

The Race Between Coyote and Turtle

A Southwestern Native American Legend Retold



One day, Coyote went to visit Turtle.

"I'm tired," Turtle told Coyote. "I just ran a race with my people."

"Who won," Coyote asked him.

"I did," said Turtle proudly.

"I've won every race against my people," said Coyote.

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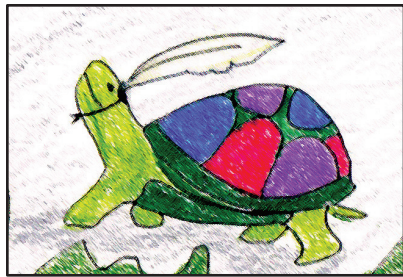
“Me too,” said Turtle. “Do you want to race each other?”

“I’d love to,” said Coyote.

They set the race for two days later.

Coyote was a fast runner. He knew he would win. He told the other coyotes to come to the race. He told them to bet money that he would win.

Turtle knew that Coyote was a trickster. Coyote didn’t play fairly. He decided to trick the trickster. Turtle called his people together. He explained his plan.



“We will all dress alike,” said Turtle. “We’ll each wear a white feather in our hair. We will paint our shells the same way. Coyote won’t look at me while we are running.

One of you will begin the race next to Coyote. Coyote will soon run far ahead. When he does, drop down in the grass. The next turtle will hide in the grass far ahead of Coyote. When the first turtle drops down, the next one pops up. Over a long distance, we will beat him using this trick. I will be the last turtle hiding. I will beat him to the finish line.”

The turtles came early to the race. They took their places in the tall grass along the trail.

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Coyote came for the race. His people came with him. They made bets with the turtles that Coyote would win. Soon the race began. Coyote ran past the turtle. He flew down the trail. He left the turtle far behind. But then, all of a sudden, Turtle was far ahead of Coyote. Coyote would pass Turtle. Moments later, he would look up and see Turtle far ahead of him on the trail.

Turtle popped up from his hiding place when it was his turn. He crossed the finish line first. The turtles let out a great cheer. The coyotes were very angry. Coyote did not win. They lost the money they bet on him. They blamed Coyote. Coyote ran off into the grass to hide. He lay low for a long time. He wondered how the slow Turtle had won the race.

