



Coyote's Place in Native American Stories

Who Is Coyote?

The coyote (*Canis latrans*) is native to California and the western United States; it may be the most adaptable species in the wild. It survives countless threats to its population and adapts to changes in culture and technology. Coyote's prey consists of any small species that invade his territory. Each of these facts is particularly helpful to understand why Native American stories often give coyote human characteristics.

What Kind of Character Is He?

Coyote has diverse roles in different stories, but common traits remain true in almost all of his appearances. Most commonly represented as a male, Coyote fills a central role in many classic Native American moral tales. He is a cunning, selfish survivalist, yet inseparable from all the other animals. He has also been described as the creator of man, and his characteristics illustrate human ethics and principles.



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Usual Tricks

Coyote, known as The Trickster, is notorious for fooling other animals in the wilderness to further his own agenda. His plots and schemes often backfire, causing Coyote more grief than when he began. These stories help to show the Native American people how cooperation is much more effective than getting ahead at others' expense. He provides the perfect example that poor behavior may benefit you in the short term, but in the long run your tricky, selfish gain will not serve you.

The Cunning Survivalist

Reality drives the portrayal of Coyote in stories. Coyotes are often seen rummaging for food and do not appear to be very successful. They are often scrawny and emaciated, missing patches of fur, but still they survive. This image is part of the inspiration that the Native American peoples saw in the coyote. The animal's cunning and craft became a symbol for Natives' own perseverance, showing that living off the land was built into them. The admirable qualities seen in this animal have often earned him the most central role in Native American stories.



Not only is Coyote The Trickster, but also the one who never has enough—who can only obtain what he needs by constantly striving for things outside of his control. Through this struggle, we can see ourselves in the coyote.

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