

According to Coyote

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Based on legends of the North American Plains Indians.

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Scene 1

[The sound of wind.]

In the beginning there was nothing. According to some, God said, "Let there be light" and there was. And He fashioned the Heavens and the Earth, and He placed men and animals on the Earth, and after seven days He rested.

According to others, there was a gigantic explosion, a big bang—and from that explosion all life in the Universe was formed. That creative explosion formed the very substance, the laws of the Universe, our Earth, our bodies.

According to Coyote, the Earth was once a human being. The Creator made her out of a woman. "You will be the Mother of all people," He said. And the Earth is still alive today. The soil is her flesh, the rocks are her bones, the wind is her breath, the trees and grass her hair. She lives all spread out and we live on top of her. Whenever she moves, we have an earthquake.

The Creator gathered some of her flesh and rolled it into balls. And these balls became the first creatures of the early world, the Ancients. The Ancients were half-people, half-animal. Some walked on two legs, some on all fours; some could fly and others could swim. They all had the gift of speech and lived together.

But there was a difficulty with this early world. The Ancients knew they had to hunt in order to live, but they sometimes got mixed up as to which creatures were food and which were themselves, and sometimes they ate their own people by mistake.

At last the Creator said, "Soon there will be no more people if I let things go on like this." So he sent Coyote down to kill all the monsters and other evil beings, and to teach all of us how to live.

Song: Ya no way ho ya a ni

Ya no way ho ya ni

Ya no way ho ya a ni

Ya no way ho ya ni

Ya no way ho ya a ni

Ya no way ho ya ni

Ya no way ho ya a ni

Ya no way ho ya ni

Scene 2

One day Coyote was going along up the river and it was really hot. Coyote was feeling pretty good. He came up to a large rock and said, "Grandfather Rock, I am going to give you my fine blanket. It's too hot, you may have it."

It was a beautiful blanket covered with beads, porcupine quills and hummingbird feathers that moved in the wind. He spread the blanket over the rock and went on his way. After a while, Coyote saw a storm approaching and thought, "Hmm. I need my blanket." So he went back to get it.

"Rock, Rock, I want my blanket back."

And the Rock said, "No." And Coyote said, "Rock, I must have my blanket." And the Rock said, "No, no. Rocks never give back presents. Once you give something to a rock, you cannot take it back." Now Coyote was very angry. He rushed up to the Rock and snatched off the blanket.

Ya no way ho ya a ni, ya no way ho ya ni.

Coyote had only gone a little way when he heard something behind him, a rumbling noise. He turned around and saw Rock rolling after him. Coyote ran to the people for help but no one would help him; not the Grizzly Bear nor the Mountain Lion or even the Buffalo. At last Coyote came to the Nighthawk people and asked them for help.

"Hide inside our lodge, Coyote, and we will take care of this." The Rock came rolling up and said, "Where is Coyote?" The Nighthawks flew straight up into the air, dove down and chipped the Rock into little pieces. Then they told Coyote to come out and go on his way.

Well, Coyote went down through the valley and up to the next hill. He turned around and shouted to the Nighthawk

people, "Hey! Hey! Hey, you big-nosed, weirdo birdbrains. I sure fooled you. I was playing a game with the Rock and you guys wrecked it. Idiots!"

The Nighthawks pretended they didn't hear Coyote. "Hey! Hey!" [*Coyote makes fart noises.*] "Hey, you beady-eyed, bandy-legged bug-chewers. Your mother lays eggs!"

The Nighthawk people got angry and put Rock back together again and Rock went rolling after Coyote. Coyote jumped up and ran off as fast as he could. He jumped over a ditch, but the Rock was right behind him. The Rock fell on Coyote and crushed him flat as a pancake. And Coyote died. The Fox came up and felt very sorry for Coyote; after all, they had been friends. So Fox jumped over Coyote four times. No sooner had he finished the fourth jump than Coyote's body sprang upright and began to move. Coyote said, "Oh man, what'd you wake me up for? I dreamt I was upriver helping the chief's daughter get into her canoe!" [*Coyote pants.*]

And Fox said, "Oh Coyote, you weren't dreaming. You were dead. I just brought you back to life. Come on Coyote, we have to go. The Great Spirit has called us all together. There is going to be a change. The Great Spirit is going to give us new names. Some of us have names now, some of us don't. Tomorrow everyone will have a name. This will be your name forever, for all your descendants. The first one to arrive at the Great Spirit's lodge tomorrow morning will get to choose whatever name he wants!"

Well, Coyote walked around saying he was going to be first. Coyote didn't like his name. Everyone called him Trickster and Imitator and Old Coyote. Everybody said those names fitted him, but he wanted a new name.

"A new name!" [*He howls.*] "I will take one of the three powerful names. Yeah, like Grizzly Bear, king of the forest, who rules all the four-leggeds!" [*He flexes.*] "Aye! Or how about Eagle, chief of the air? Aye! Or Salmon, the big fish! Aye! Yeah. Those are the best names. I'll take one of those."

So Coyote took two small sticks and wedged them between his eyelids to hold his eyes open so that he wouldn't fall asleep. And he sat down in front of the fire and thought of all the wonderful things he was going to be. Before long he was asleep with his eyes wide open.

The next day when the sun was high in the sky, Coyote woke up and ran over to the lodge of the Great Spirit. Coyote saw that no one was around and thought he was the first one there. He yelled to the Great Spirit, "I want to be called Grizzly Bear, king of the forest."

The Great Spirit said, "The name of Grizzly Bear was taken at dawn." "Then my name shall be Eagle, king of the air." "Eagle flew away with that name at sunrise." "Salmon?" "That name has been taken as well, Coyote. As a matter of fact, all the names have been taken except for yours. No one wanted to be called Coyote."

Coyote looked very sad. He tucked his tail between his legs and walked away. The Great Spirit was touched.

"Coyote, Imitator, you must keep your name. Coyote is a good name for you. I wanted you to have that name and so I made you sleep late. I have important work for you to do. The New People are coming, you will be their chief."

"The New People will not know anything when they come—not how to dress, how to sing, how to shoot an arrow. You will teach them all the ways of living."

"But you will also do foolish things too, and for this the New People will laugh at you. You cannot help it. This will be your way. But I will give you a special power. When you die, you will always come back to life again. This will be your way, Coyote, Afraid of No One. Go and do your work well!"

Song: Hey ya-hey ya-hey e ya
Ya hey ya hey e ya, ya hey e ya
Hey ya hey ya ya hey yo
Ya hey ya hey e ya
Ya hey ya hey e ya, ya hey e ya
Hey ya hey ya ya hey yo

Scene 3

In the beginning, the animal people had no fire. The only fire anywhere was on the top of a high, snow-covered mountain, where it was guarded by the skookums. The skookums were three sisters who were wrinkled and old and really, really gross. The skookums were afraid that if the animal people had any fire they might become very powerful—as powerful as the skookums themselves. So the skookums wouldn't give the fire to anyone.

Because the animal people had no fire, they were always shivering, and they had to eat their food raw. When Coyote came along he found them cold and miserable.

"C-C-Coyote," they begged, "you must bring us fire from the mountain or we will d-d-d-die from all this c-c-c-cold." "I will see what I can do for you," promised Coyote.

Well, Coyote didn't know what to do. He thought and thought, but couldn't come up with a plan. So Coyote decided to ask his three sisters to help him. His sisters were huckleberries that lived in his stomach. They were very wise and could tell him what to do.

"Wake up, sisters!" At first Coyote's sisters were reluctant to help him. "If we tell you what to do, you'll just say you knew it all along."

"No, I won't do that. Now tell me how to get fire from the skookums." [*Shakes head no.*] "Tell me!"

[*Shakes head no.*] "Tell me!! All right then, Hail, Hail, fall down from the sky!"

This made the sisters very afraid. They cried, "Stop, don't bring the hail down. We'll tell you what you want to know. Go...! The skookums may be old, but they're fast. Now, Coyote, you must hide in the bushes until the one guarding the fire turns to wake up her sisters. The second she turns her back on the fire, race in and grab it."

Coyote said, "Oh, well I knew that all along." His sisters walked back down into his stomach and Coyote went to see the animal people. He picked out the fastest runners and had them stand in a long line from the village all the way up to the top of the mountain. Coyote crept in among the bushes around the skookums' fire and waited.

It was just as the huckleberries had said. Two of the skookums were sleeping while the third guarded the fire. Just as soon as the wrinkled old skookum got up to call her sisters, Coyote sprang from the bushes, seized a burning brand of fire and ran away as fast as he could. The three skookums were behind him in an instant. They were so close they were showering Coyote with snow and ice churned up by their feet. Coyote ran faster than he had ever run in his life. He leaped over cracks in the ice. He rolled down the mountain like a snowball. But the skookums were right behind him, so close that their hot breath scorched his fur.

Coyote reached the tree line and Cougar jumped out from his hiding place. So Coyote passed the fire to Cougar—as Coyote fell flat on his face from exhaustion. Cougar ran through the high trees until he met the Fox, who took the fire and ran through the underbrush until he met Squirrel, who took the fire and ran up the trees, through the branches, back down the trees until he came to the edge of the woods. Squirrel then gave the fire to Antelope, who bounded across the plains.

At last he reached the river, and he passed the fire to the frog. The frog. By now the fire was only a little glowing coal. The frog took the coal and swallowed it. He dove into the deep river. When he got to the other side, he found the skookums all around him! The Frog leapt between their legs, but he was an old frog and the skookums caught him and tried to squeeze the coal out of him. So Frog spat the hot coal out onto Wood, and Wood swallowed the coal.

The three skookums just stood there and didn't know what to do. None of them could figure out a way to get fire out of Wood. After a while they got discouraged and left, making their way slowly back up to their snow-covered mountaintop.

Coyote then called all the animals together, and they all gathered around the Wood. Coyote was very wise, he knew how to get fire out of Wood. He told the animals, "What you must do is take two dry sticks and rub them together. Pretty soon sparks will jump out. Then add dry moss and twigs to those sparks and you will have a fire."

From then on the people knew how to get the fire out of Wood. They cooked their meat, their houses were warm, and they were never cold again.

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Scene 4

Song: Just one more kiss for the last time
Until I come back

Hold me close in the beautiful moon-
light

Farewell sweetheart

Wey ya hiyah, wey ya hiyo

Coyote loved the night.

Song: Come from Oklahoma

Got no one for my own

So I come here looking for you, hiya

I will be your sugar, you will be my
honey

By and by—ya, wey ya hiyo

All night long he would sit and watch
the stars. There was one star in particular
that was more beautiful than anything Coy-
ote had ever seen. He was in love with that
star, and would talk to her, night after night,
and all night long. But the star wouldn't
answer him; she walked across the sky, look-
ing at him but saying nothing.

Wey ya hiyah, wey ya hiyo

Coyote grew more and more crazy for
that star. He noticed that always, as she
walked through the sky, she passed very
close to a certain mountain peak, so close
it would be easy to touch her. Coyote trav-
eled as fast as he could, a long long way,
until very tired, he stood on this mountain
peak. And he waited.

In the evening he saw her coming; she
was very beautiful. He could see now that
she and the other stars were dancing; they
moved through the sky dancing. Coyote
waited, his heart nearly bursting through
his skin; but he kept quiet. The star danced
nearer and nearer; at last she was at the
mountain peak. He reached up as high as
he could, but he could not quite touch her.
He begged her to take his hand. "Please."

She reached down and took his paws into
her hands.

Slowly she danced with him, up from
the mountains; far up into the sky, over the
earth. Coyote got dizzy; his heart was afraid.
They went higher into the sky, among all
the other stars. It was bitter cold and silent.
None of the stars spoke. Coyote looked
down and fear filled his heart. He begged
the stars to take him back to earth. When
they reached the very top of the sky, the
star let go of Coyote.

Wey ya hiyah, wey ya hiyo

Coyote fell for thirty days and thirty
nights, and when he finally struck the earth,
he knocked a great big hole in it, which
became Crater Lake.

Scene 5

One day Rabbit was out on a plain eating
when Coyote came up. "I am very hungry,
I'm going to eat you!"

"Oh no, Coyote, don't eat me. They're
cooking a really good meal of chicken right
over there. Wait here and I'll bring it to
you." And the Rabbit hopped off toward
the mountain. Coyote happily waited, sing-
ing in anticipation of a fine meal. He waited
a long time. At last he became angry and
he followed the tracks of Rabbit.

He found Rabbit in a gully standing
by a cliff with his forepaws up against the
wall. "I bet you're wondering what I'm do-
ing here, right Coyote? I'm holding this cliff
up." At that moment a little rock fell and
the Rabbit pushed even harder. "Here, you
hold the cliff up while I go and get the food
I was talking about. It's almost ready."

And the Rabbit hopped away. Coyote
put his paws up against the cliff, pushing
desperately, while the Rabbit ran off. At that
moment another rock fell, and Coyote

pushed all the harder. He waited for a long time. He was very tired and terribly hungry. Suddenly he let go of the cliff and ran as fast as he could. Nothing happened. He followed the tracks of Rabbit.

"This time I'm really going to eat you!"

"Just sit down. They're going to bring that food right here. They'll be here soon."

So Coyote sat down, looking hungrily at Rabbit. Rabbit jumped up. "I'm going to hurry them. I'll be right back, I promise." So Rabbit hopped off and Coyote waited.

Meanwhile Rabbit set fire all around the edges of the thicker. He went hopping back to Coyote. "There. You smell the smoke? Do you hear the fire, Coyote? They're bringing you a wonderful meal of fry bread, kouse, and chicken!" And the Rabbit ran away as fast as he could.

Coyote happily danced and sang as he waited for his meal. The fire soon surrounded him and he was burned up.

Poor Coyote.

So Fox had to jump over his friend again.

One day Coyote was walking up the river when he came upon a lodge. No one lived there, but inside the lodge was a box. And inside the box was a pair of white leggings. These were magic leggings, fire leggings. Whoever wore these leggings would not only be protected from fire, but they would also have the strength of fire, the strength to transform an object from one thing to another.

Scene 6

One winter Coyote's wife became ill. She died. In time, Coyote became very lonely. He did nothing but weep for his wife. One night the Death Spirit came to him and asked if he was crying for his wife.

Coyote said, "Yes, my friend, I long for her. There is a great pain in my heart."

After a while, the Death Spirit felt sorry for Coyote and said, "I can take you to the place where your wife has gone, but if I do, you must do exactly what I say. You can't disregard a single word." He knew Coyote had trouble following directions.

"What would you expect me to do? Of course, I will do whatever you say, anything, my friend." "Well then, let's go." After they had gone a ways the Death Spirit again cautioned Coyote to do exactly as he was told and Coyote said he would.

By then it was morning and Coyote was having trouble seeing the Death Spirit. It was like a shadow on an overcast day. They were going across the prairie to the east when suddenly the Ghost stopped and said, "Oh, look at all these horses over there. It must be a roundup." Coyote couldn't see any horses, but he said, "Yes, yes!"

They went on a little further. "Oh, look at all those service berries! Let's pick some to eat." Coyote couldn't see any berries, and the Ghost said, "When you see me reach up and pull the limb down, you do the same."

Even though Coyote couldn't see anything, he imitated the Ghost, putting his hand to his mouth as though he were eating. He watched how the Ghost did everything and imitated him. "Very good, Coyote."

They walked a short distance. "Coyote, we are coming to a door now. Do in every way exactly what I do. I will take hold of the door flap, raise it up, and, bending low, will enter. Then you take hold of the door flap and do the same." In this way they went in. The Ghost said, "Sit down here by your wife."

Coyote could see nothing. He sat down in an open prairie in the middle of the afternoon with nothing in sight. "Your wife has prepared food for us! Let us eat." Coyote could only see grass and dust in front of him. They ate. And then the Ghost said, "I must go now, Coyote. You stay here."

Now it was getting dark and Coyote thought he could hear voices, very faintly, talking all around him. Then darkness set in and Coyote began to see many small fires in the long house. He began to see people, like shadows. And then he saw his wife sitting by his side. He was overjoyed. He cried. Coyote went around and greeted all his old friends who had died long ago. This made him very happy. All night long, he went among them visiting and talking with everyone.

Toward morning, the Death Spirit said, "Coyote, the sun is coming up and in a little while you will not see us. But you must stay here. Do not move. In the evening you will see all these people again." "Where would I go my friend? Sure, I will stay right here."

When dawn came, Coyote found himself sitting alone in the middle of the prairie. The sun got very hot and Coyote thought he could hear meadowlarks somewhere. Finally evening came and he saw the lodge again. This went on for over a week. Coyote would sit in the hot sun in the daytime and at night he would visit with his wife and his friends.

One night the Death Spirit came to him and said, "Coyote, tomorrow you will go home. You will take your wife with you. Listen to me. There are five mountains to the west. You will travel for five days. You must not under any circumstances touch your wife. When you have crossed the fifth mountain, then you can do whatever you want."

"That is the way it will be then," said Coyote. When dawn came, Coyote and his wife set out. They crossed over one mountain, then two mountains, then three. On the fourth mountain, Coyote built a fire. Coyote sat on one side of the fire, his wife on the other.

Coyote could see the firelight dancing on her buckskin dress, on her face and in her eyes. How he wanted to embrace his wife. But he didn't dare touch her. But as Coyote watched his wife, an overwhelming and irresistible urge came over him. He had to kiss his wife. He jumped up and ran around the fire to embrace her.

"No! Stop! Stop! Coyote, do not touch me!"

But her warning had no effect. Coyote rushed to her and just as he touched her she vanished. She disappeared and returned to Shadowland. When the Death Spirit learned what Coyote had done, he was furious. "Why are you always doing things like this, Coyote? I told you not to do anything foolish. You were about to establish the practice of returning from death. Now that will never happen and you have made it this way."

Coyote wept and wept. His sorrow was very deep. He decided that he would go back, find the death lodge and find his wife again. And this time he would do it right. He crossed back over the mountains, went out onto the prairie, and began to do the same things he had done on his first trip to Shadowland.

"Oh, look at all those horses. It must be a roundup! Oh, such choice service berries. Let's pick some and eat." He came to the place where the Death Lodge had stood. "Now I must do everything my friend told me. I will reach for the door flap and, bend-

ing low, will enter. And here is the spot where I sat with my wife. My wife has prepared food for us, let us eat."

Darkness fell and Coyote listened for the voices. He looked all around, but nothing happened. Coyote was just sitting in the middle of the prairie. He sat there all night long, but the lodge never appeared again. In the morning he heard the sound of the meadowlarks.

Scene 7

"The Human Beings, the New People, my children will be coming soon. I can feel it. I'll give them a start with the Monster of Kamiah!"

The monster Coyote was talking about was over eleven miles long. It lived in the Kamiah valley and had swallowed all the animal people living there.

"Oh, you horrible monster, it is I who am here now. Inhale me! Inhale me! You have already swallowed all the other people around here, you may as well swallow me as well. I don't want to be lonely. Aye. Inhale me! Inhale Coyote, the powerful Itsiyaya! I have come here to destroy you with my strong medicine. Suck me in if you can."

[Sounds of wind—Coyote tumbles in slow motion.]

Hello. Hello! Oh, yuck, I must be inside the Monster's stomach. Now where is the Monster's heart? Oh, this is disgusting. Hello Moose. And Grizzly Bear? And my friend Fox! And my auntie Meadowlark. Tots maywe* Listen up, all of you. I'm going to cut the Monster's heart off. As soon as I do, all of you must run out the open-

ing nearest you. Get yourselves ready. The heart is here."

"One. Two. Three. Four. Five. RUN!"

Hey ya hey ya hey e ya

Ya hey ya hey e ya

Ya hey hey e ya

Hey ya hey ya ya hey yo

"From the Monster's legs I make the Blackfeet and the Sioux. You are the New People. You will be good runners!"

"From the Monster's arms I make the Cayuse! You will be strong and brave. You are the New People!"

"From the Monster's stomach I make the Blood and the Cree. You will eat well and be good hunters. You are the New People!"

"From the bones, I make the Flathead! You are the New People! Think and act wisely."

"From the Monster's body I make the Klickitat, the Yakima, the Colville. You are the New People!"

"And from the Monster's blood, I make the Nez Perce. You will live here in this valley. You may be small but like the light you must be brilliant. You are the New People!"

Scene 8

Coyote's work was done. He was going through the woods up above Kamiah when he noticed a rope hanging down from the sky. Coyote thought, "What the heck is going on here? A rope has to be attached to something."

What Coyote didn't know was that the rope was attached to A-kum-kinny-koo, Heaven. And the rope was for Coyote. The Great Spirit had put it there so Coyote could climb up the rope and join the Great Spirit in Heaven. But the only way Coyote could

* Native American form of greeting.

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Five. RUN!"

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grab hold of the rope was if he confessed to all of his tricks.

"Oh shoot! Well, once I gave a present to a Rock and then I took it back again. And then once I called all these birds nasty names. And then I stole something once, but it was fire from the skookums! And then there was the time I had taken my eyeballs out and was juggling with them, when someone stole them and ran away! So I had to accidentally beat up an old woman, put on her clothes so I could get my eyeballs back."

"And once I stepped on this Rattlesnake's head and squished it flat. You should have seen his face! And then once I turned myself into a little bitty baby and I got all these pretty girls to hold me and burp me and to change my diapers!"

"And once I got this real dumb guy to marry me! No, he was real conceited and waiting for just the right wife. Boy, that was a good one. OH! There's the time I stole the sun and the moon, but then I put them in the sky for all of us to see. Should I go on?"

"No, Coyote, don't go on. Just grab hold of the rope and let me pull you to Heaven." So Coyote grabbed hold of the rope and he went higher and higher, up past

the clouds, up to A-kum-kinny-koo. But unfortunately, many of the people Coyote had tricked were now living in Heaven. And when they heard that Coyote was coming up to live in their world, they got mad. One of them grabbed a knife and cut the rope.

And Coyote fell down through the air and hit the earth.

And he changed.

He turned into the timid and slinking creature that we see running through the hills and valleys today. The Great Coyote, the powerful Itsiyaya, and all of the animal kingdom, was no more.

But then again I heard that Coyote is now living in L.A. I mean he's starring in movies as Wile E. Coyote.

I remember when the astronauts first landed on the moon. I was back on the reservation and talking to my grandfather, my Pelukut. And he said, "Oh, those people think they're so smart. They don't even know Coyote's already been to the moon and back."

Curtain