



Reading #3 In the Beginning

Unit 1 Lesson 1

In the Beginning

It began long ago, when there were no people on the earth. Senawhav* (the Maker of All Things) cut sticks and put them in a bag. Coyote watched until Senawhav left. Then Coyote opened the bag, and many people came out. They ran in every direction, all speaking different languages.

When Senawhav saw the open bag, he was angry. He planned to give each group its own place on the earth, so that the people would not fight. When Coyote spoiled that plan, Senawhav knew that wars would begin all over the land.

Some people stayed in the bag. When Senawhav saw them, he said, “These people will be very brave. They will be called Ute, and no one will defeat them.”

In this way, Ute elders explain, people came to the earth. Slowly, they learned to use what Senawhav had given them. As first the days were very short. The sun stayed in the sky for only a few hours. To help the people, Rabbit fought the sun.

He traveled over mountains and valleys until he reached the edge of the world. Then he took out his bow and arrows. When the sun rose, he shot at it but the great heat burned his arrows. Then he wet his arrows with tears and shot again. As last he hit his target.

Now the sun grew very angry because Rabbit had shot him. He began to chase Rabbit across the earth. Every time Rabbit hid, the sun burned his hiding place. In this way, Rabbit got the brown spots which cover his back and ears. Then Rabbit hid under a rabbit bush that would not burn, and the sun had to give up. After that the sun crossed the sky each day.

Then the days were long enough for the people to hunt and fish. They could gather the sweet piñon nuts and the juicy berries. The sun warmed the rock during the day. But the





Reading #3 In the Beginning

Unit 1 Lesson 1

people had no fire to cook their food. When cold winds blew at night, they could not warm themselves. So, the stories tell, Coyote decided to get fire for the people.

One day a piece of burnt grass blew in front of Coyote's home. He picked it up and called the people together. When they had come, he showed them the burnt grass and asked them if they knew where it came from. No one knew what it was.

Then Coyote asked them to search for it. They decided to head west, since wind blew from that direction. They traveled for many days, crossing mountains and plains. Finally they camped, and Coyote sent some of the people to look for this strange thing. First Red-Tailed Hawk went out, but he saw nothing. Then Eagle flew higher and saw smoke. Then Hummingbird flew away. He was gone for a long time, and the others began to look for him. When he came back, he said that he had seen something near the place where the earth meets the sky.

So all the people traveled toward that place. When they had crossed two mountain ranges, Coyote told them to wash themselves and put on their best clothes. They were near to the camp of the people who had fire and warned them that the strangers would fight to get the fire back.

When they came to the strangers' camp, Coyote met with the chief and asked the strangers to dance for them. They agreed and built a big fire for the dance. Coyote had a long black wig made of shredded bark. He danced all night. Just as the sun rose, Coyote gave his people the signal. Suddenly he took off his wig and put it into the fire. All of the fire jumped into the bark wig, and the people ran as fast as they could.





Reading #3 In the Beginning

Unit 1 Lesson 1

The angry strangers chased them. When one person grew tired, he passed the fire to another. Soon only Coyote, Eagle, Chicken Hawk, and Hawk-Moth had strength to keep going. Then the other three grew tired and Coyote ran on alone.

The strangers made water pour from the sky, and Coyote feared that the fire would go out. At last he found a dry cave. He piled up some brush and built a large fire. Outside, strangers made freezing winds blow and heavy snowfall, but Coyote stayed warm. In the morning, the sky cleared and the ice began to melt. Then Coyote carried the fire home and showed the people how to use it.

All of these stories tell of a long time ago, a magic time when animals spoke and acted like people. That magic time ended, but the Ute people stayed on the earth. They learned that everything on earth had a purpose. They read the signs of the moon and the clouds. They heard the message of the wind. They learned to use all things wisely.

Senawhav had given them a rich land. He had given them plants and animals, birds and fish. He had given them water, the milk of Mother Earth. These gifts were for all people to share. They were for all time, until darkness came to cover the earth.

Senawhav told the people how to take care of his gifts. He showed them how to use these things without wasting them. If the people did what he said, they would have strength and health. The earth would provide all that they needed as long as they treated it with care. In this way, all people could use Senawhav's gifts until the last sunset came and their time on earth ended.

Even the oldest people do not know exactly how the Ute people lived in those early days. Only a few of the stories speak of that time. They say that the people traveled across the land





Reading #3 In the Beginning

Unit 1 Lesson 1

on foot. They built homes from grass and reeds and brush. They shot deer with bows and arrows, and they gathered the plants that grew in their land. For many years the people lived in that way.

*Senawhav - the Ute Creator

Source: *The Northern Ute History Curriculum Project*. Used with permission from the Ute Indian Tribe.

A Colorado Coyote

