

Coyote and The Crow

Indian art is very close to nature. Indian art very often is made from natural materials and is given life through the natural elements: ground, fire, air and water. Many paints are made from boiling berries, bark roots and different types of dirt.

The bark of the cedar tree makes a deep brown color. The color yellow is made from the willow tree. Charcoal made the color black. Many other materials are used to make different colors. The color pigments are mixed with animal fats in small stone bowls or pots especially made for that purpose.

The Indian people long ago painted on rawhide. Rawhide is the hard dry skin of the deer. The rawhide was used to make drums and Indian suitcases. Suitcases are "Suptaki" when pronounced in the Warm Springs language. The old Indian people long ago painted their bodies in time of sorrow or when dancing. They even painted their tepees.

They drew pictures on rocks, cliffs and trees. Designs were made with porcupine quills and beads sewn on their deer skin clothing. Sometimes the paint from berries was also used to decorate clothing.

This is the story my grandmother told me of how Coyote painted the birds.

Coyote was walking along a trail one day. He was in a very angry mood. He was angry with everyone and was looking for trouble. As he walked along with his head down, he passed an Indian. Coyote spoke to the Indian but the Indian did not answer. This made Coyote very angry. Coyote, still walking with his head down, walked over to the Indian and jabbed him as hard as he could in the ribs with his elbow.



But to Coyote's surprise, it wasn't a person! It was an old tree stump. Coyote's elbow caught in the rotted stump. Although he pulled hard, he could not get his elbow out of the stump. Coyote began to howl and scream for help. He made so much noise that all the birds of the forest came flying to see what was the matter.

The birds all took turns pecking at the stump trying to set Coyote free. At last Woodpecker came and pecked the wood away from Coyote's elbow. Coyote was free at last!

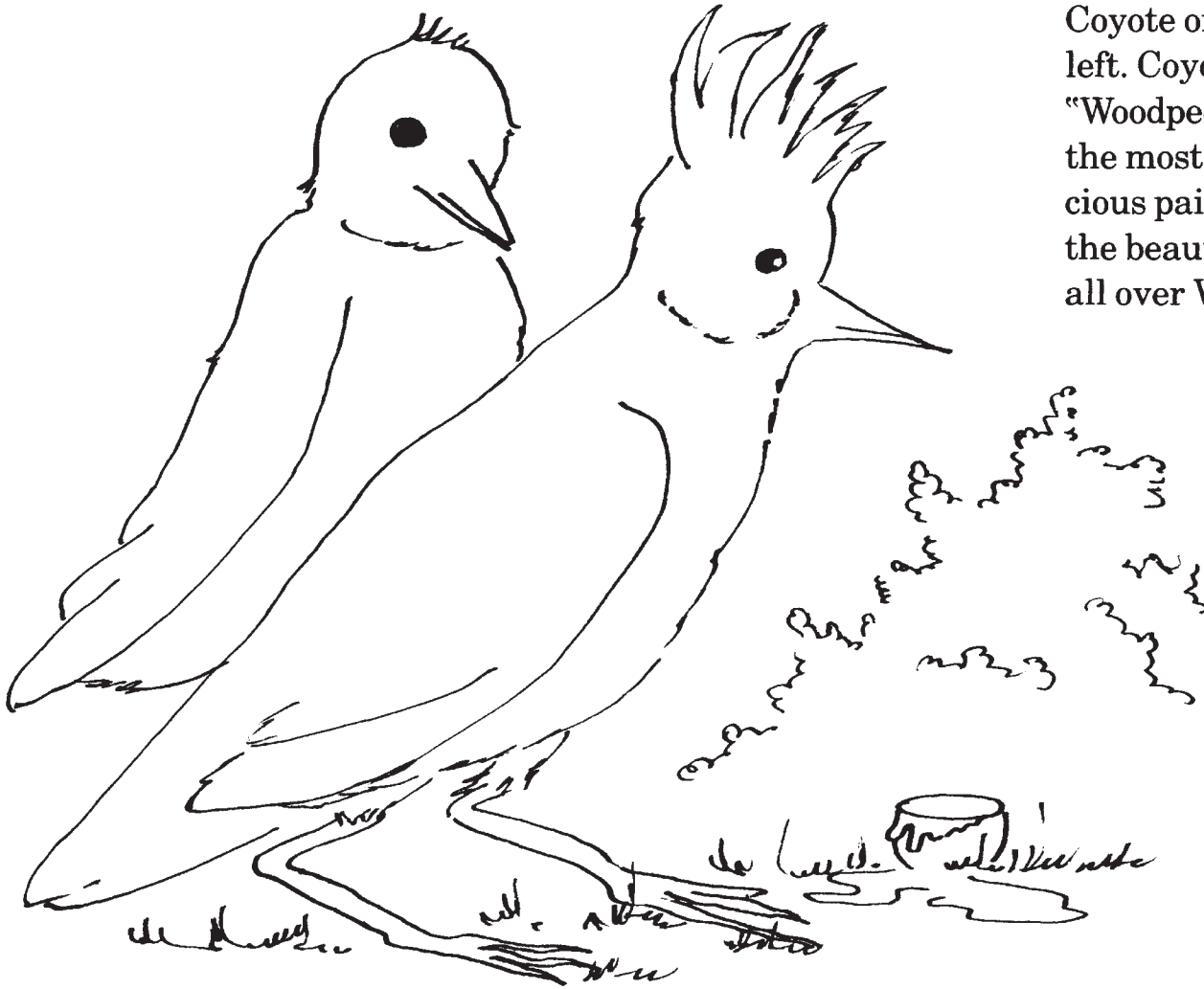


“You birds have been so nice to me this morning,” Coyote said, smiling. “I am going to do something very nice for you. I will take by Indian paints made from berries and bark dyes and make you very beautiful!”

Coyote took his brush and paints and painted the birds.



After a while it became Woodpecker's turn to be painted. There was only a little bit of the beautiful red paint left in the rock pot. It was very hard to get. And Coyote only had a very little bit left. Coyote thought to himself, "Woodpecker was so good and did the most work. I will use this precious paint on him." Coyote took the beautiful red paint and put it all over Woodpecker's head.



Crow saw the beautiful head of the Woodpecker and said to Coyote, "When you paint me, do not be stingy with the red paint. I want to be red all over!" Alarmed, Coyote said, "But this is all the red paint I have!" The crow screeched, "Go and find some more. I want to be red all over and be the most beautiful bird in the world!"

"All right," Coyote replied, "shut your eyes, and I will paint you red all over." Crow shut his eyes and Coyote painted him. But when Crow opened his eyes, he was painted black instead of the beautiful red.

Crow was very angry and scolded Coyote, "Caw! Caw! Caw!"

Coyote shook his finger at Crow. "I thanked you for helping to set me free from the stump but you wanted the best paint. After this, be satisfied with what people are willing to give you."

