

Coyote and the Geese

A Paiute Tale

Cultural Note

Coyote tales are part of the Paiute oral tradition used to teach proper behavior and values from an early age. These stories are only told during the winter time. The Coyote illustrates the mischievous nature in all of us.

Vocabulary

Cacti

mesa

mush

prickly pear patch

privilege

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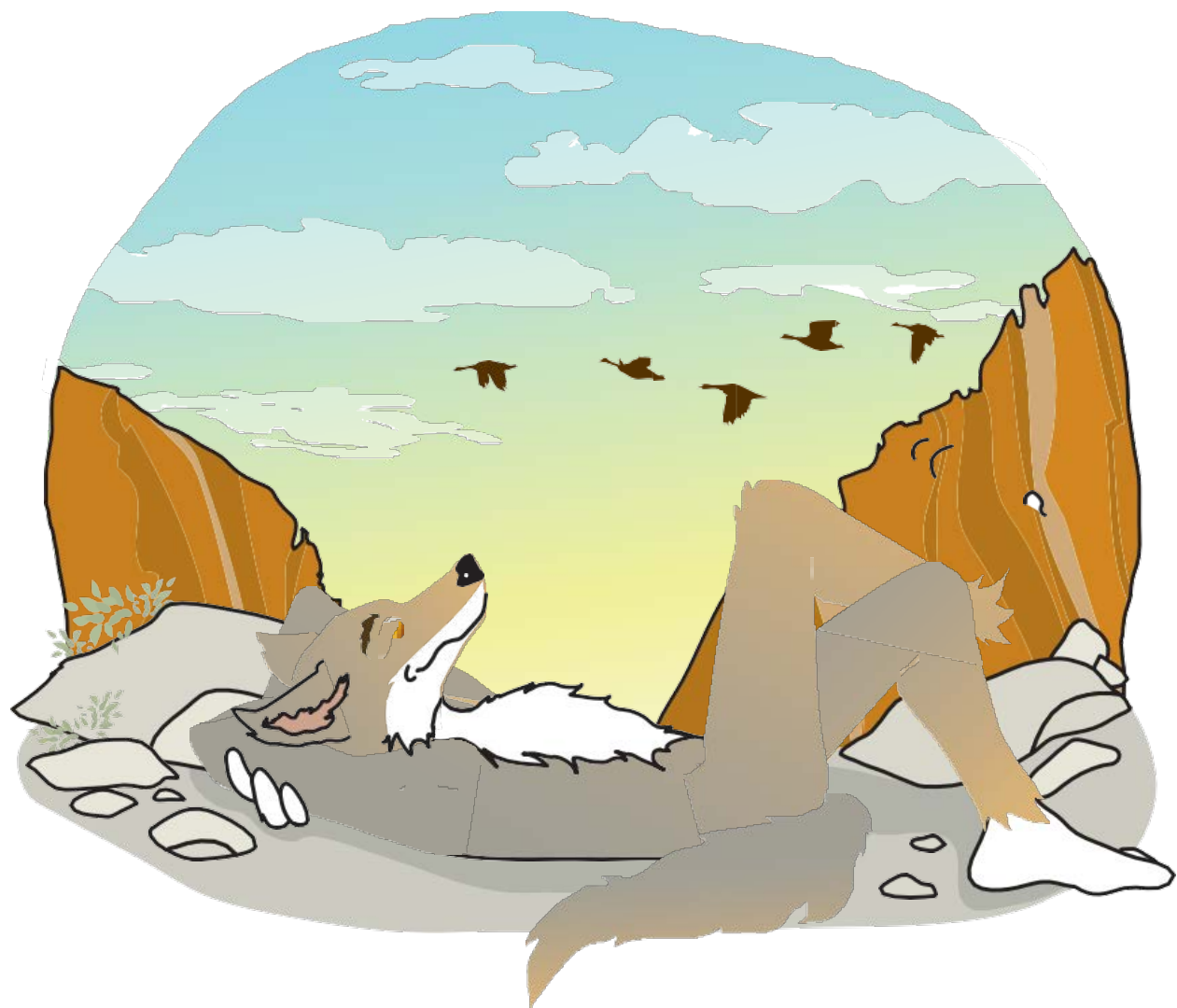
Adapted by
LeeAnn Parker

As told by
Eleanor Tom

Illustrated by
Molly Trainor

Cultural Consultants
**Karma Grayman, Dorena Martineau,
Arthur Richard, and Rita Walker**

Editing and layout by
Kathryn Hurst



One crisp, autumn day Soonuv, Coyote, lay in the noonday sun, lazily dreaming and watching the clouds dance across the sky. Suddenly, he heard singing: it was the calling sounds of geese high above, their wings and bodies gliding across the desert sky.



Coyote jumped up and ran to the top of the mesa. "Please, my brothers, come down here and show me how to fly!" he called. He danced and yelped and cried with all his might, pleading, "Please, I want to fly with you!"

The geese looked down and saw Coyote. Coyote looked up, his eyes full of pleading, his chin upturned in anticipation. They swooped down in one great circle, down, down, down, and landed where Coyote danced and yelped and cried.

"Please!" said the lead goose. "Stop this noise!" "Oh, but I want to fly with you!" begged Coyote.

The geese looked at one another, gathered in a circle to discuss the matter, then turned to Coyote, their wings folded across their chests. The lead goose stepped forward and spoke:

"This is a serious matter, Coyote. Flying is a privilege, one which we will share with you for a short time only because you beg so pitifully."

Coyote danced and pranced around the group of geese with excitement; still, the geese remained serious, and Coyote smiled, stopping in front of the lead goose.





The lead goose plucked a silver-green feather from the inside of his wing and handed it to Coyote.

"This feather will be our gift to you. From this mesa, leap across the tallest peak, and you will fly as long as you can hold onto the feather."

"Yes, yes, oh, yes!" said Coyote.

"Remember, you must hear our voices and not go far from us," the lead goose instructed. "You must follow the rules and stay in line. If you can't keep these rules, we'll have to take back the feather."

"Yes, yes, I'll follow the rules!" said Coyote. "And don't be showing off!" said the lead goose.

Coyote laughed, "Don't worry! I never show off!

Let's go!"

Coyote took a running leap across the tallest peak on the mesa. The five geese lifted off the floor of the canyon, gliding near Coyote in perfect V-formation. Coyote grinned with sheer joy, the feather safely clutched in his paw.

Coyote was filled with great energy. He soared high above the mesa. He looked down and saw the jagged red rocks, the winding river, and the blazing oranges of the flowering cactii across the valley.

"Aaa-yaaaaa!" Coyote yelled as he flew across the sky, away from the geese.

Coyote laughed and zoomed high above the five geese, then below, hiding behind clouds and doing somersaults and loop-de-loops.

The second goose called out, "Coyote, you need to stay in line with us! Stop showing off!"

Coyote laughed and zig-zagged in front, then in back, then right through the formation.

The third goose called out, "Coyote, to fly well, we must work together! It will be easier for you when we work together. Quit showing off! Come, work with us!"



Coyote just laughed and swooped in an arc high above the geese. He could picture the other animals far below watching him glide through the air. "I'm amazing!" he thought happily to himself.

The lead goose called out, "Coyote, you will tire soon. Slow down, and stay close to us. Don't be showing off!"

Coyote just laughed and zipped ahead, so proud to think he could fly so grandly. "Maybe I don't really need them at all," he thought. "After all, I still have the feather. Maybe that's all I really need anyhow!"

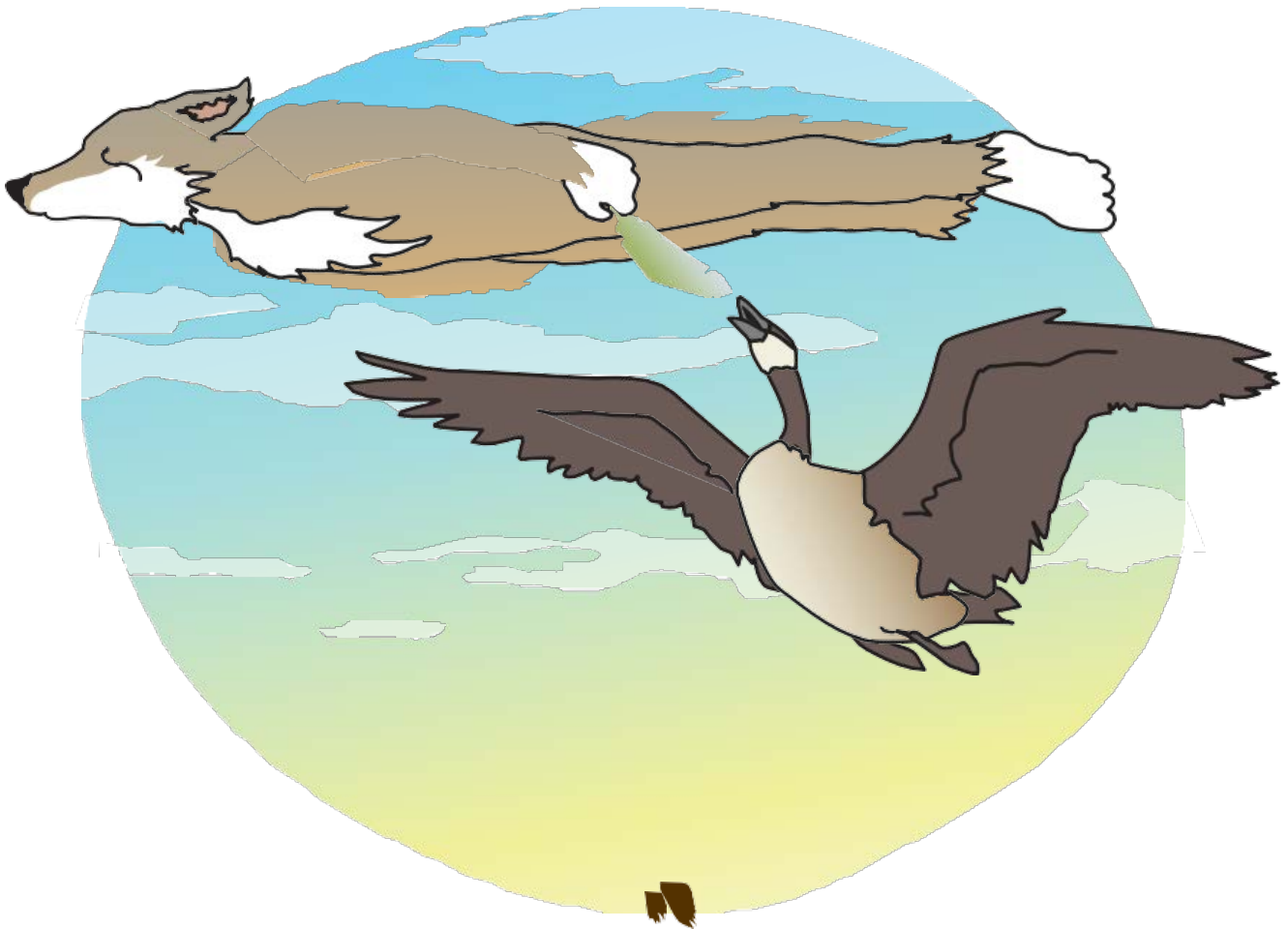
The lead goose called out, "Hey, I'm not going to tell you again. If you keep doing that, I'm not going to let you fly with us any more."

"OK, OK," said Coyote. But he didn't really mean it. Coyote kept zipping through the air, trying out his fancy tricks, whipping in and out of line.

The lead goose looked at the other geese. "Let's not let him fly with us any more. It's time to let him go now."

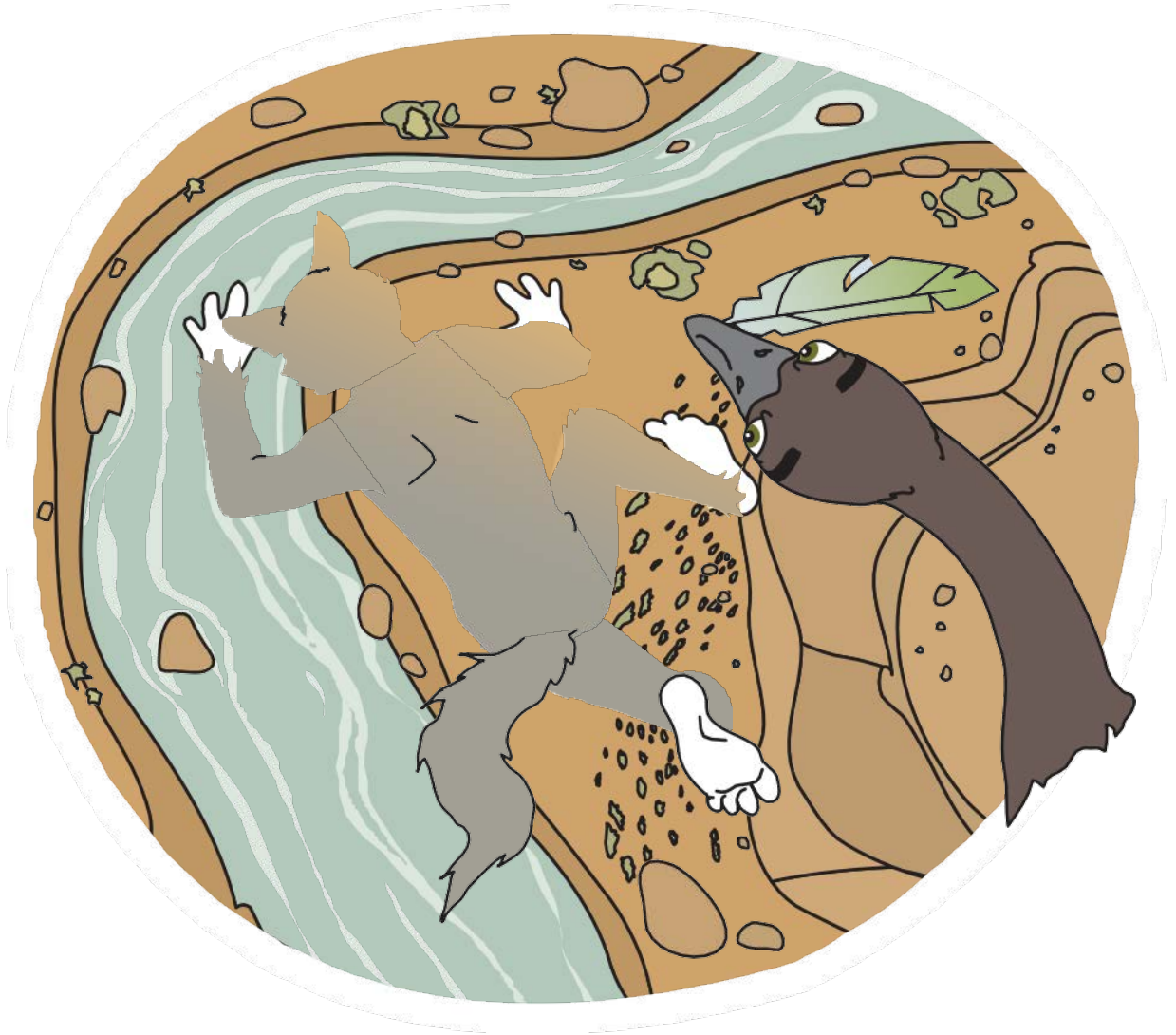
"Yes, it's time," they said.





Coyote, far ahead, spun his head to look back at the geese, and he laughed aloud. He was laughing so hard that he didn't see the lead goose pull ahead of the rest of the group.

Coyote laughed while he spun through the air. He didn't notice the lead goose pull up close to him in the sky. Only when the lead goose stretched out his neck and snatched the silver-green feather from Coyote's paw did Coyote see him.



Coyote looked down as he tumbled from the sky. "Yee-ooowww!" he yelped. Closer and closer he came to the jagged red rocks, the winding river, and the blazing oranges of the flowering cactii across the valley.

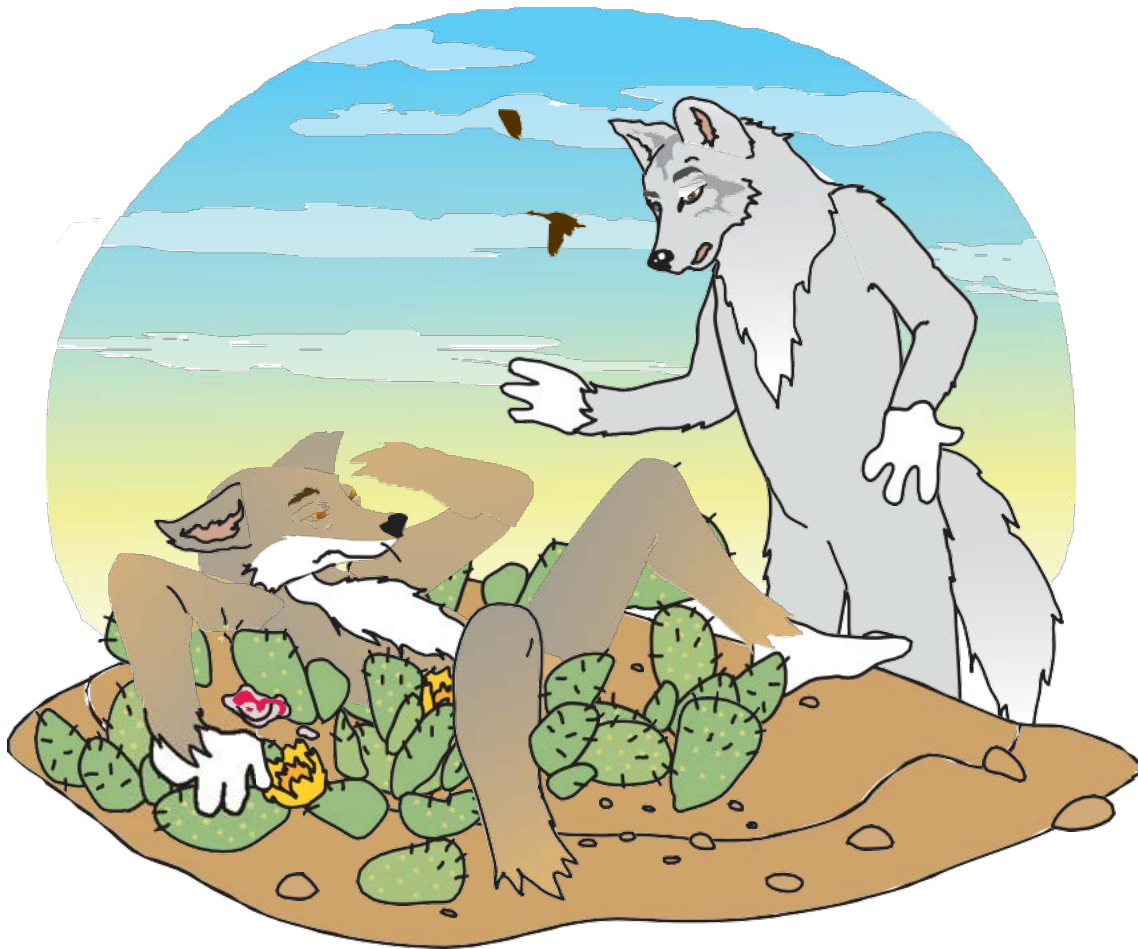
Baboom! Coyote crashed through the branches of a tall cedar. His body and head banged against the rocks in the canyon. Finally, he landed in a painful heap right on top of a prickly pear patch.

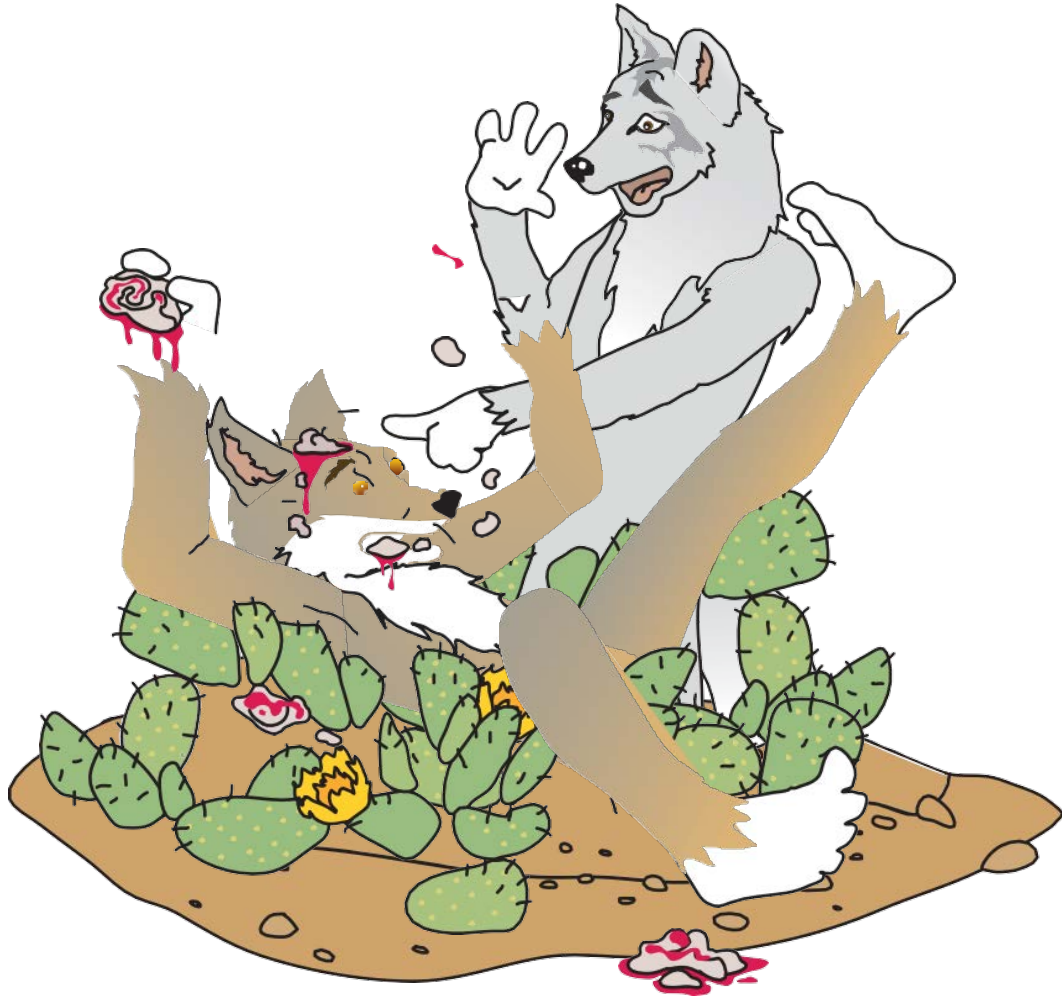
Coyote lifted his crooked and broken head. Needles poked out at strange angles from his face. "Oh, my head!" he moaned. He looked up into the sky as the silhouette of the five geese grew smaller and smaller.

Wolf came past, his paws padding softly on the sandy path, and stopped in front of Coyote. "Hey, Brother, what happened to you?"

Coyote whined, "Oh, those stupid geese up there!

They took my feather away, and now I can't fly any more! And my head! Oh, how it hurts!"





"But, hey!" Coyote said, "Look! Some people must have left some mush here on the rock."

Coyote whimpered in pain as he rolled over. He reached for some of the mush on the rock beside him and stuffed it in his mouth. "Mmm! It's good!" he said. "And I'm not going to share with you, Brother!"

His brother, the Wolf, exclaimed, "Are you crazy? You better not be doing that! Don't you know? You're eating your own brain!"

Glossary

Aaa-yaaaa - expression of delight

ka'ov - geese

pawkuhn'uv - cloud

Soonuv - Coyote

Yee-oooww - expression of fright

Reading Suggestions

- Coyote broke an important rule in the story, and he had to suffer the consequences. What are the rules at your house? Do you know your classroom rules?
- In the story, Coyote is "lazily dreaming and watching the clouds." Do you ever take time to look at the clouds? Go outside and look up at the sky. See if you can find familiar shapes in the clouds.
- In the story, you'll find the phrase "prickly pear patch." Pick a letter of the alphabet and brainstorm as many words as you can think of that begin with that letter. Then make the words into a phrase or sentence. When you say it fast five times, it makes a tongue twister.

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