

COLUMBIA RIVER STORY

Many of the stories from the East side of Washington revolve around a character whose name is Coyote or Spilyáy in some of their languages. He is a powerful being. Some people call him a trickster, because he is so smart, he plays tricks on other animals and people. Uh, but he is also much more complicated than that. I've been called to task many times because Coyote is much more powerful than a few words can describe. And so, Coyote, in essence, in the East side and many of the stories again, was put on earth to create a world that would be good for the human beings to live in. He was told to prepare the world for the people to come. So again, so many of the stories that explain how the world works include Coyote. Again, a powerful figure from their stories over there, I thought it would be important to mention that because I want to tell a couple of Coyote stories here. The first story comes from East of the mountains and is told in different ways. But it is said.....

A long time ago, there was no Columbia River. There was a great lake to the East side of the mountains and then you had the mountains to the West of the ocean. So, you had no Columbia River at all. And the people over there, their food sources were limited, they didn't have enough food all the time. And Coyote knew if there was a way, he could create a channel or path for the salmon to come from the ocean to the East side of the mountains, that that would help the people. It would give them food; it would give them salmon. Coyote was a powerful being. He took a great stick and he carried it to the West. He came to the mountains near what is now present day, Portland and he dug a great hole in the mountains. And now that lake began to drain. It began to drain, and it formed the Columbia River. This great lake became the Columbia River. And it went to the ocean now. The salmon people came up the river from the ocean to the hole Coyote had created in that mountain. Coyote also created a bridge by digging that hole in the mountains and created a bridge. And that bridge was there for some time until an earthquake came, and the bridge fell and became the Cascade Mountains at the mouth of the Columbia River. So, the river was created. The river was created for the people, salmon came up the river and fed that place, the river fed the land as well. There was a spot in the river near, what was called Salado Falls. At this place in the river, there was a great monster that lived under

the water. And as canoes would pass by, the monster would grab those canoes and drag them under the water. The people were frightened, because they could no longer travel safely along this river because this terrible monster would grab them. And many, many, many canoes were taken, many people were lost to this terrible monster. Coyote saw this and again one of his charges was to slay the monsters that might hurt the people to come. And so, Coyote did this. He decided he would take care of this terrible monster. He thought and thought about what to do but he didn't know what to do. Inside of Coyote, the story says he has three sisters. Three Huckleberry sisters. They were his advisors; they were his teachers. And he would call on them when he needed help to make a decision or find a solution to a problem. But one thing they didn't like about Coyote, these three Huckleberry sisters, is that whenever they would tell him something or advise him of something, he would say "I knew that already." Or he would say something like "That's what I was thinking all along." So, when Coyote explained to the problem about this terrible monster under the water, they said "We're not going to tell you what to do, because if we tell you, you'll say "I knew that all along." And Coyote said "No, no I promise I won't do that. I want your advice and I need your help; I'm trying to solve this problem, find a way to slay this monster." The Huckleberry sisters said, "No. If we tell you this, you'll say you knew that all along, anyway, so what's the point." And Coyote said, "If you don't tell me, I will bring a heavy rain and hailstorm." Now berries don't like heavy rains and hailstorms, so, they said "Alright, we'll tell you." What you need to do Coyote is to get five stone knives, get dried wood, carry it in a pack on your back. And then, let the monster eat you. Let the monster swallow you. Then you'll be inside the monster and then you'll know what to do." Coyote looked at them and said, "I knew that all along." And so, he went and got five stone knives, he got some dried wood, put them in a pack on his back and he went down to the river. He found a log and he floated out to the river in that spot where the monster lived. And he started to call out to the monster to come and find him. "Come find me, I'm here for you. I'm Coyote looking for the monster." The monster heard Coyote and knew that Coyote was a powerful being. And the monster chose to avoid Coyote, to stay away from him. But Coyote yelled more and more, and Coyote knew how to get the best of this monster. And so, he started to call out insults about how fat the monster was, how ugly the monster was, how smelly the monster was, how stupid

the monster was. The monster could take no more, came up and swallowed Coyote in one gulp. Now Coyote was in the belly of that monster, was deep inside that monster, and he looked around him and he could barely see in the dim glow of light inside that monster. He could barely see the pulsing heart of that monster. All around him were animals that the monster had eaten. And they were dying; some were already dead. There were skulls and bones every where littering the insides of that monster. Coyote spoke to the animals that were inside him. They were hungry. Now he took the dried wood and he built a fire under the heart of the monster. And he took one of his stone knives and he began to cut at the heart of that monster, cutting off pieces of it and putting it in the fire, cooking it. Now all the animals gathered around him, and around the fire and began to eat those little pieces of that heart. Now they were getting stronger, now they felt better. That knife broke so Coyote took a second knife and began to cut at the heart of the monster. After a time, that knife broke. And he cut the heart with again a third knife and the fourth knife. Finally, with the fifth knife he was able to cut the last string that held the heart to the body of the monster. He cut it and the heart fell to the fire and now the monster was dying. And the monster was dying, and it let out one last cough before it died. And it coughed out all the animals, all the things that had been inside of it. And now everything that was inside the monster, was free, they were outside that terrible monster. Coyote looked at all the animals, all the beings would come out with him. He looked at them and realized that these are the beings that could populate the world now. These would be the ones who would live in the world. So, he turned to one of these beings and he said "You shall be eagle. You shall be the highest flying of all the birds." To another he pointed, "You shall be grizzly bear. You shall be the biggest and strongest of all the animals that live on the land." He pointed to another. "You shall be deer. You shall feed all the beings who hunt." He looked at another animal and pointed at it and said, "You shall be sturgeon, the biggest fish that swims in the water." He pointed to another, "You shall be salmon. You shall be the fish everyone will eat. You will be food for all the beings who live in the world around this river." So, Coyote created all these beings and placed them in the world. Again, he was getting the world ready for the people to come. And then Coyote turned to the monster and revived it, brought it back to life. And he said to the monster, "You may live under the water again. You may live under the water, but you may not attack

every canoe that comes by. You must promise you will only attack a canoe every now and then for your food. And so, the people say that monster is still there. But you don't have to be as cautious of it as you once did as long as you stay near the edges of the river at that place, the monster will not get you. It's the people who are careless and forget the monster will eat for its food. And that is all.