

COYOTE FINISHES HIS WORK

retold by Barry Lopez

BACKGROUND

“Coyote Finishes His Work” is an oral tale handed down by the Nez Perce, a Native American people. The French coined the term *nez percé*, meaning “pierced nose,” because some of them wore nose pendants. Following the establishment of the Oregon Trail and fueled by the frenzy of the nineteenth-century gold rush, conflicts erupted over the Nez Perce land. In 1877, the Nez Perce leader, Chief Joseph, surrendered to federal troops with the immortal words “I will fight no more forever.”



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From the very beginning, Coyote was traveling around all over the earth. He did many wonderful things when he went along. He killed the monsters and the evil spirits that preyed on the people. He made the Indians, and put them out in tribes all over the world because Old Man Above wanted the earth to be inhabited all over, not just in one or two places. **A**

He gave all the people different names and taught them different languages. This is why Indians live all over the country now and speak in different ways.

10 He taught the people how to eat and how to hunt the buffalo and catch eagles. He taught them what roots to eat and how to make a good lodge and what to wear. He taught them how to dance. Sometimes he made mistakes, and even though he was wise and powerful, he did many foolish things. But that was his way. **B**

Coyote liked to play tricks. He thought about himself all the time, and told everyone he was a great warrior, but he was not.

“Coyote Finishes His Work” from *Giving Birth to Thunder, Sleeping with His Daughter* by Barry Holstun Lopez. Copyright © 1977 by Barry Holstun Lopez. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of Andrews McMeel Universal.

A VOCABULARY

Selection Vocabulary

By examining context clues, what do you think the word *inhabited* means?

B READING FOCUS

Circle the things that Coyote taught his people to do. What do these teachings reveal about Nez Perce **cultural characteristics**?

A READING FOCUS

What can you infer about the Nez Perce's **cultural** views on mortality?

B LITERARY FOCUS

What type of **archetype** is Coyote? Describe his characteristics.

C VOCABULARY

Academic Vocabulary
What *aspects*, or parts, of Coyote's personality seem to contradict each other?

Sometimes he would go too far with some trick and get someone killed. Other times, he would have a trick played on himself by
20 someone else. He got killed this way so many times that Fox and the birds got tired of bringing him back to life. **A** Another way he got in trouble was trying to do what someone else did. This is how he came to be called Imitator.

Coyote was ugly too. The girls did not like him. But he was smart. He could change himself around and trick the women. Coyote got the girls when he wanted. **B C**

One time, Coyote had done everything he could think of and was traveling from one place to another place, looking for other things that needed to be done. Old Man saw him
30 going along and said to himself, "Coyote has now done almost everything he is capable of doing. His work is almost done. It is time to bring him back to the place where he started."

So Great Spirit came down and traveled in the shape of an old man. He met Coyote. Coyote said, "I am Coyote. Who are you?"

Old Man said, "I am Chief of the earth. It was I who sent you to set the world right."

"No," Coyote said, "you never sent me. I don't know you. If you are the Chief, take that lake over there and move it to the
40 side of that mountain."

"No. If you are Coyote, let me see you do it."

Coyote did it.

"Now, move it back."

Coyote tried, but he could not do it. He thought this was strange. He tried again, but he could not do it.

Chief moved the lake back.

Coyote said, "Now I know you are the Chief."

Old Man said, "Your work is finished, Coyote. You have traveled far and done much good. Now you will go to where
50 I have prepared a home for you."

Then Coyote disappeared. Now no one knows where he is anymore.



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Old Man got ready to leave, too. He said to the Indians, “I will send messages to the earth by the spirits of the people who reach me but whose time to die has not yet come. They will carry messages to you from time to time. When their spirits come back into their bodies, they will revive and tell you their experiences. **D E**

60 “Coyote and myself, we will not be seen again until Earth-
woman is very old. Then we shall return to earth, for it will
require a change by that time. Coyote will come along first, and
when you see him, you will know I am coming. When I come
along, all the spirits of the dead will be with me. There will be
no more Other Side Camp. All the people will live together.
Earthmother will go back to her first shape and live as a mother
among her children. Then things will be made right.” **F G**

Now they are waiting for Coyote.

D VOCABULARY

Word Study

Spirit has multiple meanings. Look up its definitions in a dictionary. Based on what you have read so far, which definition of *spirit* do you think is being used here?

E LANGUAGE COACH

Revive means “return to life.” Write one antonym for *revive*. An antonym is a word with the opposite meaning of another word.

F LITERARY FOCUS

Old Man is also an **archetype**. Based on the evidence in the text, what kind of archetype do you think he is?

G LITERARY ANALYSIS

Based on the details in this paragraph, what do you think Other Side Camp might be?
