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Coyote Loses His Eyes

A Goshute Tale

Cultural Note

According to Goshute tradition, Coyote tales should only be told during the winter time.

The Handgame, a guessing game, is still played by many Native American Indian tribes today. It is played with ten sticks, five sticks per team. There are also two sets of bones, two with markings on them and two without. One team hides the bones, and the other team must guess who is holding the bone without markings. When a player guesses wrong, his team gives up a stick to the opposing team. Players sing songs throughout the whole game to distract the team who is guessing. The team with all ten sticks wins. Some games can last for hours.

Vocabulary

peered

pelt

rustling

socket

staggered

Glossary

isappe - coyote

papi - older brother

pui - eyes

soho - tree

puii kahni - grass house

Reading Suggestions

- When good readers summarize, they think about the most important information in one or two sentences. They might also clarify the meaning to make words or sentences more clear. Good readers also ask questions. For example, you might read and ask “I wonder” questions. As you read, think about what might happen next in the story. This is called predicting. Try some or all of these good reading strategies as you read “Coyote Loses His Eyes.”

- The next Coyote tale in this series is “Coyote and the Rolling Stone.” Read it to find out what happens to Coyote after he gets his eyes back.



Coyote Loses His Eyes

A Goshute Tale



Coyote's brother had a mountain sheep he had killed. He took the sheep's eyes and threw them at Coyote. They landed in his empty sockets, so Coyote was able to see again.

His brother said, "I would like to get back some of the things you won last night. Let's play one more game."

"I told you someday you'd be sorry you kicked me out of your house," Coyote told him, opening the door. "I'm a traveling man now. What you lost, you lost. I don't have time to play games."

"Listen to me, Coyote!" Coyote's brother scolded him. "You've been fooling around, and that's how you lost your eyes. when you leave here, don't get into any more trouble."

Happy to have eyes again, Coyote just smiled and traveled on.

Adapted by
Kathryn Hurst

Illustrated by
Curtis Yanito

Cultural Consultants
Chrissandra Murphy Bullcreek and Genevieve Fields

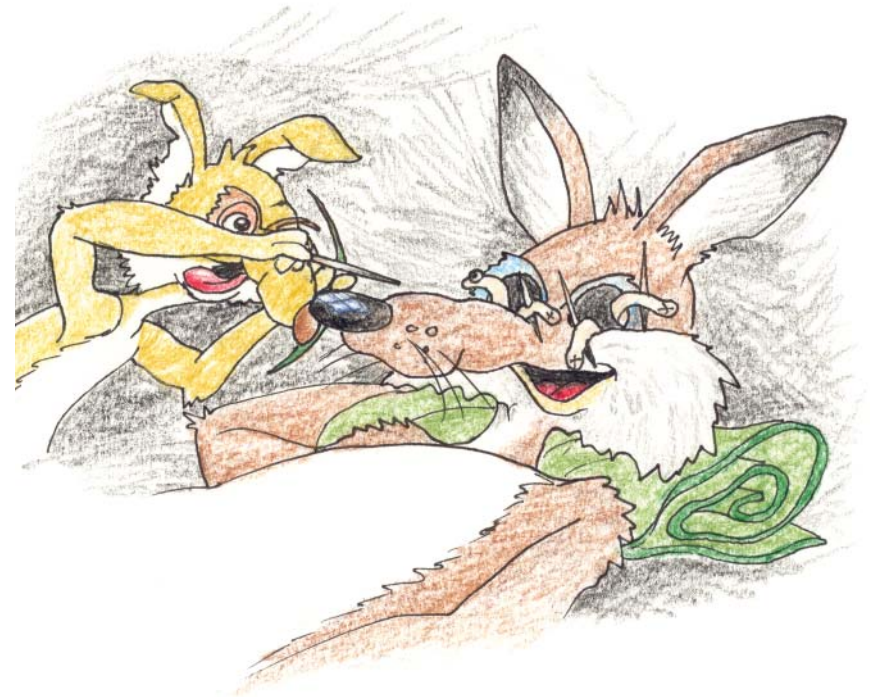
Editing and layout by
Kathryn Hurst

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The next morning Coyote's brother told his son, "While Coyote is sleeping, take care of him, because there are worms coming out of his eyes. I will make you a bow and arrow out of rye grass with cactus needles. When the worms come out, shoot them."

Sure enough, while Coyote was sleeping, the boy shot the worms as they crawled from his eye sockets. He shot them until they were all gone.





That night some people came to play the hand game, so Coyote played with them. They gave him some bones to use in the game. Coyote did well, and before the night was over, he had won everything from all the players, including his brother.



Isappe, Coyote, lived with his *papi*, older brother. One day his brother said, “You are full of mischief, and you can no longer live with me. You need to be on your way.”

“Well, I’ve had enough of you too,” grumbled Coyote. “Some day you’ll be sorry you were so mean to me!”

Coyote walked out the door, happy to be on another adventure.



As Coyote traveled along, he heard laughter coming from a grove of trees. Two girls were taking their eyeballs out and throwing them into a tree. Their eyeballs dropped back down and landed in their sockets. The girls laughed so hard that they fell over.

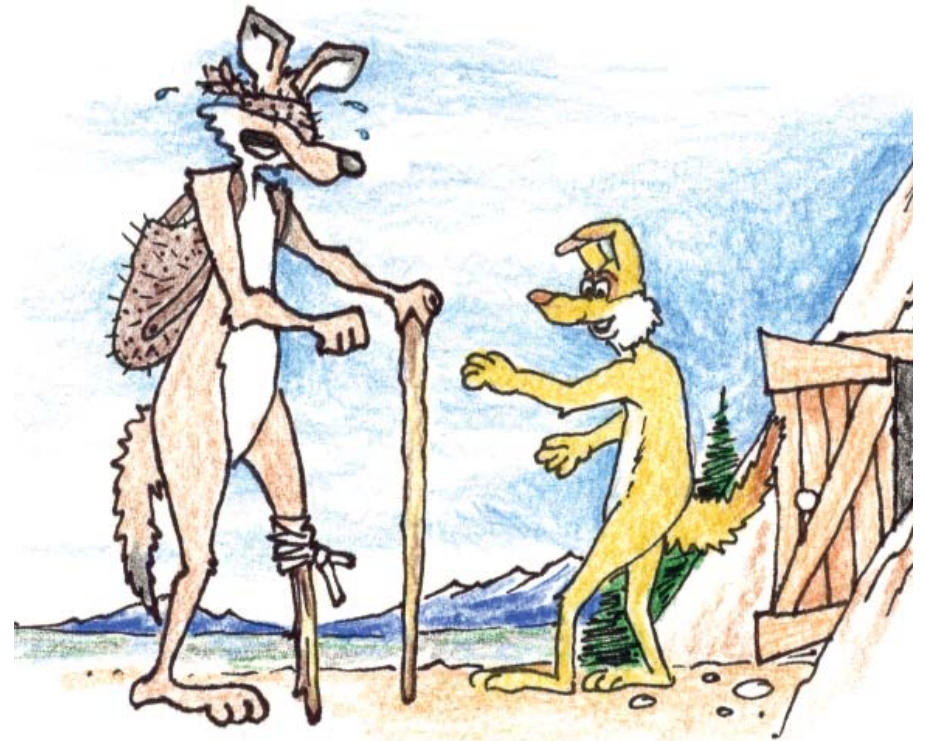
“What’s so funny?” Coyote asked.

“It feels good when our eyes go up in the air and land back in our sockets,” the girls said. “Would you like to try it, Coyote?”

Coyote sat down, took his eyes out, and threw them up into the air. Sure enough, his eyes came back down and landed in the sockets. “Oh, that does feel good!” He laughed and fell over backward just as the girls had done.

“This is so much fun!” he told the girls. “I’m going to do it again.”

“It only works with this special kind of tree,” the girls warned him, “so be careful.”



Coyote patched his leg with sticks. As he hobbled along, he remembered that his brother’s house was nearby. When he arrived there, he fumbled around for the entrance.

His brother’s son heard him and led Coyote inside. Coyote sat down with his back toward the fire and avoided looking at anyone. His porcupine hair stuck out in every direction.

The girls noticed a rotten odor coming from Coyote. His porcupine cap was poking out in every direction. “You need grooming,” they said. “Why don’t we pick lice from your hair?”

Coyote agreed. He put his head on the lap of one of the girls and his feet on the other. While they looked for lice, he fell fast asleep.

“He smells bad,” whispered one of the girls. She lifted the porcupine cap from his eyes and saw that he had no eyeballs. Big, black maggots crawled from the empty sockets.

“Let’s get out of here,” one of the girls said. They ran away as fast as they could go. Coyote awoke and began feeling around. “Did you both fall asleep?” he asked. No one answered, but Coyote heard the beads and belts of the girls rustling as they ran, so he chased after them.

The girls ran to a cliff and threw their beads and belts over the edge. Coyote couldn’t see the edge, but he could hear the beads and belts falling. He followed the sound right over the cliff and fell to the bottom.

The girls peered over the edge. “What are you eating, Coyote?” they called.

“Why, I’m eating this mountain sheep,” he shouted back.

“That’s not a mountain sheep. That’s your own leg you’re eating.” The girls shook their heads in disbelief and went on their way.



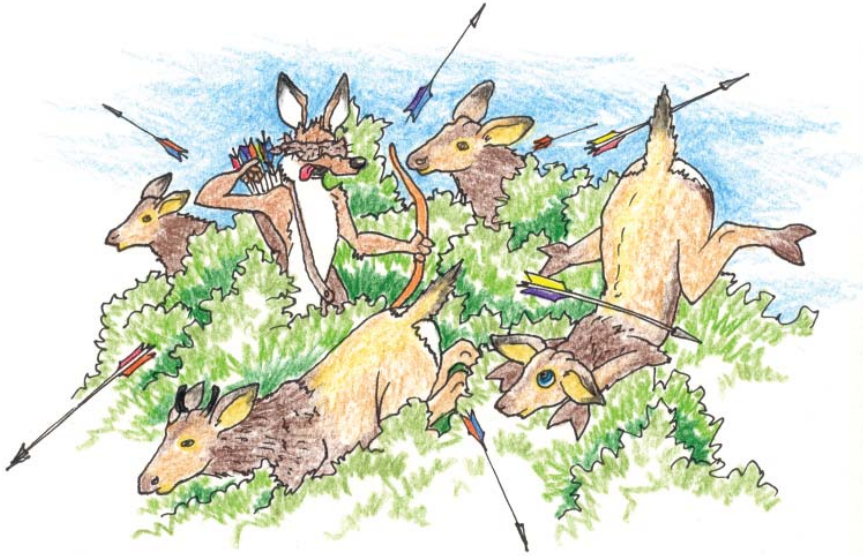
As Coyote headed on down the trail, he wondered, “What’s so special about those trees? I’m going to try this tree. It doesn’t look any different than the others.”

He knelt down, took his eyes out, and threw them up into the tree. He laughed and waited for them to fall back into his eye sockets, but nothing happened. He waited and waited, but his eyes never did return.

“I can’t see!” he gasped, struggling up. “I’ve lost my eyes!”

He felt his way to the shade of a tree and sat down next to the stream. He took off his porcupine bag, placed it in the water, and fell asleep. By the time Coyote awoke, the leather on the porcupine bag had softened. He cut off a piece of the fur and tied it around his head to hide his empty eye sockets. The porcupine quills stood up all over his head.





As he stumbled blindly along, Coyote heard some young girls talking. He adjusted his porcupine cap and asked, "Who are you?"

"We're girls from around here. Who are you?" they asked.

Coyote puffed out his chest. "I'm a great hunter!"

"Good, then you can help us. Wait for us at the mountain pass. We'll drive some elk cattle toward you, so you can kill one."

Coyote felt for an arrow and placed it on his bow, ready to shoot. As the herd passed near him, Coyote shot arrows in every direction. Finally, one hit the mark, and a cow went down.

"Do you see the one you killed?" the girls asked him.

"Yes," Coyote lied, trying to find the arrows he had shot.

As he staggered by the arrows, the girls shouted, "You walked right past them!"

Coyote was embarrassed. "Can't you see that I'm counting the arrows to see how many times I missed?"

"Oh, sure" the girls answered.

The girls began skinning the cow elk. "Come here and finish skinning this cow while we go and build a grass house," they said. They handed him a knife and warned, "Be careful when you skin it. We want to make a robe out of the pelt."

After the girls had built the grass house, they returned to find that Coyote had split the cow hide straight down the middle. "Why did you do that?" they complained. "We told you to be careful."

Coyote replied. "This is known as the one-sided method of skinning."

"Oh, sure," the girls said.

The girls began packing the meat to their house. "Go sit over there in our house and wait," they told him.

Coyote felt his way into the round, grass house. He poked around the walls, accidentally making holes.

When the girls had finished carrying the meat to the house, they noticed the holes in the walls and asked, "What have you done?"

"When something comes after us, we'll have more than one way to escape," said Coyote.

"Oh, sure," responded the girls.

