

Coyote: Sn'klep/ Sn'k'ep

Creation stories speak of a time when the animals took human form. For the Nl̓eʔkepmx (Sn'k'ep) and Syilx (Sn'klep), Coyote was a central figure in these legends and stories. The animal people during this time could walk and talk like we do today. Although Coyote thought of himself as a powerful one, his name literally translated to "Imitator".

He was known as a trickster and transformer; a complex figure, often baffling to non-native audiences. He is more of an anti-hero than a "hero." More buffoon, than champion. For native people, he is the ultimate negative example. He shares his characteristics with other trickster transformers such as Raven of the Northwest Coast.

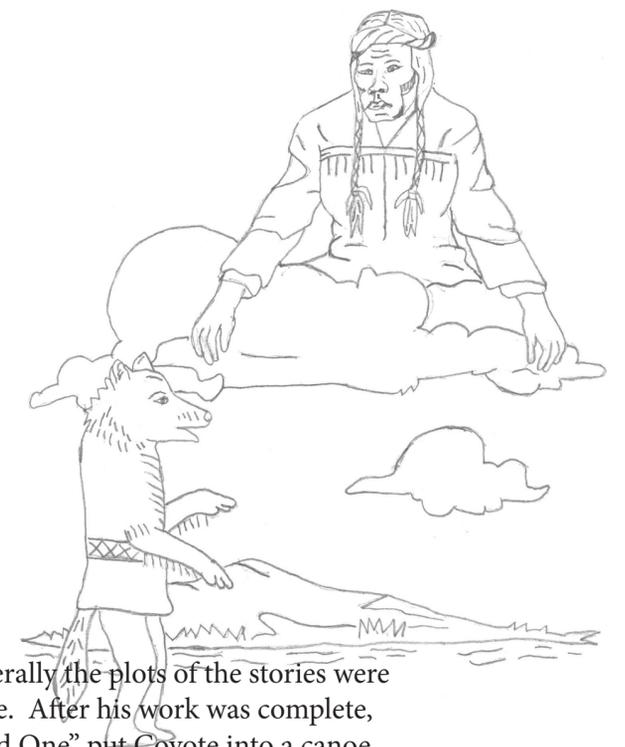
Coyote's greatest character flaw is too much pride and self-importance. If we described coyote today in human form, he would be tall and lanky, with sunken cheeks and an overall scruffy appearance. He spoke with a drawn in voice that was easily recognized by everyone, and there was no way he could get away from his speech.

His character is described as someone who bragged all the time. He pretended to know a lot, but in reality, did not know very much at all. He had a mischievous side to his character and was always getting himself into situations beyond his control or even getting himself killed. His brother fox was given the job to watch over coyote. If coyote was ever killed, fox

would jump over him four times and he would come back to life, even if all that was remaining was a single hair or piece of bone.

"The Old One", also known as "Big Chief", gave Coyote the responsibility of transforming the land and making it livable for the "people to be" because the people would not know how to live on the land; they would have to be taught. In the stories of creation there were many abnormalities or bad things on the land and it was coyote's job to "finish making the world as it is today". At the end of each story, Coyote would pronounce a "commandment" to set the law about some present condition.

Coyotes' travels are Nl̓eʔkepmx and Syilx history about the land. He set the laws and taught the people survival techniques like how to hunt and fish. Coyote was given a "special power" by "The Old One", a power which he could call upon to help him with his work. In some stories he would call on this power for his own personal use and benefit. Each tribe, band or family had its own version of these stories,



but generally the plots of the stories were the same. After his work was complete, "The Old One" put Coyote into a canoe and out into the ocean, from which he will return when needed.

Coyote is considered a teacher because he embodies many of the traits of human character such as laziness, foolishness, skillful planning, and having desires or needs. What he lacks in dignity he makes up in sheer exuberance. He also embodies human qualities that are highly respected by the Nl̓eʔkepmx and Syilx; he was a fun character and we enjoy hearing about his exploits.

Coyote is not a hopeless character, but a realistic character.

Our elders recall when they were children the stories would be told at night. The stories taught them about nature, respect, morals and proper behavior, they were also purely for entertainment. The stories would be told at Gatherings, Funerals, Potlatches, and in hunting and fishing camps and root and berry picking camps. When travelling past certain places the stories would be retold as well.

