

Coyote and Rabbit Visit Belize or How the Tricksters Were Out Trickstered

Now you know have probably heard of Coyote. He is pretty famous by now. He is the trickster of the Diné and Pueblo people of the Southwest. Maybe you didn't know that Rabbit is the trickster of the people of the Southeast. You hear some of his stories in the *Brer Rabbit* stories made famous by Walt Disney. When the African people were held in slavery along with the Choctaw, Cherokee, Muskogee, Alabama, and Seminole people, the African slaves learned these stories.

As you probably already know, tricksters try to play tricks on others to get what they want, usually food. But this one time, Coyote and Rabbit were together gabbing as they often did, swapping lies and such.

Rabbit said, "You know, Coyote, just once I think I'd like to do something good for someone."

Coyote grinned and replied, "Why'd you'd want to do something like that? It'll ruin our reputations."

Rabbit said, "Well, I don't know. Maybe people would start trusting us again, so we could play more tricks on them."

Coyote replies, "Yeah, that just might work."

They sat around the fire, pondering this new idea. In the morning, Rabbit jumped up and said, "I heard that there are some people way down south who have never heard of us and they might need some help. Besides, I am pretty sure I have some relatives down there somewhere."

Coyote nodded his head slowly as he thought about this idea. They slept a little longer before Coyote answered. "Well, how far south would we have to go?"

"Let's see," said Rabbit picking up a map. Coyote peered over his shoulder.

"What about that Belize place?" Coyote suggested.

"Well, OK," Rabbit replied hesitantly. "Are there any people down there?"

"Well, there's this place called Maya Centre. That seems to be the place with all the people."

"OK," Rabbit replied. "I'll hop on the internet to see what kind of mischief I can whip up!"

Coyote and Rabbit were flying down the road in their old pickup. Rabbit was driving, and Coyote was reading a road map.

“What are those directions to the school?” Rabbit asked.

Coyote consults a piece of paper. “It says to turn at the women’s coop, whatever that is.”

Do you know what kind of activity you are going to do with the kids?”

“Not too sure, but it’ll be a good’un. I’m pretty good at everything I do.” Coyote replied, forgetting all his previous failures.

“Yeah, me too!” Rabbit replied.

Coyote looked at him slyly, “And what about that tar person you got stuck to.”

Rabbit wrinkled his nose derisively, “And your experience with horned toad?”

They both fell silent for a while. Rabbit concentrated on making the curves in the winding, mountainous road.

“Look,” Coyote said, “There’s a sign.” They read the sign silently.

“Wonder why they spell center that way,” Coyote mused. “There’s the women’s coop. Turn here! Turn here!”

“I saw it,” Rabbit said, turning onto a dirt road.

“First road, first road on the right,” Coyote shouted.

Rabbit turned slowly onto another dirt road, wondering what kind of trick he could play on Coyote. *This straight stuff is for the birds*, he thought. They rolled slowly to a stop in front of the school. As they stepped out, they found themselves surrounded by happy, brown faces and lots of questions. T’ul, the principal (or so he said), met them in front of the school. He escorted them to an open air, concrete brick (the building blocks of developing nations), concrete floored classroom with its farrago of student desks in various states of repair and disrepair and hues and designs.

“Class,” he said, “we are very honored to have two distinguished visitors. They will introduce themselves. They are here to do some creative writing with you.” And then disappeared.

Coyote introduced himself in the language of Kauwek’ea (as you know, he is the master of disguises). He told a tale from that region, and he did look good in his vest and turquoise, coral, and oyster shell necklace. It was too hot for him to wear his fine ribbon shirt, the one that all the ladies admired him in. But there were no ladies here to impress, so it didn’t matter.

Rabbit also disguised himself as a woman wearing the clothing of the Yucatec Maya, a beautiful embroidered blouse and full skirt. S/he received many warm smiles from the girls in the class. *Well*, Rabbit thought to himself, *I'm being a role model for these girls and that's a good thing*. Indeed, many of the girls, and some boys, consulted with her/him about their writing even though it was really Coyote's workshop.

(Do you think Rabbit was thinking that Coyote was getting too much attention?)

And Coyote had asked her/him to pass out the colored pencils and the also pick them back up.

“How long are we suppose to do this?” Coyote asked Rabbit.

“I think for an hour. Do you want me to go check?” Rabbit replied.

Rabbit finally found T'ul making barbecue in a screened building in the back. S/he got the time for the class and the time for the next class. T'ul asked, “How many classes do you want to do? Our students really need your help.”

Rabbit paused and thought, “We can probably do one more after lunch, s/he said.

“Oh, that would be great,” T'ul almost purred (if it was possible for rabbits to purr).

“Time's up. Time to collect the colored pencils. Give me your papers.” Coyote barked. The children cheerfully obeyed. And so went the next class as well. As Coyote and Rabbit went to the pickup to find somewhere to eat (it was kind of a problem, you know, because Rabbit doesn't eat meat, but Coyote does. Actually, Coyote eats everything.), children followed them asking questions and wishing them well.

Coyote and Rabbit felt really proud. *Yes, we really did something good this time. People will have to stop telling those bad stories about us*. And they drove on down a dirt road. Around one bend, they saw a beautiful garden with a beautiful woman in front, so they stopped there.

Coyote thought, *I am going to woo this beautiful woman. She won't be able to resist my good looks and charm*. He looked around at Rabbit, disguised as a woman, and snorted. *This is one time Rabbit won't be any competition*.

Ixchel greeted them courteously and offered to feed them and show them around. She brought them chia tamales and fried plantains. Both Rabbit and Coyote agreed that it was a fine meal. After the meal, Ixchel suggested a walk through the cool forest where there were many medicinal plants. Rabbit and Coyote eagerly agreed, so off they went into the cool forest where they heard many birds and saw lizards, and Ixchel gave the names of the plants.

Rabbit and Coyote were enjoying themselves, but began to feel the sting of and nips of k'oxol, tiny flying insects. Rabbit thumped the ground to try to get them off and leaped and twisted in the air, and Coyote howled alternately while trying to bite the insects. It must have been a funny sight because Ixchel laughed and laughed. The harder she laughed, the more her spots came out. Finally, she slinked off into the forest.

Now, Rabbit and Coyote didn't feel so good about themselves, but shrugged it off as they headed back to the school. They thought *we'll show everyone how really great we are.*

They headed into the classroom with paper and colored pencils, and the room quickly filled with students, some shy and some curious. Five little heads with big grins appeared at the window and then disappeared when the bell rang. Students queued up and marched into the classroom and recited a prayer.

Both Coyote and Rabbit's ears went up.

The instructor introduced them—Dr. Coyote and Dr. Rabbit—and told the students to behave themselves, designating the official tattler. Coyote began, and Rabbit passed out paper and colored pencils. Next door, a couple of dozen students bounced around the classroom with no supervision. They said their teacher was by the fence (The only person by the fence was lying down.) and poked their intrigued and intrusive faces and little bodies further into the next classroom where Coyote bravely carried on. All the children worked diligently and as fast as they could.

Rabbit felt the need to be useful, so s/he went looking for T'ul and looked in all the classrooms. More than one didn't have a teacher. In fact, one poor teacher was running madly between two classes of about 30 six- to seven-year-olds, yelling at the top of her lungs the whole time. Rabbit finally found T'ul and three teachers sitting in an office talking.

At the end of an hour, Coyote said, "That's it. You need to turn in the colored pencils." Rabbit and Coyote collected the pencils and paper and left the classroom. T'ul had disappeared and no teachers ever appeared. As they walked back to the pickup, scratching their bug bites, they looked at each other and said, "What was that?"

"Did they just use us as substitute teachers," Rabbit asked.

"I think that's exactly what they did," Coyote replied.

Somewhere in the forest, T'ul was laughing.