

This month's theme:
Coyote stories



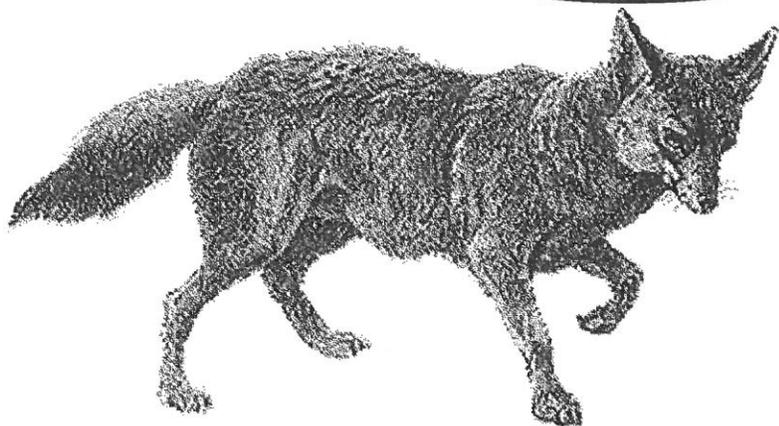
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The Newsletter of the Idaho State Historical Society's Junior Historian Program

PROSPECTOR

November, 2003



Coyote Stories

What do you think of when someone says "American Folktales"? Do you imagine a giant lumberjack named Paul Bunyon chopping his way through the forest with his pet blue ox? Or maybe you picture a skinny, shabbily dressed boy named Johnny Appleseed with a bag full of seeds, planting fruit trees wherever he goes. From Davy Crocket to John Henry, these familiar names are the characters most of us think of when we picture American stories or folktales.

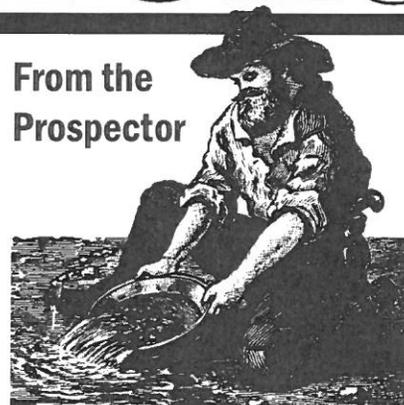
But there are other older, less familiar stories that are

important to our cultural heritage. Long before any Europeans visited North America, there were people who lived on this continent. These Native American people told stories of a time before humans walked the Earth. These fascinating stories were passed down from generation to generation, for perhaps thousands of years, and are still told today.

There are many tribes of Indians in North America and each has unique stories. Strangely though, there is a character who keeps popping up all over the continent. From Canada to Mexico, from the Pacific Ocean to the Mississippi

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From the Prospector



Howdy Prospectors!

This month my best friend, my mule, tried to convince me to write an entire issue on famous mules in Idaho history. He thought it was a pretty good idea. "Mules are important," he said, "everyone loves to hear a good mule story." Well I don't know about you guys, but I don't know any mule stories and even if I did, I'm not sure I'd write an entire issue about them. But, his idea got me thinking. Is there another animal that I could write about? Is there some critter whose stories are important to Idaho? In the end, I picked coyotes. As I'm sure you'll agree after reading this month's issue, Coyote stories are some of the best in the west.

Remember to send me your submissions for next month's issue. I can't wait to see what you come up with!

Coyote Stories Continued

River, a character named Coyote is the star of many of these tribal stories.

Coyote is especially popular in Idaho. In addition to many other tribes, Coyote appears in the stories of the Kootenai and Coeur d'Alene to the north, the Nez Perce in the central regions, and the Shoshone to the south. Coyote is everywhere.

Native American folktales might first seem unusual to those unfamiliar with them. Although most of the characters in the stories have animal names, they are not really animals. Coyote is not like the canine scavenger that roams the state today on four legs, nor does he look like a typical Indian. Not quite an animal and not quite human, Coyote is instead, a magical creature from the distant past.

Coyote is also a trickster. A trickster is a character who can be good or bad, hero or villain, wise man or clown. Coyote is known for his many daring adventures, fighting monsters

and defeating horrible enemies to help the other creatures of his world, but he is also known for his poor behavior. Coyote is sometimes a liar and a cheater. He is often greedy and tries to take more than he needs. Although Coyote is clever, his foolish choices sometimes get him into trouble.

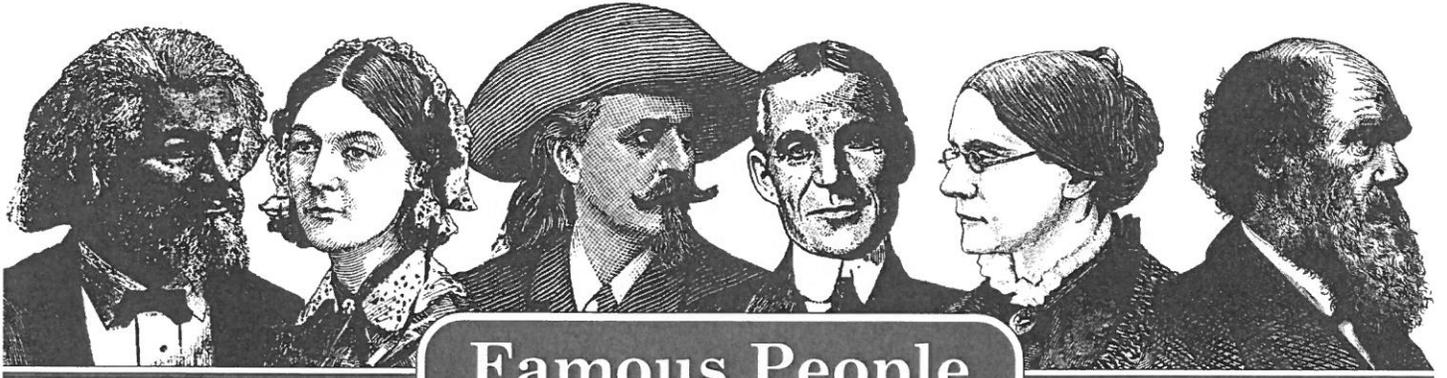
Another thing that might seem strange to those of us who haven't grown up in a Native American community, is that Coyote stories were not written down until

recently. Oral storytelling is an important tradition that many of us are unfamiliar with. Because most Native American tribes did not have a written language, they could not keep their knowledge and history in books. Storytelling was an important way to teach children about the world around them.

For example, a Coyote story might teach children how to find the North star so they would never get lost, or it might explain the best time and place to go salmon fishing in the area. Coyote stories also could teach a child how to act. Since Coyote's bad behavior often got him into trouble, children listening to the stories could learn that being good had more rewards than being bad.

Although Coyote stories were important teaching tools, they had another purpose. Before radio and television and computers, storytelling was a great way for the family to get together and have a good time. Imagine you and your family snuggled up to a warm campfire on a cold starry night listening to the fantastic adventures of Coyote. Coyote stories are fun. ■





Famous People

Raven and Other Tricksters

Coyote is everywhere. If you were to do a careful study of Native American folklore, you would find that most of the tribes of North America tell Coyote stories. Wise or foolish, hero or troublemaker, the trickster seems to be an important character in their oral storytelling. But is Coyote the only trickster in Indian legend?

Although coyote is popular, there are other mischief makers in Native American stories. For example, Sioux storytellers often speak of Iktomi the spider. Like Coyote, Iktomi can be very helpful to humans. In Sioux myth he is responsible for creating time and inventing language. Unfortunately he also possesses some of coyote's worse qualities, telling

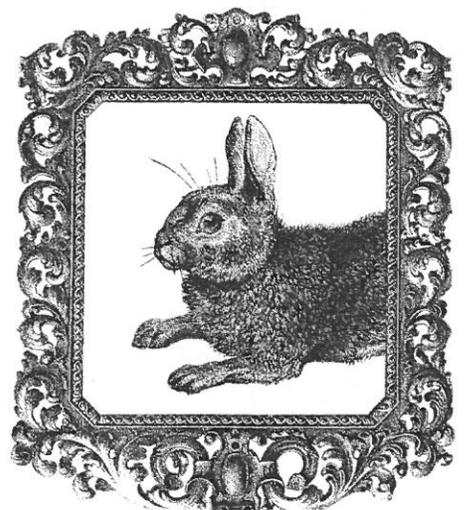
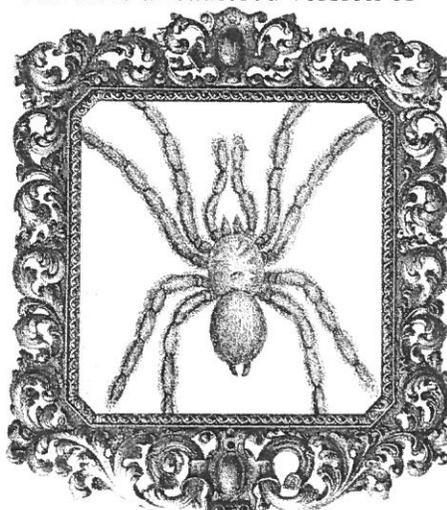
lies and playing tricks to get his way.

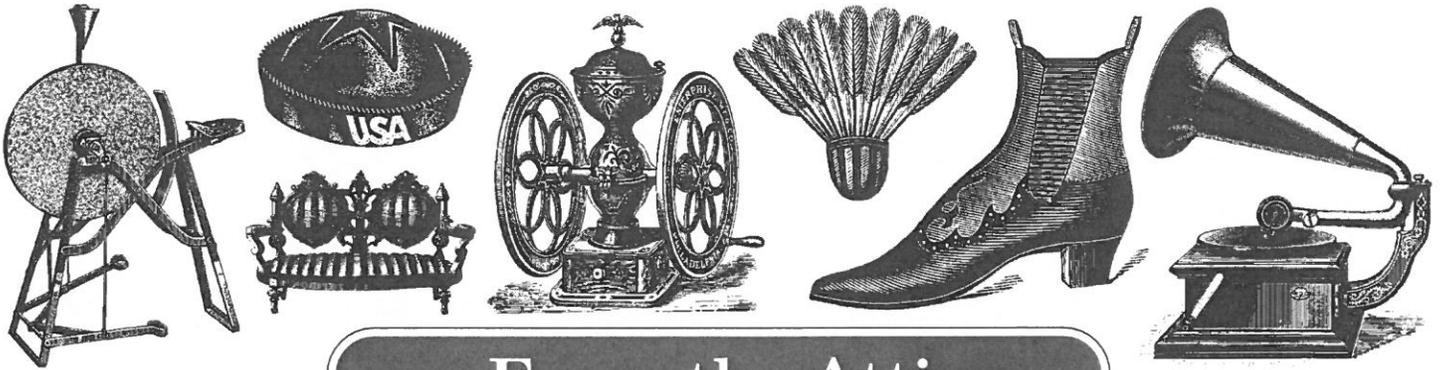
Masau'u, the Skeleton Man, is the trickster of the Hopi tribe. Masau'u is a shape changer who takes many disguises. Sometimes dressed as a handsome young man, sometimes as a fearsome skeleton, Masau'u can be both a protector and a thief.

There are other examples of tricksters from other tribes. The Blackfoot and Piegan tell of Old Man Napi. The Lakota and Cherokee have stories of a troublemaking rabbit. But probably the second most popular trickster in Native American mythology is Raven. Important to tribes in the Pacific Northwest like the Tlingit and the Haida, Raven is a feathered version of

Coyote. Clever and very cunning, Raven can be a great friend to humans when his mood is right. On the other hand, just like other Native American tricksters, Raven isn't always wise and honest. Sometimes his desire to get something he wants, bring out his bad side. Even though he is a creator with great power, Raven can act like childish clown, lying and cheating to get his way.

Trickster characters are an important part of Native American mythology. The humorous stories about these troublemakers have entertained generations of Indian children, as well as teaching them important lessons about how to live in their family and tribe. ■

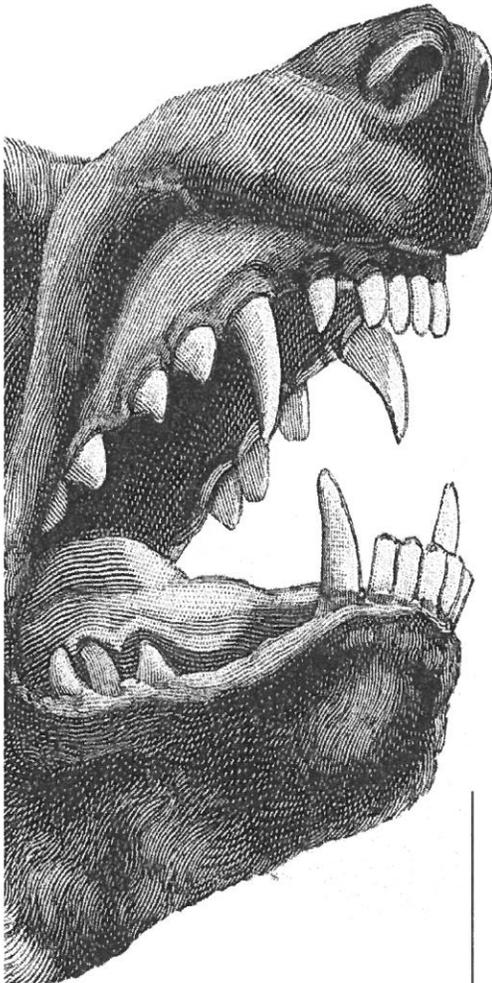




From the Attic

Heart of the Monster

The Nez Perce tribe tells many wonderful Coyote stories. In some of these tales, real landmarks are mentioned to teach the children geography and to help them appreciate the landscape. In one



of the most famous Nez Perce stories, Coyote creates all of the human Indian tribes by cutting out the heart of a great monster. Near the town of Kamiah, on the Clearwater River, stands a tall rocky hill that represents the heart of the great beast. This area is protected as an important Nez Perce cultural and historic site.

We have included a written version of this famous Nez Perce oral story, so that you can experience this enjoyable piece of Idaho folklore. Next time you are near Kamiah, stop and visit “the heart of the monster.” You won’t be disappointed.

One day Coyote noticed it was very quiet. “I wonder where all the animals have gone,” he thought. “I think I’ll go look for them.” He searched for his friends everywhere, in the mountains, the forest, and near the rivers, but no one was around. Tired and ready to give up, Coyote sat down to rest.

“Lima, lima, lima,” shrieked a voice from below

him.

It was Meadowlark. Because Coyote hadn’t been paying attention, he had sat down upon the poor bird and broken her leg. She was very angry, but Coyote made her a deal to calm her down. “I will make you a new strong leg out of wood if you tell me where everyone went.”

The Meadowlark agreed. “Everybody has been swallowed up by a ferocious monster,” she said and then she gave Coyote directions to where the beast was last seen.

After fixing the bird’s leg, Coyote packed his fire-making supplies and some knives and set out to find the monster. When he arrived where Meadowlark had directed him, he couldn’t believe his eyes. Before him was a gigantic monster lying on his belly. The creature was so big that his back reached as high as the



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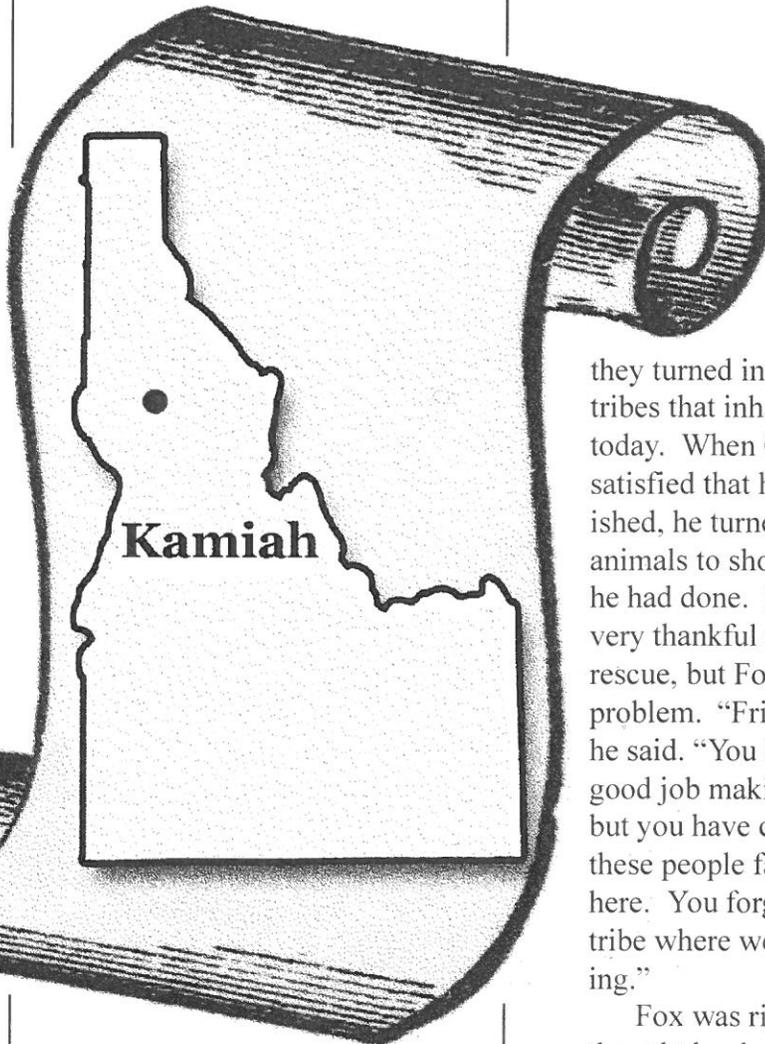
Heart of the Monster Continued

nearby mountains.

Coyote approached the great beast fearlessly, hoping it would open its giant mouth and swallow him up. But the monster just lay there and looked at him suspiciously. Coyote had a reputation as a troublemaker and the monster didn't want to be tricked.

Coyote tried a different plan. He walked up to the fearsome creature with a sad look on his face. "Help me," he asked the beast. "I am lonely. You have swallowed all the animals and now I have no one to talk with. Please eat me too, so I can be with my friends." Coyote was so sincere that he convinced the monster that he was telling the truth. The beast opened up his mouth and sucked Coyote down his cavernous throat.

Once inside, Coyote set immediately to work. He called for all the animals who were trapped inside to help him start a fire and then he began to cut away at the monster's heart. When the beast saw the smoke coming from his belly and felt the great pain in



his chest, he knew that Coyote had tricked him, but by then, it was too late. Coyote finished slicing out the monster's heart and all of the animals were free.

In celebration of the escape, Coyote carved up the body of the great monster. Whenever he sliced off a piece, he would throw it far away in a different direction. Wherever these pieces landed,

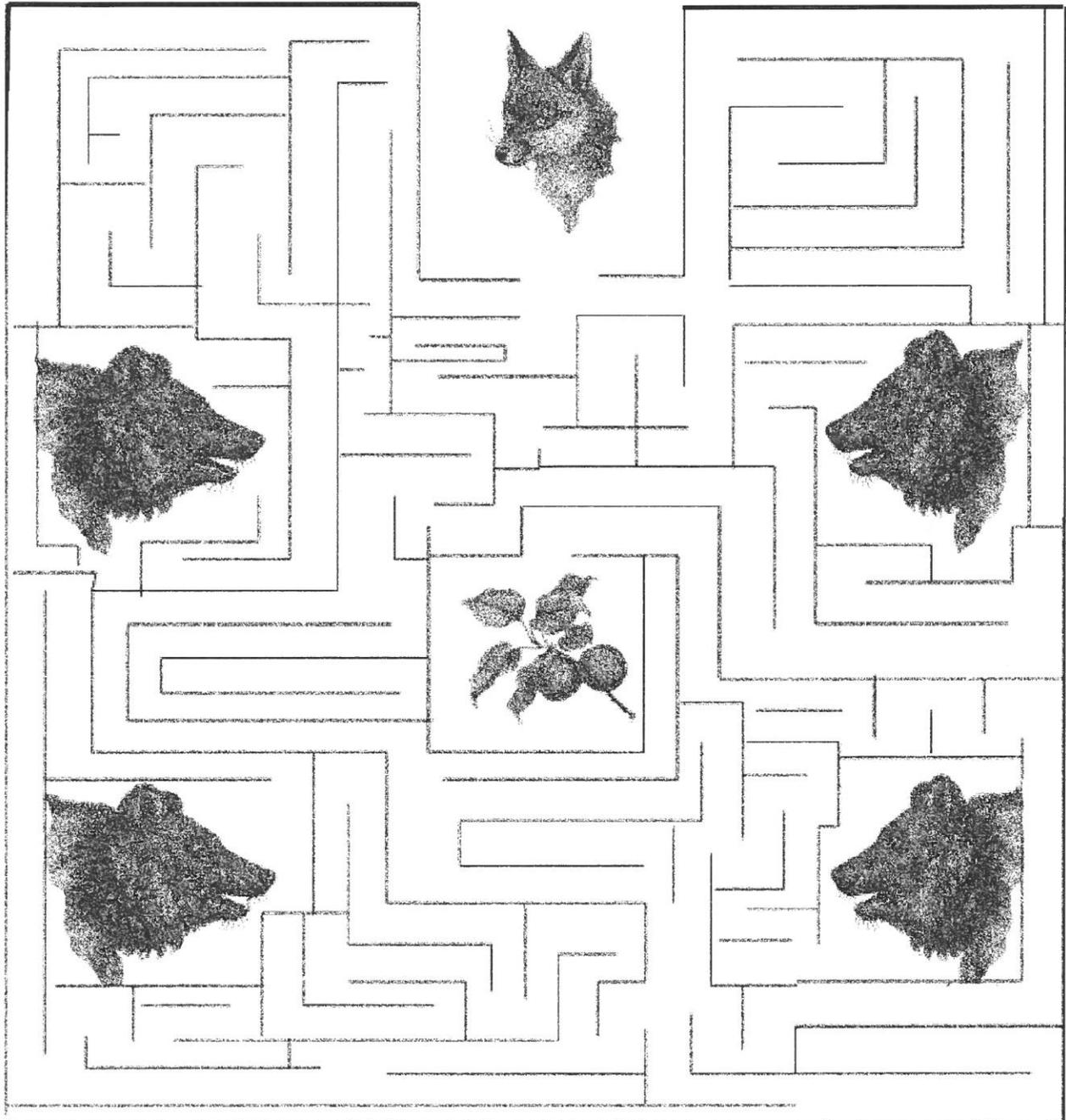
they turned into the human tribes that inhabit the Earth today. When Coyote was satisfied that he was finished, he turned to the other animals to show them what he had done. Everyone was very thankful of Coyote's rescue, but Fox noticed a problem. "Friend Coyote," he said. "You have done a good job making humans, but you have created all these people far away from here. You forgot to make a tribe where we are standing."

Fox was right. Coyote thought hard and then came up with an idea. He washed the monster's blood from his hands and let the drops sprinkle on the ground. This blood turned into the Nez Perce tribe. ■



The Fun Page

In some stories, Coyote has trouble with the ferocious Grizzly Bear brothers. Can you help Coyote avoid them? Guide Coyote through the maze to the berries without running into the bears. Good Luck!





Next Month's Activities

Well, we've told you all we know about Coyote stories, but we need your help so that we can learn more. Pick from one of the activities below or make up your own Coyote project and send it in to our Prospector Headquarters. We'll take some of your best work and print it in next month's magazine. Remember to include your name, your town, and the name of your prospector chapter. We can't wait to see what you send in.

Singing About Coyote:

Before people had written language, all information was passed down from generation to generation by spoken word. In this month's issue we learned about storytelling, but there are other ways to orally exchange information. Two methods that were very common in the past were poems and songs. Can you

write a short Coyote tale in the form of a poem or a song? Give it a try and send in your results.

Calling all Tricksters:

Coyote is only one of the Native American tricksters. Other tribes use ravens, skeleton men, spiders, and even rabbits to tell their stories. Can you come up with another trickster? Pick an animal or a creature that you think would make a good trickster and draw a picture of him or her for the other prospectors. Don't forget to tell us why you think your animal would make a great trickster.

Coyote (A.K.A *Canis*

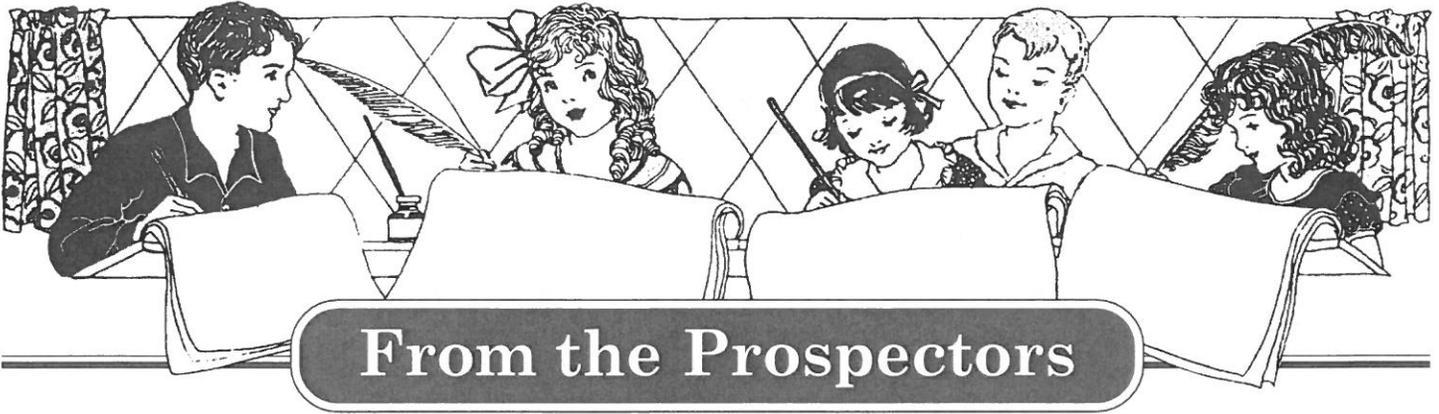
***latrans*):** We have learned a lot about the magical trickster, Coyote, but we haven't learned anything about real coyotes. In Idaho, coyotes are one of the most common predators. Using your library or the internet, do a

little research and tell us some facts about real coyotes. What do they eat? What kind of noises do they make? How big are they? If you find out the information, we'll print it here.

Send in your work by December 12th to:

Prospector Club
Lucky Noah
Idaho State Historical
Museum
610 North Julia Davis Drive
Boise, ID 83702

Or email it to us at
kzwolfer@ishs.state.id.us.



Look at these great submissions on last month's mammoth theme! Thanks for the help prospectors.

Mammoths were heavy, hairy and big,
 Their trunks were long and their tusks could dig.
 Their giant mouths could eat a ton,
 And their big, huge feet could smash the sun.
 It's sad to see that they're gone today,
 But it got so hot that they couldn't stay

Katie Knick
 Riverside Chapter
 Boise

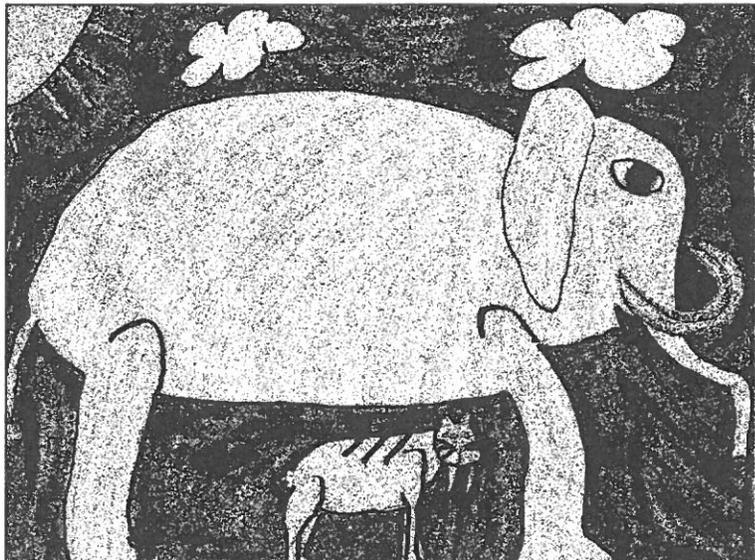
In the morning light,
 I looked from my window to see an amazing sight.
 A Mammoth was there!
 Stripping the trees bare.
 He looked up at me and snickered to me.
 Nice and kindly too.

I ran downstairs to give him some fruit.
 When I did, he grabbed the food.
 He happily ate it up.
 So now he was my friend,
 But he gets mad now and then.
 So that's my mammoth I found.

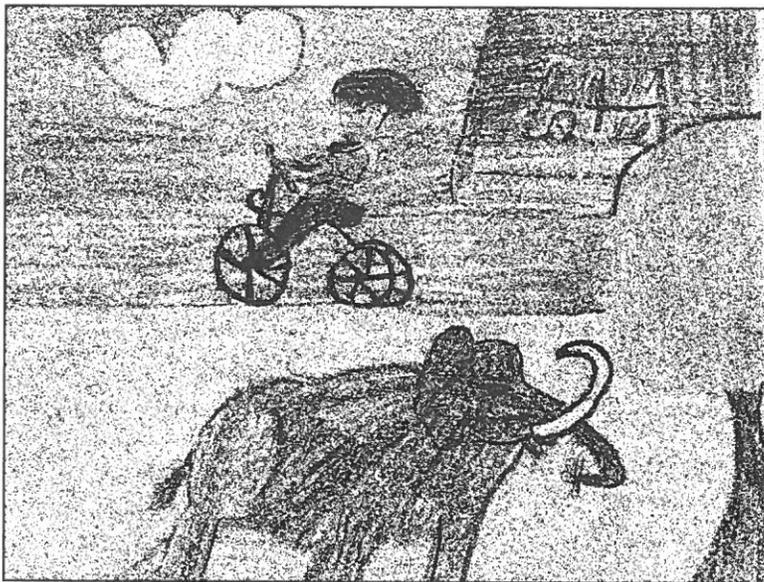
Michelle Wu
 Riverside Chapter
 Boise

If I woke up with a mammoth in my backyard I would be so happy.
 I would go get dressed and run outside. I would go and jump on the mammoth and ride it for the whole day. Then I would go to sleep and wake up in the morning telling everybody to come to my backyard. Everybody would be so happy. Then when I woke up in the morning nobody was there not even the mammoth. Then I remembered mammoths are extinct.

Brink Bolen
 Riverside Chapter
 Boise



Eric Robbins
 Riverside Chapter
 Boise



Kevallyn Drake
Riverside Chapter
Boise

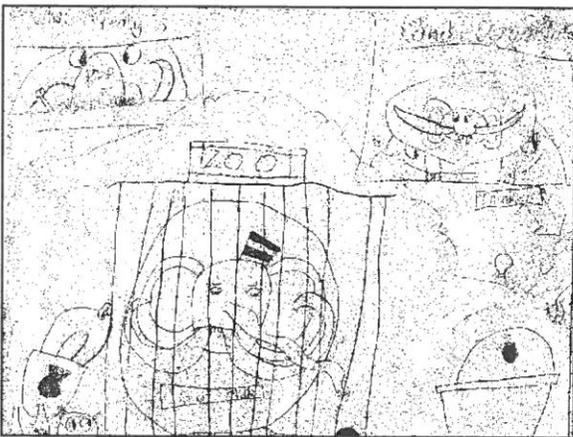
Once I saw a mammoth in my
backyard,
He was even bigger than my Saint
Bernard.

He would eat the grass,
And stomp on glass
he even scared a little lass.

It would moan and groan
When he saw my friend gone,
And then he stood as still as a
bone.

As the end of the day drew near,
that mammoth would quiver and
sneer
And then he would disappear.

Hannah Loveless
Riverside Chapter
Boise

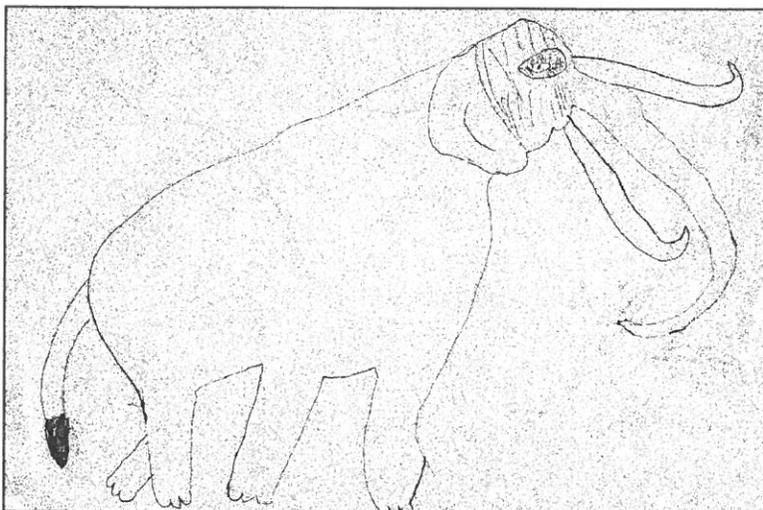


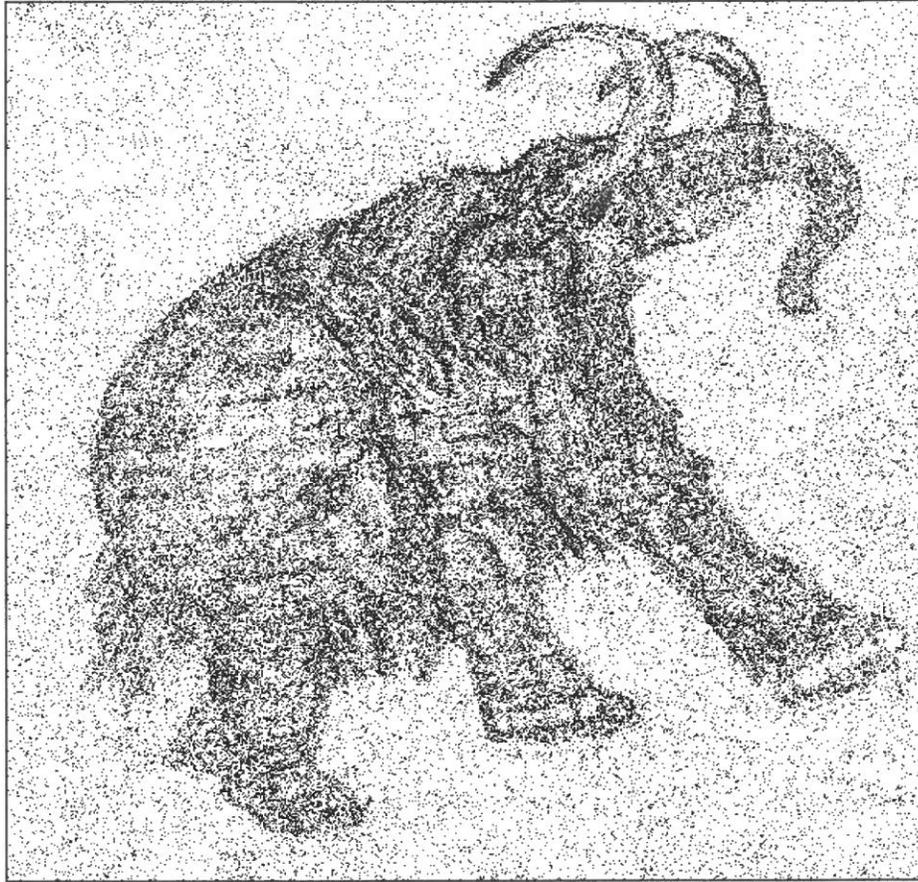
Robby Gonzales
Riverside Chapter
Boise

Isabella Cohen
Riverside Chapter
Boise

Mammoth mammoth in my yard,
Mammoth mammoth acting like a
guard.
Mammoth mammoth is playing
Mammoth mammoth is playing
on bars
Mammoth mammoth on some
cars.

Nathaniel Wilder
Riverside Chapter
Boise





Mammoth lived in South Central Idaho over two million years ago. They were gigantic creatures having many elephant-like features. Mammoths had long, curved tusks up to thirteen feet long, and big humps on their backs which made them big and strong. The Columbia mammoths were sixteen feet tall, weighing up to ten tons in all. The woolly mammoth had a thick hairy coat to help it adapt to its cold, Ice Age habitat. They were plant eating herbivores, not meat eating carnivores. They are now extinct, disappearing 10,000 years ago scientists think.

Paul Schroeder
Riverside Chapter
Boise

Resources for Teachers

Field Trip Ideas

Nez Perce National Historical Park

39063 U.S. Highway 95
Spalding, ID 83540-9715
(208) 843-2261

In east Kamiah, 2 miles upstream from the bridge that crosses the Clearwater.

Visit the rock formation that is the physical and spiritual base for the Nez Perce "Heart of the Monster" creation story.

Books

Although there are many sources for Coyote tales, keep in mind that they all aren't appropriate for small children. Coyote's adventures can sometimes be a bit raunchy or violent for the 4th grade. Make sure to preview any reading accordingly.

Boas, F.

Folktales of Salishan and Sahaptin Tribes
GE Stechert and Co. 1917

Stories from the Pend d'Orielle, Cour d'Alene, and Nez Perce tribes.

Bright, W.

A Coyote Reader

University of California Press. 1993

Filled with coyote tales from many Indian cultures, this book is a good overview of the importance of Coyote in Native American folktales.

Erdoes, R. and Ortiz, A.

American Indian Trickster Tales

Viking. 1998

The best collection of Native American trickster stories around. Features Coyote, Raven, Spider, and more.

Hines, D.

Tales of the Nez Perce

Ye Gallein Press. 1984

A collection of Nez Perce folktales including some of Coyote.

Linderman, F.

Kootenai Why Stories

University of Nebraska Press. 1997

An overview of Kootenai stories.

Nez Perce National Historical Park

And It Is Still That Way

National Park Service

An excellent teacher's guide to Nez Perce oral storytelling, complete with lesson plans and other resources. Available through the Nez Perce National Historical Park.

Slickpoo, A. editor

Nu Mee Poom Tit Wah Tit (Nez Perce Legends)

Nez Perce Tribe. 1972

Nez Perce Coyote stories as told directly by the tribe.

Smith, Anne

Shoshone Tales

University of Utah Press. 1993

A collection of Shoshone mythological stories.

Strauss, S.

Coyote Stories for Children

Beyond Words publishing. 1991

Four Coyote stories appropriate for children.

Walker, D.E.

Indians of Idaho

University of Idaho Press. 1978

A cultural and historical overview of all of the Idaho tribes.

Walker, D.E.

Nez Perce Coyote Tales: The Myth Cycle

University of Oklahoma Press. 1994

Coyote stories in the Nez Perce culture.

Web Resources

The Biology of the Coyote

http://www.desertusa.com/june96/du_cycot.html

Native American Oral Tales and Songs

<http://members.cox.net/academia/naindex.html>

A Collection of Short Coyote Stories from Different Tribes

<http://www.indians.org/welker/coyote.htm>

Official Website of The Fort Hall Shoshone Bannock Tribes

<http://www.shoshonebannocktribes.com>

Official Website of the Coeur d'Alene Tribe

<http://www.cdatribe.org>

Official Website of the Nez Perce Tribe

<http://www.nezperce.org/main/html>

Lesson Plan

Oral Storytelling

Goal of Lesson

Once you have learned to communicate in a world of written language, it is difficult to switch over to an oral culture. Oral storytelling is an art and a skill that seems deceptively simple until tried for the first time. In this lesson, the class will try to pass an oral story from person to person and conclude with a discussion on the differences between oral and written storytelling.

Inventory

Copy of Coyote creation story

Activity

Explain to the students that for a short time you are going to pretend that nobody in the class knows how to read or write. Just like the early Indian tribes of Idaho, all of your storytelling is done orally. To practice that skill the group is going to try to pass a Shoshone-Paiute creation story from person to person. If the group is careful, the story might remain intact from beginning to end.

Pick the first student and bring him or her to a place out of listening range of the rest of the class. Read the Coyote creation story (written below) to the student twice, making sure he or she fully understand it. After the student is confident, bring the next student volunteer up. Still out of earshot of the rest of the class, the first student must recite the story, to the best of his or her memory, to the second student and then sit down. The second student will then pass the story on to the third and so on until there is only one student left. This last student will recite the tale to the class. Immediately after the student is done, read the original written story out loud to the class so that they can compare the two versions.

Coyote's Children

Once when Coyote was young, he visited a far off

land. There he married his wife and had many children. These children were the Indians. When he decided to go home and leave the foreign land, he put all of his children in a basket with a lid. His wife warned him not to open the basket until he got home to the Rocky Mountains. While he was on his long journey, he heard singing inside the basket. He decided to slip the lid off so that he could better hear the voices. Immediately, the children ran out in all directions, all over the world. Luckily, he was able to close the basket before the last two children could get out. He carried these two home and they became the Shoshone and Paiute people.

Discussion

Was the first story and the last story the same? Chances are, like the classic game of telephone, the stories will be very different. Discuss what elements of the story were the same and what was lost.

Why did the story change? The students will probably realize that the tale mutated because each child remembered it differently. Does this mean the Coyote stories told by Native Americans would change every time they told them? Yes and no. Early Native Americans lived in an oral culture. They had the skills necessary to remember and pass a story from person to person. Since this was the way the tribe shared their history from one generation to the next, it was important that they were accurate. This isn't to say the stories were identical in each telling. Each storyteller might emphasize different parts of the story or add different information depending on his or her intended audience. Stories were both educational and entertaining, so the storytellers were allowed a little creative license.

Are there tricks you can use to help you better remember a story? In some parts of the world, stories and histories were transformed into poems and songs. Sometimes using catchy rhymes or musical tunes makes information easier to remember.

As a class, set up a grid on the board and try to identify some advantages and disadvantages of both written and oral storytelling. Compare and contrast the two forms of communication. Is one better for group use? Is one more accurate? Which helps to build family bonds?