

**Silly Coyote: Tricksters are for Kids!**  
**Trickster Stories from the American West**

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**Introduction**

“The West” - Ask a first grader what this means and he may mention the cardinal direction. Most likely he will look at you and shrug his shoulders. Ask about “The American West” and you will continue to get blank stares. Native Americans? If it is after Thanksgiving, first graders will eagerly say that they were the Pilgrims’ friends. Indians? The Indian students will proudly raise their hands. Cowboys? Everyone knows they wear those cowboy hats and boots. The Spanish and Mexicans? What do they have to do with The American West?

When I was a child we played “Cowboys and Indians”. We knew who John Wayne was; he *was* a cowboy. We saw him in movies on Saturday afternoon television. He wore a ten-gallon hat, carried six-shooters and rode a horse. Indians wore buckskin pants, war paint on their faces and feathers in their headdresses. They also had war cries and scalped people. At Halloween, you would see both cowboys and Indians. Today, country music (not country and *western*) stars wear cowboy hats and American Indians are pretty much absent from popular culture. Our students have no cultural references from which to draw background knowledge.

Our Delaware Social Studies curriculum does not explicitly mention Native Americans until fourth grade.<sup>1</sup> Depending on their teacher, students may get some information on Native Americans as part of Columbus Day or Thanksgiving activities but explicit, targeted instruction is not prioritized. The American West and/or the pioneer experience may be explored as part of a unit on comparing communities, past and present, but again this instruction, if given, takes place in later grades. Therefore our first grade students come in with no preconceived notions as to what the American West is or was.

I see this unit as an opportunity to give students background knowledge on basic elements of the American West that they may access in later grades. In order to provide this background knowledge, we are going to study trickster stories from Native American traditions as well as from the traditions of other peoples found in the West. As this is a unit for first grade, stories will be chosen that are first grade appropriate. These stories will not necessarily be the original stories that were told but will be ones that give the general spirit of the tales in a first grade accessible manner. As we do for stories in our curriculum, we will look at the story elements of character, setting, plot, problem and

solution, making predictions and author's purpose through both reading and listening. We will ask and answers questions both orally and in writing. We will also compare and contrast stories from different traditions, Native American, Hispanic and African-American. As we read the stories, it is my hope that students will come up with questions about the American West that we can then explore. Questions such as: "Where did Native Americans come from?" "Why did they live like that?" and "Where are they now?" It is for questions such as these that the teacher must have background information on the American West.

## **Background**

I teach first grade in a K-5 elementary school consisting of almost 1200 students. As part of first grade Language Arts instruction we have a program called Response to Intervention. Every eight weeks, students are sorted into groups based on reading ability and receive targeted instruction based on their ability. This means that although I have 22 students in my regular class, I have different students in my RTI – Response to Intervention block. These RTI students come from five first grade classrooms that are part of my Professional Learning Community- PLC. Typically, the students in my RTI group are from various ethnic groups and socio-economic classes. Most students are not well traveled and have very little experience with the world outside of their respective communities. At the moment, I have 28 students in my RTI group. These students are advanced readers; they generally read one to two grade levels above their peers. Although their reading is advanced, students' writing ranges from below grade level to on or above grade level. First grade writing consists of writing on topic for four plus sentences including proper conventions (capitals, spacing and punctuation) and correct spelling of short vowel words and appropriate first grade level word wall words.

Our RTI block is 30 minutes a day. This 30-minute block also includes time for students to get to and from their regular classroom so instructional time is approximately 25 minutes. During the RTI block, we work on story comprehension elements and fluency. This will continue as appropriate in this unit. Many of the stories are not on level for my students to read therefore many activities will be based on listening comprehension. Students typically fill out a graphic organizer to help with comprehension. So far this year, we have read Henry and Mudge stories by Cynthia Rylant and Anansi stories from the Story Cove series.

Students learn all academic subjects in the first grade classroom. This allows for incorporating different standards from different subjects into one lesson. It is not uncommon to have Social Studies standards addressed in a Language Arts lesson and vice versa.

I envision this unit to last at least five weeks of the eight-week RTI cycle. It will use the model that I have used for the other stories with tweaking to allow for explicit

instruction on the historical concepts that we will cover. We will read many different trickster stories, some from the Native American tradition, from the Hispanic tradition and from the African American tradition. If student interest is there, more stories will be added. The unit will culminate in an individual or shared writing and/or performance activity.

Bringing a study of the American West to students this young can be very tricky. The more students learn, the more they will think and questions may arise that will need sensitive answers. Students may ask where the Indians went? Why did this happen? The answers are not easy to explain nor will they be easy for first grade minds to understand. The good thing about teaching first grade is that, for many subjects, they have no preconceived notions. My job is to lay out the facts as I learn them and let the students make up their own minds. First graders understand the concept of fair better than most anyone. As questions arise, students will discuss what happened and why – at their level- and come up with their own conclusions. My hope is that they take these basic conclusions with them to later grades and build upon them to a more nuanced understanding.

## **Concepts**

### The West

I would like to start the unit off with the Kiowa story from Ken Burns' The West where N. Scott Momaday relates how Devil's Tower was created. This story will show the children that we will be learning about things that "may have to be believed in order to be seen"<sup>ii</sup>.

When we speak of the American West, I conjure images of cowboys and Indians, railroads and prairies, mountains and buffalo herds. For me, I see the American West post Civil War, the West of Sitting Bull and Custer. My students see only what I show them. They have no prior knowledge of the American West; in fact, they have very little knowledge of America as a country – but that is for another unit.

There are a variety of theories about how Native Americans came to be in North and South America. These theories, whether espousing the Beringia concept of the land bridge between Siberia and Alaska, the Mormon belief that they were "a lost tribe of Israel that migrated to the Americas many hundreds of years ago"<sup>iii</sup>, the creation myths that the Native Americans had themselves or others, the bottom line is that they were here long before Leif Erickson around 1000 and Christopher Columbus in 1492 landed on their shores.

In 1494, King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabella I of Castille and King John II of Portugal signed the Treaty of Tordesillas effectively dividing the new discoveries

between Spain and Portugal. Although hardly any land had been “discovered”, “lines were slashed across the globe, giving most of North and South America to Spain and the easternmost area of what is now Brazil to Portugal. The Treaty was sanctioned by a Papal decree, but future bulls moved this meridian back and forth, giving Spain control in Asia and allowing Portuguese expansion in Brazil.”<sup>iv</sup> When students wonder why so many American places have Spanish names, it is a direct result of this treaty. Other countries, left out of the treaty, resorted to a search for the Northwest Passage, piracy, or trade elsewhere. Eventually they refused to recognize the Treaty’s authority and sent their own colonists west.

By 1540, the Spanish had conquered Mexico and moved north looking for gold to send back to Spain. In January of that year, Vasquez de Coronado was sent north from Mexico City to find the fabled Seven Cities of Cibola. During this foray, the conquistadores encountered Zuni warriors at the pueblo Hawikah, who they defeated. “In little more than two years, Vasquez de Coronado and his men explored much of the southwestern United States, ventured deep into the plains of Kansas, descended the walls of the Grand Canyon and visited all the major Indian villages in the region.”<sup>v</sup> Needless to say, the seven cities proved to be a myth and Coronado and his men returned to Mexico City and the North was forgotten for almost 40 years.

During the 1580's the Spanish sent several expeditions north to New Mexico and explored much of the same region that Vasquez de Coronado had four decades before. In 1582, an expedition led by Fray Bernardo Beltran and Antonio de Espejo, is credited with the first official use of the term, “la Nueva Mexico” to describe this area. “The reports of these expeditions reminded Spanish officials of the many potential converts to Christianity which lived in this region, and encouraged the subsequent conquest and colonization of this “new” Mexico.”<sup>vi</sup>

By 1680 the Spanish colony of New Mexico was well established with its capital in Santa Fe. The Indian pueblos had all built their own churches and the Indians had been baptized. During this time, European diseases killed more than one third of the native population and this, coupled with years of drought caused a belief to form among the Indians that the old gods were displeased. Traditional ways were brought back and the Spanish tried to stop this from happening. Eventually a full-scale revolt took place and the Spanish retreated south to Mexico. The Indians were free. This lasted for little over a decade.

In 1692 the Spanish re-conquered New Mexico but, this time, they were more tolerant to Indian ways. Indians and Spanish began to intermarry and cultures melded. Stories from this time contain both Spanish and Indian ideas and themes.

One off shoot of the Indian revolution of 1680 was the dissemination of the horse through the West. When the Spanish left, they left their horses and their former Indian

slaves knew how to use them. “The Spanish had a law that made it a crime for an Indian to own a horse or a gun. Still these Indians learned how to train a horse and they learned how to ride a horse. They also learned how to use horses to carry packs.”<sup>vii</sup>

The Pueblo Indians raised the horses and traded them to tribes to the East and North. These herds then spread throughout the Plains and “French traders reported that the Cheyenne Indians in Kansas got their first horses in 1745.”<sup>viii</sup>

The horse made the lives of the Plains Indians much easier. Many tribes were nomadic and horses made their journeys much easier. Hunting for Buffalo and other game became easier, as well, and the areas where tribes could trade expanded. Goods were not the only things that were traded by tribes, stories were told from tribe to tribe and just like television has homogenized world culture in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, the horse may have homogenized Native American culture in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as ideas and stories were traded and adapted for each tribe’s particular circumstance.

As the horse moved east across the Plains, Europeans started moving west. This western migration had the effect of pushing the Indian tribes they met farther west, in front of them. The Europeans pushed the Ojibwe and the Chippewa people who, having guns, pushed the Sioux onto the Great Plains from Minnesota. The Sioux got horses from the Cheyenne. The Sioux used their horses to hunt buffalo on the Plains and become masters of inter-tribal warfare. The Sioux soon pushed out the Cheyenne, the Kiowa and the Mandan and created their own empire on the plains.

Just as the Spanish in the 16<sup>th</sup> century had set out to conquer land for Spain and souls for Christ, missionaries headed west in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to save the souls of the “heathen” Indian and just as the pueblo Indians had seen great power in the Christian god, the western Indian also saw great power and wondered how to add the Christian god to the powerful deities they already worshipped. Many missionaries were accepted into native villages as Native Americans tried to understand how they could access the power the Christian god was said to have.

A chance for a better life in the West had some Americans moving west. Of course, there was a problem. People were already living where the settlers wanted to go. The government tried to solve this problem by making an “Indian Territory” a territory of ever decreasing size west of the Mississippi. This territory was to be reserved for Indians only and tribes from all over were resettled there. As early as the 1830’s, the Cherokee were resettled west in exchange for their lands in the Southeast. As more land was needed, the treaties were renegotiated, tribes were forced to resettle and white settlers moved in.

... because its fertile land proved desirable to whites, with the 1854 Kansas and Nebraska Act Congress formally organized those parts of

northern Indian Territory into official territories that afterward became states. (Kansas entered the Union in 1861 and Nebraska in 1867.) After the Civil War ended, Indians were moved further south into the part of the Indian Territory that is present Oklahoma. Plains tribes, including the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Comanche, Kiowa, and Apache, were concentrated on reservations in the western half of the territory. By 1889 more than three dozen tribes resided here.<sup>ix</sup>

This concentration of tribes into one area caused a strain on natural resources. The buffalo, once plentiful on the plains was unable to maintain their numbers. “Drought, Indian market hunting, and cow selectivity must stand as the critical elements – albeit augmented by minor factors such as white disturbance, new bovine diseases and increasing grazing competition from horses- that brought on the bison crises of the mid-century southern Plains.”<sup>x</sup> Indians were forced to look to the government for food and this helped take away their independence.

While the United States expanded west at the expense of the Indians, they also expanded at the expense of the Mexicans. Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821. In 1846, Mexico and the United States fought a war. At the end of the war, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed giving the United States control of a vast area in the north called Alta California and Santa Fe de Nuevo Mexico. This area included what we now call California, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah and parts of Wyoming and Colorado. The U.S. also received Texas and the border between Texas and Mexico was set at the Rio Grande River.

In 1848, Gold was discovered in California. Prospectors left their lives in the East to strike it rich in the California riverbeds. The journey to California was long and fraught with peril. Disease, hunger, thirst and the danger of 19<sup>th</sup> century travel were constant companions. People came from all over the world to try their luck. They brought with them disease. Cholera spread through the plains killing traveling prospectors and decimating Indian tribes. The Indians of California were killed by disease but also murdered for their land.

As people were moving west, the government tried to keep them safe. As we learned in “The Right of Conquest” in episode three of Ken Burns’ The West, in 1851, the US government forged a treaty with Plains tribes that promised 50 years of supplies if they stopped fighting among themselves, allowed free access across their lands and allowed the army to build forts. The government also tried to fix borders between the tribes. This was a time of ascendancy for the Sioux. They were building their empire and said they do only what the United States does – they take land by conquest. When the government tried to take the Black Hills from the Sioux, land they had taken from the Cheyenne, the Sioux refused. The government relented and the Fort Laramie treaty was finally signed on September 12th, 1851. The peace lasted for three years.

Changing economic and political forces in the 1850's provided challenges for the settlers. Large southern plantations forced out smaller farmers and these farmers looked west to Texas to improve their fortunes. At the time, one had to purchase land from the government and these farmers demanded "preemption," an individual's right to settle land first and pay later (essentially an early form of credit).<sup>xi</sup> Eastern manufacturers were worried that preemption would take away their labor force and opposed it. The Southern plantation owner was worried that small farmers would be anti-slavery and that any new states and territories would swing political power firmly into the abolitionist camp. These opposing forces were deadlocked even as new immigrants flooded in with the hope of heading west for economic opportunity.

In 1862, after the Civil War started and Southern resistance to homestead reform was removed, the Homestead Act was signed.

The new law established a three-fold homestead acquisition process: filing an application, improving the land, and filing for deed of title. Any U.S. citizen, or intended citizen, who had never borne arms against the U.S. Government could file an application and lay claim to 160 acres of surveyed Government land. For the next 5 years, the homesteader had to live on the land and improve it by building a 12-by-14 dwelling and growing crops. After 5 years, the homesteader could file for his patent (or deed of title) by submitting proof of residency and the required improvements to a local land office.<sup>xii</sup>

Homesteading was hard. The elements were brutal and resources could be meager. Often, 160 acres was too small a parcel to make a living. Those homesteaders who stuck it out soon found some relief with changes in transportation. In 1869, the transcontinental railroad was finished and this railroad provided access to goods necessary for survival and to markets necessary for prosperity.

African-Americans also made their way out west. The first free African-American settler in the Nebraska territory was Sally Bayne and she arrived in 1855. "Before that, both slaves and free blacks had traveled through on the Oregon Trail and settled on the west coast."<sup>xiii</sup> Near the end of the Civil war, the government sent black troops, called "Buffalo Soldiers" by the Indians, to the New Mexico territory to protect the interests of the white settlers. After the Civil War, African-Americans moved west looking for the opportunities that were denied to them in the South.

Benjamin "Pap" Singleton became the leader of the "Exoduster Movement". He and his associates urged blacks to acquire farmland in Tennessee but whites would not sell them usable land. He began scouting land in Kansas and in 1874, "Singleton and his associates had formed the Edgefield Real Estate and Homestead Association in

Tennessee, which steered more than 20,000 black migrants to Kansas between 1877 and 1879.”<sup>xiv</sup>

African-Americans were among other things, soldiers, cowboys, ranch hands, servants, farmers, lawmen and businessmen. Their experiences, although mostly ignored by the Western icon makers in New York and Hollywood, were the quintessential Western experiences and could, and maybe should, make up a unit of its own.

The Homestead Act and the rise of the railroad added to the demise of traditional life for the Indian. Easterners, ex-slaves fleeing the repressive sharecropping system, and immigrants, all looking for a better life, went west. As more land was claimed, the Indian land became smaller and smaller. The railroad brought with it towns and also livestock. Great herds of cattle and sheep roamed the plains competing with the buffalo for grass and water. Nomadic Indians were confined to one area and their lifestyle changed from hunting and gathering to agriculture and dependency.

Of course, not all Indians went meekly to their reservations. The mid to late 1800's were a period of armed conflict with the Indian tribes. Among them, Apache attacks in New Mexico, Arizona and Texas, the Ute Wars in Utah, the Red River War where General Sherman of Civil War fame put an end to free roaming independent tribes of Arapaho, Comanche, Cheyenne and Kiowa tribes on the southern plains and the Nez Perce War between Chief Joseph's Nez Perce and the U.S. Army under General Howard and Colonel Miles. When the Nez Perce, after a 1700 mile escape attempt though the Northwest were 40 miles from the safety of the Canadian border, the U.S. under Colonel Miles, attacked and eventually the Nez Perce surrendered. Chief Joseph's eloquent surrender speech was recorded and translated and survives to this day:

"I am tired of fighting. Our chiefs are killed.... The old men are all killed.... It is cold and we have no blankets. The little children are freezing to death. My people, some of them, have run away to the hills and have no blankets, no food; no one knows where they are, perhaps freezing to death. I want time to look for my children and see how many of them I can find. Maybe I shall find them among the dead. Hear me, my chiefs, I am tired; my heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever."<sup>xv</sup>

The Sioux led by Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse gave the Indians their most famous victory, at Little Bighorn, over General George Custer and the Seventh Cavalry. But this Sioux war, which started in 1854, culminated in the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890 where, after the death of Sitting Bull, the U.S. Army destroyed the final band of armed Sioux led by Big Foot.

The Stories

Elementary students love stories. They love to listen to stories, they love to look at the pictures, and they love to create their own pictures in their mind and on paper. We are going to read stories and listen to them and conjure up feelings and ideas for stories of our own

Trickster stories are found in almost every culture. Most European tricksters, Till Eulenspiegel from Germany and Nasrettin Hodja from Turkey as examples, are human males. Native American tricksters are the personifications of an animal – Coyote, Inktoni the spider, Raven and Rabbit boy. “These stories are extremely important because they set up standards for proper behavior as well as telling us how certain things (an animal’s appearance, fire, or certain rules) came about.”<sup>xvi</sup> The trickster can triumph over larger creatures due to his cunning and wits or he can fail due to his pride or ego. Lessons are learned in an entertaining way but they are not just told, the tales are believed. “They are emblems of a living religion, giving concrete form to a set of beliefs and traditions that link people living today to ancestors from centuries and millennia past”<sup>xvii</sup>

Coyote is the central figure in many Native American stories.

...Coyote is the most popular prankster of all. Tales of Coyote’s wild and wicked adventures are told from the Arctic down to Mexico, and across the continent from ocean to ocean. There are probably more tales about Coyote than there are about all the other Native American Tricksters put together, an probably all the other characters, too.<sup>xviii</sup>

Why is the coyote so prevalent in these stories? The name coyote comes from the Native American Nahuatl word coyotl. Coyotes are resourceful and have adapted to an ever-changing landscape. They can be found almost everywhere, including cities, on the North American continent from Alaska to Central America. I have even seen one in New Castle, Delaware. They are omnivores; they will eat almost anything from deer to fruit and grass. They have excellent vision and a keen sense of smell and in fall and winter form packs to make hunting easier. Their fur is grayish to yellowish brown with buff or white throats and may have dark tips on their tail and ears. The coyote has many vocalizations including barks, growls, howls, yips and whines. At night, these sounds can form a chorus as the animals communicate with one another.

Europeans brought their stories with them. Hispanic “cuentos” come from the Catholic stories from Spain and are filtered through Mexican and Native American culture, especially Pueblo and Apache. Coyote makes appearances in this tradition. The cuentos allowed older generations to pass on their wisdom to the new and they helped people make sense of their mysterious world. The stories are relatively unchanged from those told centuries ago.

Because of the geographic and cultural isolation of (Hispanic) areas, the elements of traditional storytelling have been carefully preserved. These remote valleys and mountains were the ideal place to preserve the stories almost unchanged well into the twentieth century.<sup>xix</sup>

African-Americans brought their stories from Africa that then morphed into stories from slavery. These stories went with them as they moved west. The most famous trickster from the South was Brer Rabbit who is a descendant of Zomo, a West African trickster. We will read one of his stories and compare him to Coyote and the other tricksters.

## **Strategies**

### Comprehension

In first grade Language Arts, we are learning to read. At the same time, we are learning various strategies to help understand what we are reading. These comprehension strategies are used for both student reading and listening. Stories will be read to the students and students will also be reading the stories if they are written at an appropriate reading level.

Comprehension strategies that we will use for every story are identifying the character and setting. Who is the story about and where does it take place? Students will note details about the characters and settings. What do they look like? Is the main character a human or animal? Students will draw their own interpretation of the characters and settings based on the descriptions in the stories. Students will make connections to their lives by noting whether the characters remind them of anything in real life or in popular culture. As the unit continues, characters will be compared to one another.

Most if not all of the stories will be unfamiliar to students. This will allow opportunities for students to make predictions as to what will happen next. Students may also have the opportunity to write and illustrate a different ending to the story.

Students will also show comprehension by retelling stories. They will retell by sequencing pictures or writing summaries telling what happened in the beginning, middle and end of the story. Students may also retell orally or act out the plot of a story.

Why were the stories told? Was the story purely for entertainment or was there a greater purpose? Students will find the moral of the story, the lesson that is taught. Does this lesson pertain to their lives?

Students will also be asked to identify the problems that characters encounter and the solutions they come up with. Students may be asked to provide their own solutions.

Students will discuss cause and effect. When something happens in the story, why did it happen and what effect does it have on the characters?

Although specific comprehension strategies may or may not be mentioned in each lesson, informal assessment during discussion will dictate which questions are asked of the students. Graphic organizers may be employed to help students to identify story elements we are looking for. A good resource for organizers is The Florida Center for Reading Research, [www.fcrr.org](http://www.fcrr.org).

## The West

A brief overview of the West will be given at the beginning of the unit. Starting with Columbus, European expansion into the New World will be discussed. What happened to the Indians will be covered in an appropriate first grade manner. How the tribes were resettled as the Americans moved west and the effects of the settlement will be explored. The landscape will be discussed and we will use our Internet capabilities to find pictures of the various places the tribes lived so we can evoke a sense of place. Most students will never have seen an image of a Native American, whether iconic or not. We will look at photographs, both historical and contemporary, from the collections in the National Museum of the American Indian. The West is a gigantic concept to undertake with 1<sup>st</sup> graders. It is important to note that student questioning will inform most of the historical instruction. As we read the various stories, I expect questions such as, “Where did the people come from?” “Where are they now?” and “How did they live?” to be asked. Discussion of Hispanic stories will include age appropriate background on California, New Mexico and Texas. African-American stories will draw upon student knowledge of slavery and will discuss African-American migration, again in age appropriate manner after the end of the Civil War. The background knowledge from my viewing of “The West”, readings, seminars and subsequent research will come in to play. I am sure questions will be asked that I do not have the answers for and we will research via the Internet, as a class.

## Classroom Activities

Lesson One: Setting the Stage. This lesson will take one to two class periods.

Vocabulary: The West, Native Americans, Indians, culture

Opening: Tell students we are going to study some stories that come from American history. Although the students may not have heard these stories before they will sound familiar because the ideas behind them are part of our shared culture. We will be learning about a place from our American history that existed long ago and exists today – a place that is real and imaginary. “A place that needs to be believed to be seen”

Instruction: I will play the segment from Ken Burns’ The West where N. Scott Momaday relates the Kiowa story of how Devil’s Tower was created. I will only play the audio. In

the story, seven sisters and their brother are playing and he turns into a bear and tries to eat them. A stump tells them to climb on it so they will be safe. The stump pushes up to the sky and the bear cannot reach them. The bear scores the sides of the trunk with its claws. At the end the sisters go up into the sky and form the constellation of the Big Dipper.

We will discuss the story; I will ask them if it is true. I will show them a picture of Devils' Tower at [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/46/Devils\\_Tower\\_CROP.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/46/Devils_Tower_CROP.jpg) and ask them again if it is true. We will note the scratches from the bear on the sides of Devil's Tower. I will show them a picture of the Big Dipper at [http://www.astropix.com/HTML/SHOW\\_DIG/Big\\_Dipper.HTM](http://www.astropix.com/HTML/SHOW_DIG/Big_Dipper.HTM) and we will count the stars and ask again if it could be true. We will discuss the role of stories in our lives. How stories help us to make sense of the world around us. If the bear did not cause the scratches on the tower, what did? If the girls did not become the stars, where did the stars come from? Imagine sitting by a fire at night. There is no television, no Internet, no writing. You look up and see the stars. You look over and see this large rock with scratches on it. Why not a boy and his sisters playing a game that got out of hand?

We will talk about Indians. I will start with Columbus "discovering" America and what happened after that. We will discuss why the Spanish and Portuguese wanted to come to the New World. We will discuss the vastness of the American West and although it might have seemed empty it was full of people and animals. I will ask, "What do you think happened to the people who were already here?" We will discuss that as people from the East moved to the West, the Native Americans that were already there needed to be moved. Was this fair? Was there a better way? We will take a look at a satellite map of Oklahoma and discuss how the landscape changed. Do you think there were roads here? Farms? Towns?

Lesson Two: Introducing.....Coyote. This will take at least four class periods

Vocabulary: coyote, trickster, mesa, folktale, legend, myth

Day 1:

Opening: I will play some sounds that coyotes make and ask the students what they think is making those sound: [www.soundboard.com/sb/Wild\\_Coyote\\_sounds](http://www.soundboard.com/sb/Wild_Coyote_sounds). We will discuss the characteristics of a coyote and how they are resourceful and found everywhere.

Instruction: I will show pictures of the American Southwest so students will get an idea as to the landscape. I will read Coyote by Gerald McDermott. This is a colorfully illustrated storybook based on a story from the Zuni Pueblo in the American Southwest. Coyote is blue and has a nose for trouble. He has misadventures until he finds the crows and convinces them to teach him how to fly. More calamity strikes and Coyote loses his blue color and becomes the color of dust with a burnt tip to his tail.

Again, I will ask questions. Is this a "true story". Why do you think it was told? What can you tell me about Coyote? We will discuss how Coyote is the same as a coyote and

what is different about him. Is Coyote more like an animal or a person? Coyote is known as a trickster. What do you think it means to be a trickster? Is Coyote a trickster in this story?

Day 2:

Vocabulary: Zuni, pueblo, treaty, Treaty of Tordesillas

Opening: Today we will discuss the Indians that originally told this Coyote story. I will show photos from the Zuni Pueblo.

<http://www.ashiwi.org/PhotoGallery/PhotoGallery.aspx>. We will explore what a pueblo is. We will go back to the Treaty of Tordesillas and talk about the Spanish conquest of the American Southwest, including the battle at the pueblo Hawikah, and what it meant for the Pueblo Indians. We will talk a little about the United States' take over after the Spanish. Do you think things changed for the Zuni? Did it get better or worse? Why would an animal like a coyote be the main character in stories told by the Pueblo Indians? Who was this story told to and what was the purpose of the storyteller?

Pueblo “just means "town" or "village" in Spanish, and was originally used to refer to the Indian cliff dwellings and large adobe house complexes of the Southwestern Indian tribes. Today, the word "Pueblo" (with a capital P) is also used to refer to these tribes themselves.”<sup>xx</sup>

“Pueblo people lived in adobe houses known as pueblos, which are multi-story house complexes made of *adobe* (clay and straw baked into hard bricks) and stone. Each adobe unit was home to one family, like a modern apartment. Pueblo people used ladders to reach the upstairs apartments. A Pueblo adobe house can contain dozens of units and was often home to an entire extended clan. Unlike most old-fashioned Indian shelters, traditional Pueblo houses are still used by many people today. In fact, some Pueblo people have been living in the same adobe house complex, such as Sky City, for dozens of generations. Other Pueblo families live in modern houses or apartment buildings...”<sup>xxi</sup>

“The Pueblo people commonly believed that humans, animals, birds, trees, objects, fire, water – everything – possessed magical powers. They lived and they could talk.”<sup>xxii</sup> How does this idea relate to our story?

Day 3:

Opening: Today we will break into small reading groups. Students will read *Coyote* with their group and work on a story sequence graphic organizer. Students will retell the story focusing on what happens in the beginning, the middle and the end of the story.

Instruction: Students break into pre-assigned groupings, read the story and work on the beginning, middle and end graphic organizer. This presupposes that sufficient quantities

of books are available. If not, the story will be read aloud again and students will work on their organizers after the reading.

Assessment: Formal: graphic organizer. Informal: conversations between students and between the teacher and students.

Day 4:

Opening: Today we will be making a traditional headband that the Pueblo people wear during their ceremonies. We will use the illustrations in the story to help us decorate a headband in the style of the Pueblo people.

Instruction: At the end of *Coyote*, Gerald McDermott has instruction for a craft based on Pueblo designs. Students will create this craft and take it home.

Lesson Three: Helpful Coyote. This will take at least five class periods.

Day 1:

Vocabulary: Shoshone, Old Woman, tipi

Opening: Coyote is a trickster but he is sometimes helpful. During this lesson we will read some stories where Coyote helps his fellow animals. We will review what we know about Coyote from our earlier story and from the facts about the animal.

Instruction: I will read *How Coyote Stole the Summer* retold by Stephen Krensky. How is the setting at the beginning of the story different than the setting of our earlier Coyote book? When Coyote and his friends go to get Summer, where did they go? Who is Old Woman and who are her children? Why did Coyote bring his friends? How is Coyote a trickster in this story?

Day 2:

Vocabulary: nomadic, hunter-gatherer

Instruction: Discuss Shoshone tribe using information on History, Culture and Tradition found at the end of *Coyote Steals Fire*. This information talks about how life was different before European influence. How was life different for the Shoshone than the Zuni? What do you think caused this difference? How do you think the Shoshone live now? Are they still nomadic? Why or why not? Think back to our map that showed roads, farms and towns. Could a group of people who live in tipis and travel on horses make a good life for themselves? What would they hunt? What would they gather?

Day 3:

Instruction: We will split up into groups and read one of two stories either: *Coyote Steals Fire: a Shoshone Tale* by The Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation, or *Fire Race* retold by Jonathan London. In these two stories, Coyote, with the help of some friends, steals fire and brings it to the animal people. Students will create a summary of their story to share with a group that read the other story. Students will compare similarities and differences between their stories and *How Coyote Stole Summer*. What did Coyote steal? Why? Who helped him? What happened at the beginning, the middle and the end of the story. The way the story ended, was it good for everyone? What would have happened if

they had not come to an agreement? I will show a map of the US. I will point out where the Kayuk lived, in Northwest California, and where the Shoshone lived, just west of the Rocky Mountains from Wyoming to Nevada. Why do you think Indians from these two regions had similar stories?

Assessment: Informal by conversation of compare and contrast the different stories.

Days 4 and Day 5:

Vocabulary: Kachinas

Instruction: Coyote is not always helpful. I will read the Zuni story Sun and Moon in a Box retold by Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz. In this story, Coyote and Eagle steal the Sun and the Moon from a pueblo where some Kachinas were dancing. “These are supernatural Pueblo nature spirits, particularly important to the Keres, Hopi and Zuni tribes. The Zuni have elaborate kachina ceremonies where male dancers don sacred costumes and become living embodiments of certain kachinas.”<sup>xxiii</sup> Kachinas are both the supernatural beings and the dancers who embody them. Eagle takes the Sun and Moon and will not let Coyote help. Coyote finally pesters Eagle into allowing him to carry the box. Eagle tells him not to open the box but, of course, Coyote’s curiosity gets the better of him. The Moon and the Sun drift away bringing winter into the World. How is this story like the other stories we have read? How is it different? Why did Coyote look in the box? Was it a good idea? Would you look in the box? How would the world be different if Coyote had not looked in the box? Students will then break into groups and illustrate scenes from the story. Students will retell the story using the scenes.

Assessment: Students will retell the story using student artwork.

Lesson Four: El Coyote. This will take at least five class periods.

Day One:

Vocabulary: Hispanic, cuentos

Opening: Los Angeles, Santa Fe, Colorado, San Francisco, Rio Grande. What do these words have in common? Why are there so many Spanish place names in the West? “Our ancestors have been telling stories to their children since 1598 when the first Spanish families settled along the Chama River in northern New Mexico.”<sup>xxiv</sup> There were Spanish speaking settlers in what is now the western United States almost 10 years before English speaking settlers landed in Jamestown in 1607.

Instruction: I will read Borreguita and the Coyote. In this Mexican folktale, a little lamb outsmarts a hungry Coyote. Who is Borreguita? Why does Coyote want to eat her? How does she outsmart him? What is the lesson of this story? What is the same about this Coyote and the other Coyotes we have read about? What is different? Why do you think this Hispanic Coyote acts the way he does as compared to the Native American Coyote? Do you think shepherders like coyotes? Why or why not? Hispanic in this sense means: “of, relating to, or being a person of Latin American descent living in the United States; *especially*: one of Cuban, Mexican, or Puerto Rican origin”.<sup>xxv</sup>

Day Two:

Instruction: Today I will read The Foolish Coyote (El Coyote Loco). In this cuento, the Spanish word for story – particularly a folktale, Coyote outsmarts a mother pigeon but, in the end, is outsmarted by another. How does this story compare to Borreguita and the Coyote? How is it different? What is the lesson in this story? Can you apply the lesson to your life?

Assessment: Students will fill out a comparison worksheet on the two stories.

Day Three:

Instruction: Today I will read The Coyote Under the Table. In this cuento, a coyote saves an old dog's life. The dog figures out a way to repay the coyote's kindness by letting him sit under the table and feeding him. Why do the people want to get rid of the dog? Why does the coyote help him? How is the dog rewarded for "saving" the baby? How is the coyote rewarded? Is this a good idea? Why or why not? The people think that the coyote is a bad animal; does the dog feel this way? Is this coyote the same as the last two we read about? How is he different? Which do you prefer? Why do you think this story is told?

Days Four and Five:

Instruction: We will return to the Spanish "conquest" of the West. We will look at place names on the map and figure out where the Spanish had influence. What were the Spanish looking for? What did they find? We will discuss how horses came to America how they spread and read two accounts of how non-Pueblo tribes thought they came: Bringer of the Mystery Dog by Ann Nolan Clark tells a Sioux tale and <http://www.firstpeople.us/FP-HTML-Legends/HowAPieganWarriorFoundTheFirstHorses-Blackfoot.html> tells a Blackfoot legend. How did the horse get to North America? Which legend is true? Why are there different legends? What animal did Native Americans use before the horse? How do you think the horse made life different for the Native Americans? What do you think is our "horse" in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Lesson Five: Bugs Bunny's Ancestors. This will take at least four class periods.

Day One:

Vocabulary: Buffalo Soldiers, Brer

Opening: Coyote was not the only trickster in the American West. We will look at another popular trickster. Many people came to the West for a new start. Among those people were African-Americans. We will discuss in an age appropriate manner why African-Americans, in particular, would have liked a new start out west and where they went. We will discuss the Buffalo Soldiers from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and why they were sent out West. We'll look at an African-American trickster tale and compare it to a cuento from New Mexico and a Native American tale.

Instruction: I will read the children's book All Stuck Up which is an age appropriate retelling of the Uncle Remus tale "Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby". In this story the tricky

Brer Rabbit gets out foxed by Brer Fox and finds himself stuck to a doll. Brer Rabbit convinces Brer Fox to throw him in the briar patch and makes his escape. Does this story remind you of anything? If we have read Anansi stories, it should remind them of Anansi's "gum baby" trick in A Story, A Story. If we have not studied Anansi, this would make a good extension. Why does Brer Fox throw Brer Rabbit in the briar patch? Is that what Brer Rabbit really wanted to happen? Why are the main characters a rabbit and a fox?

Day Two:

Instruction: Students will read their own copy of All Stuck Up and create a character outline for either Brer Rabbit or Brer Fox.

Assessment: The character outline will be assessed for accurate description of the chosen character.

Day Three:

Instruction: Today we will watch the Rabbit Ears production of "Brer Rabbit and The Wonderful Tar Baby" retold by Danny Glover. We will compare this version of the story with All Stuck Up.

Day Four:

Vocabulary: tar, pitch, procession, feast

Instruction: Today I will read The Rabbit and the Coyote (El Conejo y El Coyote). In this story, Rabbit is captured by Coyote but tricks Coyote into letting him go. The trick involves convincing Coyote that rubbing pitch on his eyes will allow him to see long distances. How is this story similar to All Stuck Up? Why do you think they are similar? Why were these stories told? What is the lesson they give? What characteristic of Coyote helps Rabbit get free in this story? What characteristic of Brer Fox helps Brer Rabbit get free in All Stuck Up?

Day Five:

Instruction: I will read the tale Coyote and Rabbit retold by Joe Hayes but not attributed to a particular tribe. In this tale, Coyote pursues Rabbit to a hole in the ground. Coyote decides to smoke him out and rabbit convince him to use piñon pitch. When Coyote bends down to blow the smoke in the hole, Rabbit kicks the pitch in his face causing his muzzle and paws to turn black. Why did Rabbit convince Coyote to use pitch instead of all the other materials to start his fire? Is this Coyote more like the Coyote in The Rabbit and the Coyote or more like Brer Fox? Students will illustrate a favorite scene from the story.

Extensions: If the unit is successful with the students, other tricksters can be added, for example, Inkтоми of the Sioux and Raven of the Northwest tribes.

At the end of the unit, students have a choice of working with a group, partner or individually and doing a creative activity. Students may write and illustrate their own trickster tales, taking ideas we have learned and adding their own twists. Students may also reenact one of the stories for their classmates. Finally, students may write and illustrate a book review for one of the stories we have read. Students will present their end product to the class.

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## **Appendices**

### Appendix A

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects  
Reading Standards for Literature

*Key Ideas and Details:*

1. Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.
2. Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson.
3. Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details.

*Craft and Structure:*

4. Identify words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses.
1. Identify who is telling the story at various points in a text

*Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:*

2. Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting, or events.
9. Compare and contrast the adventures and experiences of characters in stories.

*Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity:*

10. With prompting and support, read prose and poetry of appropriate complexity for grade 1.

Writing standards

*Text Types and Purposes:*

1. Write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or name the book they are writing about, state an opinion, supply a reason for the opinion, and provide some sense of closure.
3. Write narratives in which they recount two or more appropriately sequenced events, include some details regarding what happened, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide some sense of closure.

Speaking and Listening Standards

*Comprehension and Collaboration:*

1. Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 1 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.
  - a. Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion).
  - b. Build on others' talk in conversations by responding to the comments of others through multiple exchanges.
  - c. Ask questions to clear up any confusion about the topics and texts under discussion
2. Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.
3. Describe people, places, things, and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly.

*Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas:*

4. Describe people, places, things, and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly.
6. Produce complete sentences when appropriate to task and situation.

Conventions of Standard English

*Vocabulary Acquisition and Use*

6. Use words and phrases acquired through conversations, reading and being read to, and responding to texts, including using frequently occurring conjunctions to signal simple relationships (e.g., *because*).

## Appendix B

### Delaware Social Studies Standards

*Economics Standard Three:* Students will understand different types of economic systems and how they change [Economic systems].

K-3a: Students will identify human wants and the various resources and strategies which have been used to satisfy them over time.

*History Standard One:* Students will employ chronological concepts in analyzing historical phenomena [Chronology].

K-3a: Students will use clocks, calendars, schedules, and written records to record or locate events in time.

*History Standard Four:* Students will develop historical knowledge of major events and phenomena in world, United States, and Delaware history [Content].

K-3a: Students will develop an understanding of the similarities between families now and in the past, including:

- Daily life today and in other times
- Cultural origins of customs and beliefs around the world

**Curriculum Unit Title**

Silly Coyote Tricksters are for Kids - The American West

**Author**

David Ostheimer

**KEY LEARNING, ENDURING UNDERSTANDING, ETC.**

America is a diverse place with many different cultures. When we look at the experiences of another culture, especially as related in literature and the historical record, we can see that they have lessons to teach us.

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S) for the UNIT**

How can Trickster stories teach us about the American West? How are these stories relevant to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

**CONCEPT A**

The values found in our stories are universal.

**CONCEPT B**

As culture meet and interact they share ideas.

**CONCEPT C**

As European influence increased, Indians had to

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS A**

Coyote, Brer Rabbit and other animals can teach us lessons. How do these lessons from the past apply to us today?

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS B**

How are the stories from different cultures similar?

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS C**

How did European influence change the Indians' life experience?

**VOCABULARY A**

trickster, Coyote, Native American, Indian, Hispanic

**VOCABULARY B**

character, compare and contrast

**VOCABULARY C**

pueblo, horse, nomadic, hunter-gatherer

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/MATERIAL/TEXT/FILM/RESOURCES**

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