



Handsome Coyote and Wildcat

A Tale from the Northwestern Band of Shoshone

Cultural Note

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

Instead of using the "lecture" method of teaching morals and life lessons, Shoshone parents use tales such as "Handsome Coyote and Wildcat" to teach their children that there are consequences for their actions.

Vocabulary

appendage

bristle

haunches

sprawling

vain

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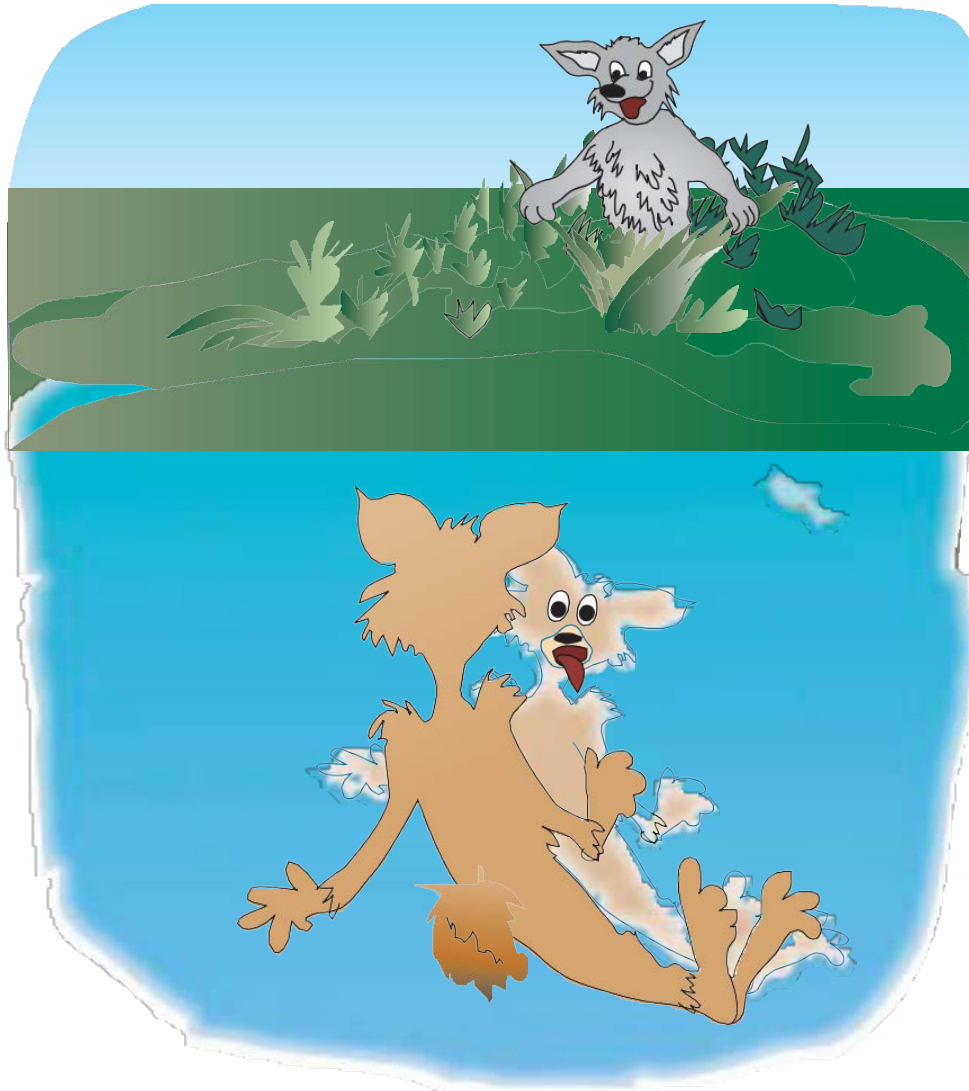
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Itsappe, Coyote, stood by the stream staring at his reflection in the clear mountain water. "Well, lookee here! Who is this handsome fella staring back at me?" crooned Coyote. He stretched his neck and twitched his nose. "Now, isn't that a fine looking nose? Neither too pudgy nor too pointy. It's just perfect."



"Why thank you, Coyote! It is a beautiful nose, if I say so myself. What do you think of my ears?" *`Tukkupittseh*, Wildcat, spoke from the other side of the stream.

"EEEEya!" Coyote yelled as he jumped higher than the young willow growing nearby. "Old Wildcat, I wasn't talking to you! Your nose is so long and pointy that you and Crow could be twins!"

The two vainest animals of the forest had just met. Coyote continued, "And your ears! They match that pointy snout of yours. Pointy, pointy, pointy!" Coyote extended a sharp claw out from each side of his head, then fell to the ground laughing.

"You're just jealous because I can sniff the mountain air and hear the call of the eagle miles away. You can barely call those little nubs on each side of your head ears! Poor things, they barely peek out from under all that straggly fur. I think that's why you have a hard time hearing the wisdom of others," replied Wildcat. He stood proudly on the bank with his arms folded and his chin lifted high.



“Ha! Look who’s talking!” Coyote chanted, “Wildcat, the scaredy cat! Your tail tells of wildcat fears by hiding itself under your backside. Rrrrrrrar,”

Wildcat bristled, and his whole body stiffened. “At least I have a tail, unlike your . . . uh, tail? No, what do you call that sorry little appendage sticking out from your rear?” asked Wildcat.

Coyote jumped up and bared his teeth. “Grrrrrr! Stay out of my way, Wildcat. You just might find your face rearranged, courtesy of handsome Coy.. o..te.” And with that, Coyote turned and trotted toward the cliffs.



That night Coyote was restless. Thinking about the conversation he had with Wildcat had kept him up all night. By morning he was in a foul mood and looking for trouble. As he made his way between the red cliffs and junipers, who should he see but Wildcat, taking a mid-morning nap under the shade of a sprawling tree. Without hesitation, Coyote pounced on Wildcat.

Thud! Pound! Pound! Pound! Thud! "Owww! My nose, my nose!" cried Wildcat. Pull! Pull! Pull! Stretch!

"Yikes! Oh, oh, oh! My tail, my tail! Ow, ow, ow!" hollered Coyote.

Squeeze! Wring! Clutch!

"Oooh! Wildcat! Let go of my ears!" demanded Coyote.





The racket was deafening! Dust flew everywhere. The fight was a tornado rolling across the mountain cliffs onto the flatlands and through the sagebrush. It lasted all day and all night. Animals called out to one another, jumping from its fury. Sounds of pain and cries of triumph could be heard echoing through the canyons and up the mountainside. Finally, there was silence. When the dust cleared, there lay two battered, beaten, bruised animals on the ground.



Coyote slowly picked himself up from the earth and dusted himself off. Wildcat opened his eyes.

“Ahhhh yah, Coyote! Your ears! Your nose! And your tail! They’re just like mine!” cried Wildcat, jumping to his feet.

Coyote felt his nose and his ears. He wiggled his tail. “EEEEya! Where are my handsome ears? Where is my beautiful nose? And my tail!” Coyote turned to look at Wildcat, “You! Wildcat! You have stolen my uh. . .uh...”



Wildcat nervously felt his ears, his nose and his tail. Shock, disbelief and horror traveled through his whole body. Through the rounded ears that once belonged to Coyote, through the flat nose that Coyote had loved, and all the way through to the short stubby tail that Coyote had prized. "What have we done, Coyote? What have we done?" Wildcat moaned.

Coyote, with his new pointed nose and ears and his long fluffy tail, stood stunned, staring at Wildcat. Wildcat, with his new rounded ears, flat nose and stubby tail, stared back at Coyote. They both just stood there facing each other, too shocked to do anything.

Finally, Coyote spoke. "They looked better on me," he said quietly.





Wildcat shook his head, "Stay away from me, Coyote. You are nothing but trouble." And with that, Wildcat turned and staggered toward the mountains, his short stubby tail following behind him.

Coyote felt sorry for himself. He trotted off to a nearby cliff and sat down on his haunches. Then he pointed his new long nose skyward and howled and howled.

Glossary

itsappe - coyote

'ukkupittseh - wildcat

ketaate - tail

mupi - nose

nainki - ears

Reading Suggestions

- Coyote has several characteristics. He is conniving, mischievous, cunning, vengeful, obnoxious, boastful, greedy, insightful, self-centered, impatient, demanding, and wise. Make a list of characteristics that describe you.
- The Northwestern Band of the Shoshone, where this tale comes from, resides in northern Utah and southeastern Idaho. See *Coyote Steals Fire, A Shoshone Tale* (ISBN 0-87421-618-40) for another story from this band. You can also visit www.nwbshoshone-nsn.gov.

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