

STUDENT HANDOUT 3-6

Coyote Stories:
Coyote Takes Water from the Frog People
 (from Columbia River: It's Future and You)
and
The Legend of Coyote
 (told by Moses George, Colville Confederated Tribes)



Coyote Takes Water from the Frog People

Coyote was out hunting when he found a dead deer. One of the deer's rib bones looked just like a big shell. Coyote picked it up and took it with him to see the Frog People. The Frog People had all the water. When anyone wanted any water to drink, to cook with, or to wash with, he or she had to get it from the Frog People.

Coyote said, "Hey, Frog People, I have a big shell. I want a big drink of water, and I want to drink it for a long time." "Give us that shell," said the Frog People, "and you can drink all you want." Coyote gave them the shell and began drinking. The water that Coyote drank was behind a large dam.

Coyote began drinking. He drank for a long time. Finally, one of the Frog People said, "Hey Coyote, you sure are drinking a lot of water there. What are you doing that for?" Coyote brought his head up out of the water. The Frog People wondered how Coyote could drink so much water. They thought Coyote might be trying to trick them.

All the time he had his head underwater, Coyote was digging. He was making a hole under the dam. When he was finished, he stood up and said, "That was a good drink, just what I needed." Then the dam collapsed and the water went out into the valley and made the creeks and rivers and waterfalls. The Frog People were very angry. "You have taken all the water, Coyote!" They cried. Coyote said, "It is not right that one group of people has all the water. Now it is where everyone can have it."

Now, anyone can go down to the river and swim or get water to drink or to cook with.



STUDENT HANDOUT 3-6

The Legend of Coyote

After Old-One, the Great Spirit and Creator, had made the earth and the ancient Indian people, he sent Coyote among them, because they were very much in need and were having a hard time. Coyote was told to kill the evil beings who preyed upon them and to teach them the best way of doing things. It was because of Coyote that the salmon were first brought to the Wenatchee River. First, he broke down the dam which five Beaver women had built in the lower Columbia. "It is not right," he said to them, "for you to keep the salmon penned up here. The people farther up the river are hungry."

Then he changed the Beaver women into sandpipers. "You shall forevermore be sandpipers," he said. "You shall always run by the water's edge. You shall never again have control over salmon."

By this time so many salmon had come up from the mouth of Big River that the water was dark with them. Coyote walked along the bank of the river, and the salmon followed him in the water. At all the villages, the Indian people were glad to see him and the fish he brought. Their hunger was over.

When he came to the Little White Salmon River, he stopped and taught the people how to make a fish trap. He twisted young twigs of hazel brush and hung the trap in the river. Then he showed the people how to dry fish and how to store it for winter use.

When he came to the bigger White Salmon River, he showed the people how to spear salmon. He made a spear from a young white fir tree and tipped the point with a sharp flint rock found along the Big River bank and caught the salmon with the pointed end of the spear. "This is how you should do it," said Coyote.

Wherever he stopped, he showed the people how to cook fish. They had always eaten it raw. He showed them how to broil salmon by holding it over the fire on sticks. Coyote put salmon in a hole, poured a little water over it, dropped hot stones into the pothole, and covered everything with green grass to hold the steam. Thus the salmon followed him. Often he came to a smaller stream flowing into Big River. Because the people along the Yakima and Wenatchee Rivers treated him kindly, Coyote sent the fish up their rivers and promised them that every spring the salmon would return. Where he was treated very kindly he made the river narrow in one spot. He made the two banks of the river almost meet, so that there would be a good place for catching salmon. This Salmon Place where we are gathered today is the place where he has always given us fish to meet all of our needs.



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Questions:

In *Coyote Takes Water from the Frog People*,

1. Who had all the water?
2. What did Coyote exchange for water?
3. What was Coyote really doing, when he said he was drinking?

In *The Legend of Coyote*,

4. Why was Coyote sent to earth? What was his purpose?
5. What was the first thing Coyote did? What was his reason for doing this?
6. What did he do to the Beaver women? Why do you think he did this?
7. What many things did Coyote teach the Indian people?
8. Why did Coyote send fish up the Yakima and Wenatchee Rivers?
9. Why did he make narrow spots along certain parts of the rivers?

In both stories,

10. Why were the Frog People and Beaver women, seen as evil by Coyote?
11. What are the major themes and cultural values passed on in the Coyote stories? How do these themes and cultural values relate to water issues of today?

