

The Race Between Coyote and Turtle

A Southwestern Native American Legend Retold



One day, on the way home from a failed hunt, a very hungry Coyote stopped in to visit his friend Turtle. Turtle invited him in and courteously offered the tired Coyote some refreshment.

"I'm exhausted, too," Turtle said, reclining against some cushions with a weary sigh. "I just ran a race with my people."

"Who won," Coyote inquired, thinking it funny that turtles ran races and trying not to laugh.

"I did—I've won every race against my people," gloated Turtle.

"So have I," said Coyote with equal pride.

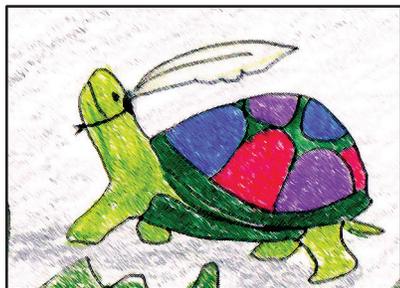
"Maybe we should compete against each other some time," challenged Turtle.

The Race Between Coyote and Turtle

"I'd love to," said Coyote.

The friends agreed to meet for the race two days later.

Coyote, being a swift runner, was sure he'd beat Turtle without much effort. Wanting to help his people win some money, Coyote invited them to come to the race and place bets against the turtles that he would win.



Turtle knew that Coyote was a trickster and didn't trust him to play fairly. So Turtle decided to trick the trickster. He called his people together to explain his plan. Turtle wouldn't run the whole race himself—he would

only pop in at the end to cross the finish line. Other turtles would help him run the race, which meant that they'd have to dress just like Turtle, who planned to wear a white feather in his hair and paint his shell a certain way.

"Coyote runs with his head down," explained Turtle to the other turtles. "He won't look closely at his competitor while he is running. One of you will start the race next to him. Coyote will soon run far ahead of him and, when he does, that first turtle will drop down in the grass to hide. Up ahead, well in front of Coyote, a second turtle will be hiding in the grass waiting for a turn. When the first turtle drops down, the next one pops up and continues the race. And we will continue this way until Coyote gets close to the finish line—then I'll pop up and be the first one to cross. Coyote won't notice that we're different turtles and we will beat him using this trick."

The turtles came early to the race and stationed themselves in the tall grass along the trail. Coyote soon arrived with his people who placed their bets on Coyote to win the race.

The Race Between Coyote and Turtle

As soon as the race began, Coyote sped down the trail leaving the turtle far behind him. All of sudden, Coyote looked up and was surprised to see that the turtle was now far ahead of him on the race trail. Coyote ran extra hard to pass the turtle, which he did with some effort. The race continued on like this—Coyote would pass the turtle, but when he looked up a few moments later, he'd see that the turtle was far ahead of him.

Soon it was Turtle's turn to run and the rest of the turtles let out a great cheer when Turtle crossed the finish line ahead of Coyote. The other coyotes were very angry at Coyote for losing the race because they lost all the money they bet on him to win.

Afraid of what they would do to him, Coyote ran off into the grass to hide. He lay low for a long time wondering how the slow-moving Turtle had won the race.

