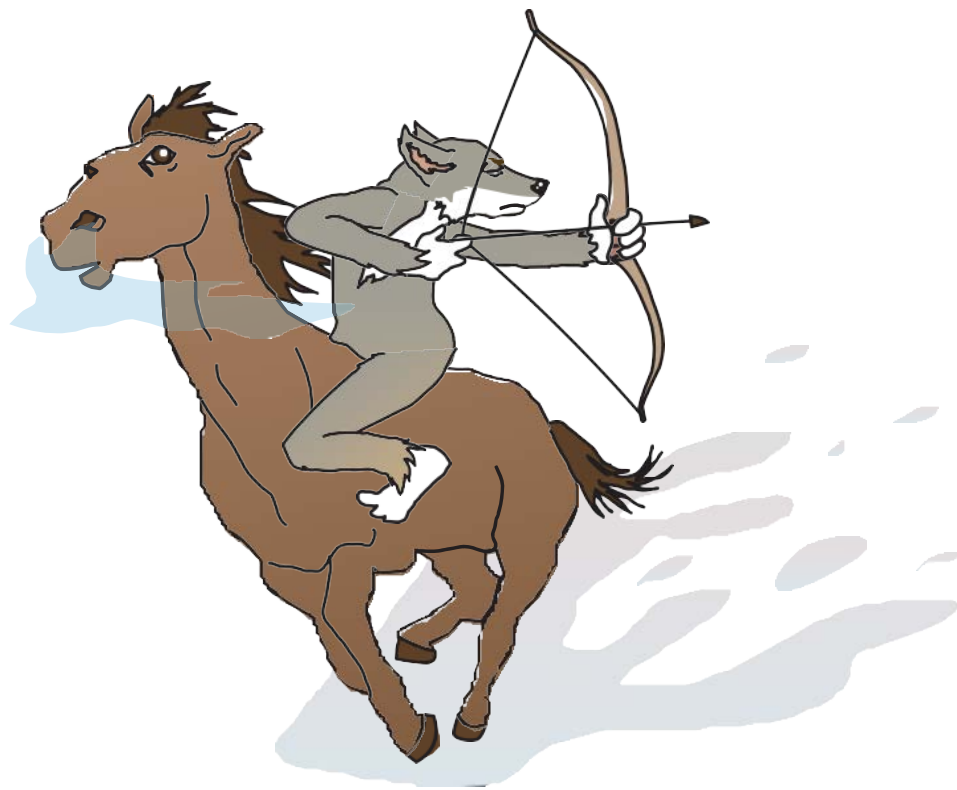
Coyote said, "I don't have anything to trade right now. Won't you just give them to me?"

Woodpecker was silent. Coyote reached forward to take the sharp-edged arrow points, but Woodpecker pushed them out of Coyote's reach.

"What? You're not going to share?" whined Coyote. "I'll show you!" He grabbed his club and swung it at Woodpecker. Woodpecker groaned and fell backwards. Coyote grabbed a handful of arrow points and hurried home.

When he arrived back at his camp, Coyote gathered everyone together. "We had a fine hunt yesterday, but we must go out once more," he said. The others in his camp complained, but Coyote held up his hand to silence them. "This time," he said, "we are all going to give to one another. We will share our meat."

During the hunt, he rode like the wind on his horse. The others sat atop their horses, amazed at how fast Coyote was hunting. Armed with his bow and Woodpecker's new arrows, Coyote shot in every direction. He killed many buffalo. When Coyote was finished, he said, "I shouldn't share with you. None of you even tried to hunt!" But he kept his promise and divided the buffalo with everyone.





Coyote and his wife went home with the fresh meat. Coyote smiled as he watched his children eat the savory morsels. As the campfire crackled and the sun set, they fell asleep with smiles on their faces and their stomachs full.

Later that evening, Coyote gathered several large slabs of buffalo that his wife had cooked. He traveled to Woodpecker's home, where he found Woodpecker sitting near the fire, wrapped in a woven blanket. Woodpecker watched Coyote come in. Coyote didn't look up. He placed the pack of buffalo on the ground in front of Woodpecker and left without saying a word.

Glossary

dahooch - buffalo

yourgurrvech - coyote

dahgurch - crow

turmert - winter

tuhnah - hunt

Reading Suggestions

- Roam around the Internet in search of buffalo. Try <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/buffalo>. Check out the puzzles and fun section.
- Take a family trip to visit a museum. Look for places close by that may have a teepee you can go inside. In Cache County, Utah, you can visit the American West Heritage Center. See <http://www.americanwestcenter.org> for a list of activities to enjoy there as a family.
- An onomatopoeia is a word that is spelled the way it sounds, like “bang,” “boom,” or “woof.” There are some examples in this story, like “sizzle.” Write a post card to someone in your family and use onomatopoeia. Also use sense words (sight, smell, taste, touch, and feel) to make your descriptions more vivid.

2006

Produced by

Utah State Office of Education and
San Juan School District Media Center

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