

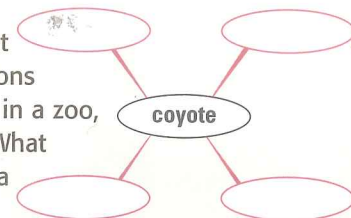


Coyote Stories

OKANOGAN (ō'kə-nōg'ən) FOLK TALES
Retold by MOURNING DOVE

Connect to Your Life

Coyotes—Fact and Fiction A coyote is a small, wolflike animal that is native to western North America and found in many other regions of the continent. You might have observed coyotes in the wild or in a zoo, or you might have seen them depicted in Westerns or cartoons. What traits do you associate with coyotes? Record your impressions in a word web, with the word coyote in the center of the web.



Build Background

Okanogan Storytelling The homeland of the Okanogan people is north central Washington State and southern British Columbia. Many of the Okanogan now live on the Colville Reservation in Washington. "Coyote and the Buffalo" and "Fox and Coyote and Whale" are two folk tales originally told by Okanogan storytellers who traveled from village to village. They told these stories in Salish, their native language, and referred to places along the Columbia River, where they lived. Mourning Dove's retellings include Salish words and place names, spelled in a way that reflects their pronunciation.

Both tales belong to an oral tradition of the history of the Animal People, a race of supernatural beings believed to have been the first inhabitants of the world. The Animal People had magical powers and could alter their shapes. They usually appeared in animal form but could also take human form. When human beings appeared on earth, the Animal People were changed into different animal species. Coyote, one of the most important Animal People, is a central figure in these stories. He is thought to have made the world habitable for humans by killing monsters and bringing fire and salmon, among other deeds. Coyote stories are told in many Native American cultures across the western states.

Focus Your Reading

LITERARY ANALYSIS TRICKSTER TALES Like myths, **folk tales** are stories handed down, usually by word of mouth, from generation to generation. In fact, some scholars regard myths—religious stories offering supernatural explanations of the world—as a special category of folk tale. **Trickster tales** are folk tales that feature an animal or human character who engages in deceit, violence, and magic. Often trickster tales are mythic, explaining features of the world. As you read these two stories, notice how Coyote demonstrates the trickster's contradictory qualities: he is foolish yet clever, greedy yet helpful, immoral yet moral. Also notice what Coyote creates.

ACTIVE READING STRATEGIES FOR READING TRICKSTER TALES

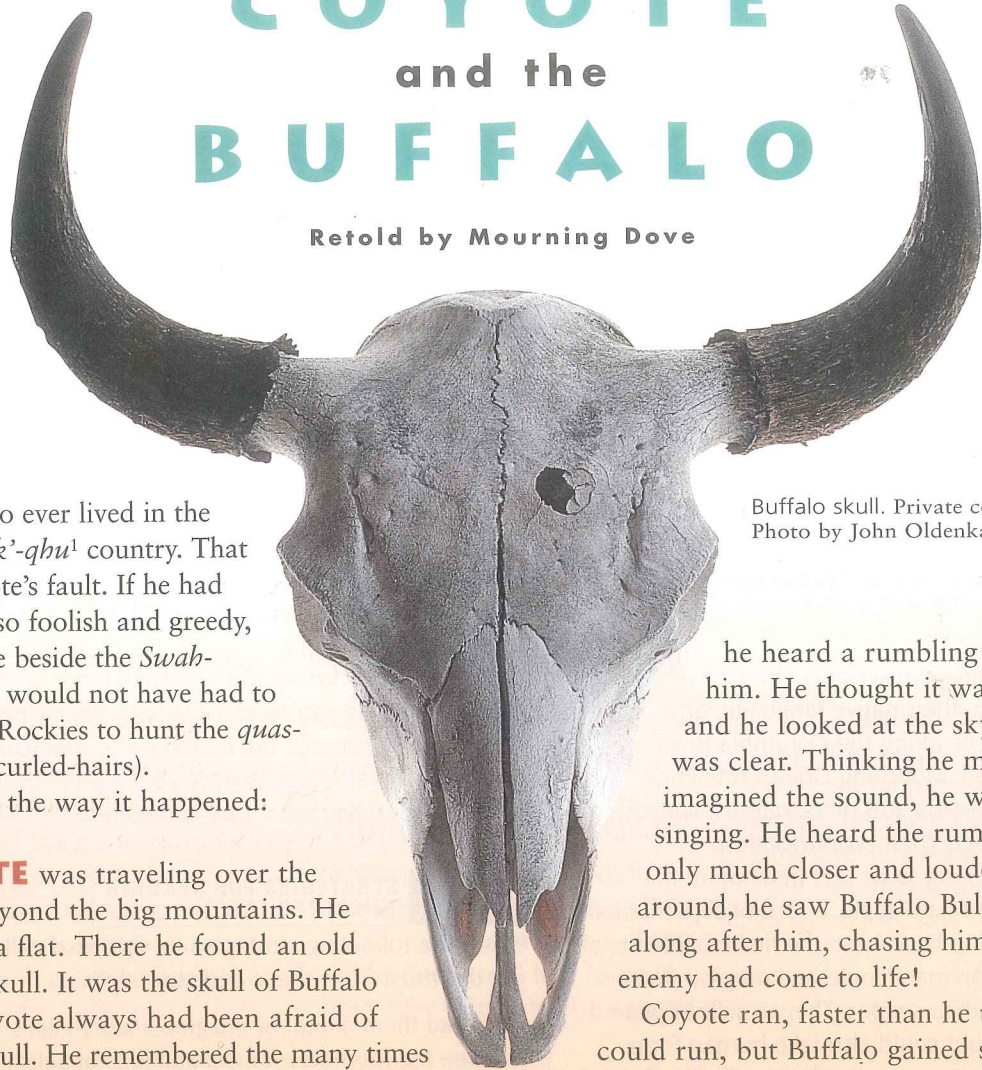
Using the following strategies as you read will help you get the most from these trickster tales:

- Read them aloud, or imagine a storyteller's voice.
- See the footnotes for explanations of Salish words.
- Accept magical transformations and animals who behave as humans.
- Note mysteries of nature that are explained.
- Infer the social values taught through the characters and situations.
- Note details that reveal other aspects of Okanogan culture.

READER'S NOTEBOOK As you use the last three strategies, jot down your notes in a three-column chart with these headings: **Explanations, Social Values, Cultural Details.**

COYOTE and the BUFFALO

Retold by Mourning Dove



Buffalo skull. Private collection.
Photo by John Oldenkamp.

No buffalo ever lived in the *Swab-netk'-qhu*¹ country. That was Coyote's fault. If he had not been so foolish and greedy, the people beside the *Swab-netk'-qhu* would not have had to cross the Rockies to hunt the *quas-peet-za*² (curled-hairs).

This is the way it happened:

COYOTE was traveling over the plains beyond the big mountains. He came to a flat. There he found an old buffalo skull. It was the skull of Buffalo Bull. Coyote always had been afraid of Buffalo Bull. He remembered the many times Buffalo Bull had scared him, and he laughed upon seeing the old skull there on the flat.

"Now I will have some fun," Coyote remarked. "I will have revenge for the times Buffalo made me run."

He picked up the skull and threw it into the air; he kicked it and spat on it; he threw dust in the eye sockets. He did these things many times, until he grew tired. Then he went his way. Soon

he heard a rumbling behind him. He thought it was thunder, and he looked at the sky. The sky was clear. Thinking he must have imagined the sound, he walked on, singing. He heard the rumbling again, only much closer and louder. Turning around, he saw Buffalo Bull pounding along after him, chasing him. His old enemy had come to life!

Coyote ran, faster than he thought he could run, but Buffalo gained steadily. Soon Buffalo was right at his heels. Coyote felt his hot breath.

"Oh, *Squas-tenk'*,³ help me!" Coyote

1. *Swab-netk'-qhu*: the Salish name for Kettle Falls on the Columbia River or for the river itself.
2. *quas-peet-za*: a Salish word for buffalo.
3. *Squas-tenk'*: a Salish word that refers to Coyote's power or spirit helper.

begged, and his power answered by putting three trees in front of him. They were there in the wink of an eye. Coyote jumped and caught a branch of the first tree and swung out of Buffalo's way. Buffalo rammed the tree hard, and it shook as if in a strong wind. Then Buffalo chopped at the trunk with his horns, first with one horn and then the other. He chopped fast, and in a little while over went the tree, and with it went Coyote. But he was up and into the second tree before Buffalo Bull could reach him. Buffalo soon laid that tree low, but he was not quick enough to catch Coyote, who scrambled into the third and last tree.

"Buffalo, my friend, let me talk with you," said Coyote, as his enemy hacked away at the tree's trunk. "Let me smoke my pipe. I like the *kinnikinnick*.⁴ Let me smoke. Then I can die more content."

"You may have time for one smoke," grunted Bull Buffalo, resting from his chopping.

Coyote spoke to his medicine-power, and a pipe, loaded and lighted, was given to him. He puffed on it once and held out the pipe to Buffalo Bull.

"No, I will not smoke with you," said that one. "You made fun of my bones. I have enough enemies without you. Young Buffalo is one of them. He killed me and stole all my fine herd."

"My uncle,"⁵ said Coyote, "you need new horns. Let me make new horns for you. Then you can kill Young Buffalo. Those old horns are dull and worn."

Bull Buffalo was pleased with that talk. He decided he did not want to kill Coyote. He told Coyote to get down out of the tree and make the new horns. Coyote jumped down and called to his power. It scolded him for getting into trouble, but it gave him a flint knife and a stump of pitchwood.⁶ From this stump Coyote carved a pair of fine heavy horns with sharp points. He gave them to Buffalo Bull. All buffalo bulls have worn the same kind of horns since.

BUFFALO BULL was very proud of his new horns. He liked their sharpness and weight and their pitch-black color. He tried them out on what was left of the pitchwood stump. He made one toss and the stump flew high in the air, and he forgave Coyote for his mischief. They became good friends right there. Coyote said he would go along with Buffalo Bull to find Young Buffalo.

They soon came upon Young Buffalo and the big herd he had won from Buffalo Bull. Young Buffalo laughed when he saw his old enemy, and he walked out to meet him. He did not know, of course, about the new horns. It was not much of a fight, that fight between Young Buffalo and Buffalo Bull. With the fine new horns, Buffalo Bull killed the other easily, and then he took back his herd, all his former wives and their children. He gave Coyote a young cow, the youngest cow, and he said:

"Never kill her, *Sin-ka-lip*!⁷ Take good care of her and she will supply you with meat forever. When you get hungry, just slice off some choice fat with a flint knife. Then rub ashes on the wound and the cut will heal at once."

Coyote promised to remember that, and they parted. Coyote started back to his own country, and the cow followed. For a few suns he ate only the fat when he was hungry. But after awhile he became

He heard the rumbling again, only much closer and louder. Turning around, he saw Buffalo Bull pounding along after him, chasing him. His old enemy had come to life!

4. *kinnikinnick*: the Salish word for the bearberry, a shrub that is native to North America and Eurasia. The Okanogan toasted bearberry leaves and then crumbled and mixed them with tobacco for pipe smoking.
5. *my uncle*: Native Americans commonly use terms such as *uncle*, *cousin*, *brother*, and *sister* to express affection or respect or to flatter someone. Coyote uses this term of endearment to flatter Buffalo Bull.
6. *pitchwood*: the sap-filled wood of a pine or fir tree.
7. *Sin-ka-lip*: the Salish name for Coyote; it means "Imitator."

tired of eating fat, and he began to long for the sweet marrow-bones and the other good parts of the buffalo. He smacked his lips at the thought of having some warm liver.

"Buffalo Bull will never know," Coyote told himself, and he took his young cow down beside a creek and killed her.

As he peeled off the hide, crows and magpies came from all directions. They settled on the carcass and picked at the meat. Coyote tried to chase them away, but there were too many of them. While he was chasing some, others returned and ate the meat. It was not long until they had devoured every bit of the meat.

"Well, I can get some good from the bones and marrow-fat," Coyote remarked, and he built a fire to cook the bones. Then he saw an old woman walking toward him. She came up to the fire.

"*Sin-ka-lip*," she said, "you are a brave warrior, a great chief. Why should you do woman's work? Let me cook the bones while you rest."

Vain Coyote! He was flattered. He believed she spoke her true mind. He stretched out to rest and he fell asleep. In his sleep he had a bad dream. It awoke him, and he saw the old woman running away with the marrow-fat and the

VAIN COYOTE!

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boiled grease. He looked into the cooking-basket. There was not a drop of soup left in it. He chased the old woman. He would punish her! But she could run, too, and she easily kept ahead of

him. Every once in awhile she stopped and held up the marrow-fat and shouted: "*Sin-ka-lip*", do you want this?"

Finally Coyote gave up trying to catch her. He went back to get the bones. He thought he would boil them again. He found the bones scattered all around, so he gathered them up and put them into the cooking-basket. Needing some more water to boil them in, he went to the creek for it, and when he got back, there were no bones in the basket! In place of the bones was a little pile of tree limbs!

Coyote thought he might be able to get another cow from Buffalo Bull, so he set out to find him. When he came to the herd, he was astonished to see the cow he had killed. She was there with the others! She refused to go with Coyote again, and Buffalo Bull would not give him another cow. Coyote had to return to his own country without a buffalo.

That is why there never have been any buffalo along the *Swah-netk'-qhu*. ❖

Thinking Through the Literature

1. **Comprehension Check** What happens when Coyote disobeys Buffalo Bull's order?
2. Folk tales often serve to teach or explain. In your view, what does "Coyote and the Buffalo" teach or explain? Refer to the chart you made in your

 **READER'S NOTEBOOK** as you read.

THINK ABOUT {

- what actions are rewarded or punished
- what changes occur in the characters
- the first and last paragraphs of the tale

3. Okanogan storytellers might tell "Coyote and the Buffalo" during a winter night. Why do you think people would want to hear this story over and over again?

FOX and COYOTE and WHALE

Retold by Mourning Dove

FOX had a beautiful wife. He was very much in love with her, but she had stopped caring for him. Fox was a great hunter, and every day he brought home food and fine skins for his wife to make into robes and clothing. He did not know that, while he was away hunting, his wife would sit beside the *Swah-netk'-qhu* and sing love songs to the water. Painting her face with bright colors, she would pour out her love thoughts in song.

Coyote came to visit his twin brother, and he soon noticed the strange actions of his sister-in-law. He spoke to Fox. "*Why-ay'-looh*,"¹ he said, "I think your wife is in love with somebody else." But Fox could not believe she loved anyone but him. He was blinded by his love for her. Then, one sun, he and Coyote returned from a hunt and she was not in the lodge. So Fox started to look for her. He walked down toward

Nootka wood
whale effigy rattle
(about 1870).
Courtesy, Morning
Star Gallery, Santa Fe,
New Mexico. Photo by
Addison Doty.

the river and there he saw his wife. She was sitting on the river bank, singing a love song. She did not see Fox. He watched her.

As Fox watched, the water began to rise. Slowly it rose, higher and higher, and soon, out of the middle of the river, appeared a big monster of the fish-kind. The monster was *En-hah-et'-qhu*, the Spirit of the Water—Whale. It swam to the shore. As it

1. *Why-ay'-looh*: the Salish name for Fox.

tired of eating fat,
began to long for
sweet marrow
the other
the b
hi

a man but a mouse
Coyote came home from hunting, she was gone,
and the fire in the lodge was cold. Fox called and
called. He got no answer. His heart was heavy.

A few suns later Fox looked up the river and
saw an odd-shaped canoe coming. It was only
half of a canoe. Two Water Maidens were
standing in it, rocking it from side to side. They
were singing:

We come for food,
Food for the Chief's stolen wife.
The water-food does not suit her.
That is why we come! We come!

As the Water Maidens approached, Fox and
Coyote hid in the tepee. The maidens beached
the half-canoe and entered the lodge. They began
to pick up dried meat to take to the stolen wife.
Coyote and Fox sprang from their hiding places
and caught the maidens, and Fox asked about
his wife—where she was and how to get to her.
The maidens were silent. Then the brothers
threatened to kill them unless they answered,
and the maidens said:

"To find the person who stole her, you must
go over the Big Falls² and under the water. His
lodge is under the falls, under the water—a
dangerous trip for Land People. Every trail is
watched. Even if you get there, the mighty Whale
chief will kill you. He is bad."

The Water Maidens had told all they knew, so
Fox broke their necks. He and Coyote dressed in
the maidens' robes and started down the river in
the half-canoe. Standing on the sides of the

to a tall handsome
his monster-man
way. He went to his
he wondered how he
e. He worried about
grew pale and thin.
pleased her. Her
the man who was not
day when Fox and

strange craft, they rocked it as they had seen the
maidens do, and rode it down the river and over
the roaring falls. "Let me do all the talking,"
Fox warned Coyote. "I know better what to
say." Down through the pouring, flashing
waters they shot with the half-canoe. The
thunder of the falls hurt their ears. And then,
suddenly, they were landing at a great
encampment of Water People, a strange kind of
people to them. All of the people were strange
except *Gou-kouh-whay'-na*—Mouse. She was
there. She knew them and they knew her. Fox
jumped ashore. Coyote, following, tripped and
touched the water, and Mouse, the Sly One,
laughed. "Ha-ha!" said Mouse, "Coyote nearly
fell into the water."

"Do not speak," Fox whispered to Mouse.
"Say nothing. I will pay you well."

But some of the Water People had heard.
"What, *Gou-kouh-whay'-na*, did you say?" they
inquired.

"Nothing," Mouse answered. "Nothing of
importance. I was just joking."

"Yes, you did say something," said a Water
Person. "You said that Coyote nearly fell into
the water. You cannot fool me."

MOUSE insisted that she had not said that,
and the other Water People believed her. They
knew she was a fickle person and giddy, and
they did not think much of her because she
went everywhere to steal. She went everywhere,
and that is why she understood all the different
languages.

Carrying packs of dried meat and berries they
had brought with them, Coyote and Fox made
their way to the lodge of Whale, the chief. He
and the stolen wife sat side by side in the lodge.
The wife was glad to get the meat and berries,
her kind of food.

2. **Big Falls:** Kettle Falls on the Columbia River in
northeastern Washington.

FOX AND COYOTE kept their robes over their faces until everyone else was asleep. Then, when everything was quiet, Fox slipped up to Whale and cut off the monster's head with a flint knife. At the same time Coyote picked up the stolen wife and ran for the broken canoe. The noise they made awoke the camp, and the people rushed out of their lodges to see Coyote carrying off Fox's wife and Fox close behind, carrying the head of their chief. The people chased them, but the three got into the broken canoe, and Fox quickly put Coyote and the woman into his *shoo'-mesh*³ pipe. Then Fox pushed the half-canoe into the water and it shot up to the river's surface below the falls. There Fox landed. He took Coyote and his twice-stolen wife out of the medicine pipe, and the head of the Whale Monster he threw toward the setting sun.

"In the Big Salt Water (ocean) shall Whale Monster stay," said Fox. "No longer shall he live in the smaller waters, in the rivers, where he can make love to the wives of men, where he can lure wives from their husbands."

As Fox and his wife and brother walked up the bank to their tepee, the headless body of Whale Monster turned over and over in the depths of the river, making the Big Falls of the *Swah-netk'-qhu* more fearful and thunderous, the way they are today, spilling with such force over the great rocks.

The wife of Fox became contented and happy again, glad to be back in her husband's lodge. But since that day Whale Monster was vanquished the Land People and the Water People have not loved each other. Fox made it so. ❖

3. *shoo'-mesh*: the Salish word for medicine, or magic power.



Mask for Coyote Dance.
Courtesy, University of
Texas at Austin. Photo by
Donald Codry.

Connect to the Literature

1. **What Do You Think?**
What did you feel was most memorable about "Fox and Coyote and Whale"?

Comprehension Check

- Why do Fox and Coyote go to the world of the Water People?
- What caused the powerful force of Kettle Falls, according to the story?
- Why don't whales live in fresh waters, according to the story?

Think Critically

2. What might be Okanogan storytellers' purpose for telling this story?
3. **ACTIVE READING STRATEGIES FOR READING TRICKSTER TALES** Share details about Okanogan culture that you recorded in your **READER'S NOTEBOOK** as you read the story. What did you learn about the Okanogan people and their way of life?

THINK ABOUT

- their values, attitudes, and beliefs
- geographical features of their area
- the ways they adapt to their environment

4. Do you view Coyote as admirable? Explain why or why not.

Extend Interpretations

5. **Comparing Texts** What do these Coyote stories have in common with other folk tales you know?
6. **Different Perspectives** Some Native Americans have argued that stories about the Animal People constitute "the first history of America." Do you agree? Support your opinion.
7. **Connect to Life** Compare Coyote in these stories with your previous mental image of a coyote. Refer to the word web you were asked to make on page 39.

Literary Analysis

TRICKSTER TALE A **trickster tale** is a folk tale about an animal or person who engages in deceit, violence, and magic. Besides Coyote, tricksters in Native American oral traditions also include Raven, Mink, Hare, and Blue Jay. In tales from other world cultures, the trickster is a spider, a rabbit, or a fox. According to the folklorist Stith Thompson, a trickster "may appear in any one of three roles: the beneficent culture hero, the clever deceiver, or the numskull."

Paired Activity Create a three-column chart that classifies tricksters according to Stith Thompson's categories. Then meet with a partner to analyze the roles that Coyote plays in "Coyote and the Buffalo" and "Fox and Coyote and Whale." Fill in the chart with examples to support your findings. In each tale, which role of trickster seems the most dominant?

Culture Hero	Clever Deceiver	Numskull