



The Eye Juggler Coyote

A Uintah/Ouray Ute Tale

Cultural Note

When the earth was new, there were no people, only the animals. The animals had human characteristics, and they were able to speak to one another. Coyote was often the trickster and had to learn the hard way.

The Ute people tell stories about Coyote and other animals to their children. Based on Coyote's mistakes, the elders teach children about proper behavior and positive attitudes. The lessons learned help them avoid making the same mistakes Coyote did and suffering the consequences in their own lives.

Vocabulary

grimaced

hollered

meandered

muttered

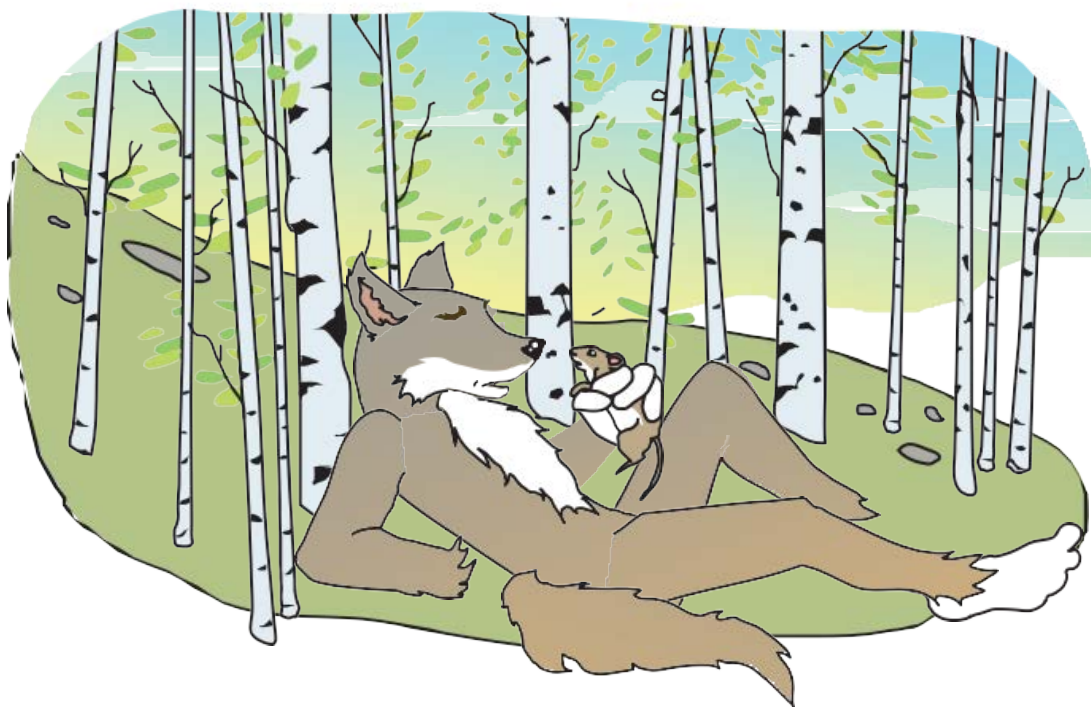
scurried

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One day, Yourgurvech, Coyote, strolled through the orchard. Birds chirped high up in the treetops. He threw his head back and hollered, "Hey, little brothers, come on down here where I can see you."

One of the birds flew down and landed on a branch just out of Coyote's reach. Coyote asked, "What's all this noise you're making? It sounds like you're doing something fun."

The little bird threw out its red chest and answered, "We're playing a game. It's called eye juggling."

"Oh, please, Weecheech, Bird, teach it to me!" whined Coyote.



The little bird flew down to a large rock, still a safe distance above where Coyote sat. "Well, here, I'll show you," said the bird. "First, you pop your eyes out, like this." The little bird flicked his wingtips near his eyes. His eyeballs landed in his talons. "Then you toss them up in the air, like so. Most importantly, you must call out the magic words, and your eyes will land perfectly back in their places."

"Like this?" Coyote asked, as he tried the new trick.

"Yes, you've got it!" chirped the bird.

"Oh, and one more thing," the bird warned, "don't try this game near the bushes, and stay far away from tree branches."





Well, Coyote was a creature that didn't like anyone telling him what he could or couldn't do. "Who do you think you are, telling me what I can't do?" he muttered under his breath.

"Coyote, I'm warning you. Whatever you do, stay away from the branches."

Coyote winked at the bird and replied, "No problem!"

"Hmmpf," said the bird, and he flew back to his friends high up in the treetops.

Coyote played with his eyes all morning long. He'd throw up one eye, then the other, and when he called out the magic words, they would fall back into his eye sockets. He laughed and meandered through the valley. He was having so much fun that he didn't notice he was on a mountainside covered with quaking aspen. He tossed his eyeballs up, but they didn't return.

"Oh, look how strong I am!" He flexed his muscles on his arms. "I don't know my own strength! I must have thrown them so high that they've gone out into orbit. Yes, that's it! Yes, I'll just take a little break and call them down later." He lay down to take a nap in the cool shade of the aspen trees.



Just as he was falling asleep, he awoke with a great start. Something was scurrying up his legs! Coyote grabbed at the creature. He held it in his paws. "Please," squeaked the creature, "let me go! I'm just trying to get past you!"

Coyote sniffed at the creature. It was

Poo oo chch, Mouse. Mouse wiggled and squirmed in Coyote's grip, but Coyote held on tighter.

"Mouse, brother, I need your help. Give me one of your eyes!"

"And if I don't?" Mouse squeaked.

"If you don't? Well, then, I'm going to have to...to...eat you."

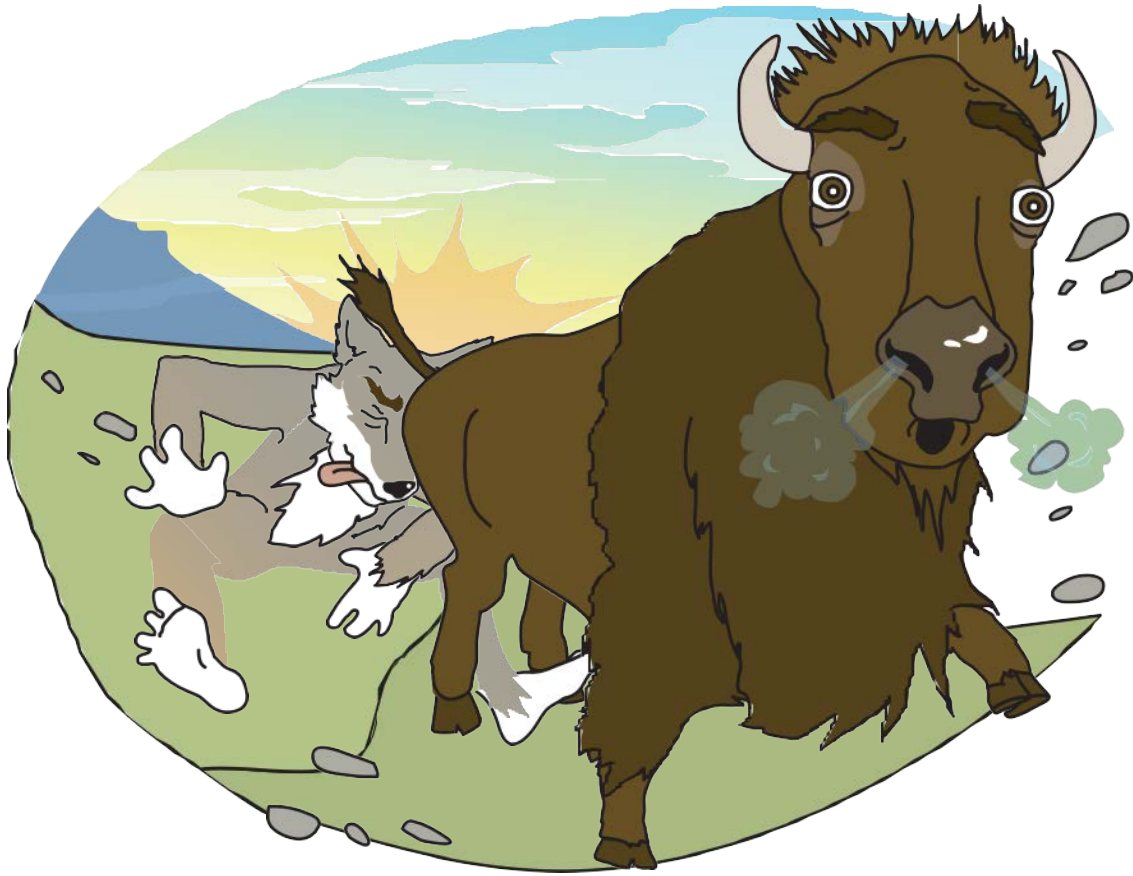




Mouse sighed. He popped one of his eyes out and handed it over to Coyote. "There, now let me go!" he pleaded.

Coyote released his grip, and Mouse scurried away, chattering angrily.

Coyote fumbled with the tiny eye and plunked it into his eye socket. Blink! BLINK! Mouse's tiny eye wiggle-waggled around. Coyote squinted with all his might, but all he could see through Mouse's tiny eye were shadows and bits of light. "Oh, nooooo!" wailed Coyote. "I still can't see a thing!"



He stumbled through the valley all day long.

Finally, he crashed into a large, furry creature. The creature snorted and stamped his hoof. It was Dahooch, Buffalo. "Oh, Coyote, what a sorry sight you are. What happened to you?"

"Please, my buffalo brother, have pity on me! The birds have tricked me. The rules for the game that they gave me didn't make any sense. I threw my eyes up into the air, and they never came back. Please, help me. I can't see a thing."

And Buffalo, generous, kind-hearted creature that he is, gave up one of his eyes. But it was much larger than Coyote's eye socket. He grimaced and twisted and whimpered endlessly. "Ah, there! That's better!" he exclaimed when it finally plopped into place. But the two mismatched eyes didn't work very well together. Coyote couldn't see in a straight line, and he zigzagged all the way home.





To this day, you will see that Coyote hates to look any creature in the eye for very long. He is ashamed to have anyone see that his two eyes—a teeny, tiny one and a large, bulging one—don't match at all.

Glossary

yourgurrvech - coyote

weecheech - bird

pooeevf - eyeballs

poo oo chch - mouse

dahooch - buffalo

Reading Suggestions

- Play one of your favorite games with your family, like Scrabble, Monopoly, or Yahtzee. Read the directions to see whether you are following the official rules, or whether you have changed the rules over time. Play the game using the official rules.
- Have you ever tried juggling? Find three small objects of about the same size, then visit <http://juggling.org/books/ingalese/> chapter2.html. Give it a try.

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