



Native American Literature: Myths & Folklore

Myth Recap

- A myth (or origin/creation story) is a traditional story which describes the **origins** of something--typically the world, humans or aspects of nature or a culture.
- A myth is an **attempt to explain mysteries**, “supernatural events”, and cultural traditions.
- Sometimes considered a form of **religious/spiritual** beliefs. In other words, the culture of origin typically believes the myth is **nonfiction**.
- Often involves gods, spirits, or characters with supernatural abilities.

Native American Myths and Folktales

Similarities

- Both are stories passed down from generation to generation by **word of mouth**.
- Both often involve nonhuman characters (gods, spirits, or animals) or human characters with **supernatural** abilities



Myths vs. Folklore

Myths

1. A myth's main purpose is to explain the origin of something, but can have a moral
2. The culture of origin typically believes the myth is nonfiction

Folklore

1. Focus is passing on a lesson or moral, but can explain an origin
2. Acknowledged as fiction by its culture of origin.

How the Coyote got his Cunning

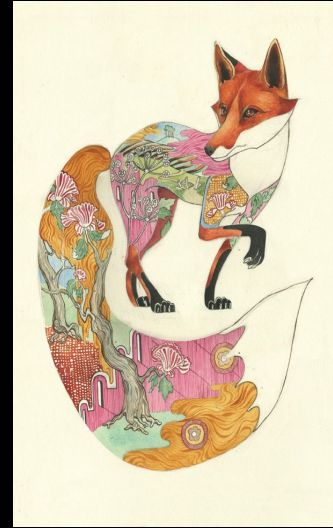


As you watch the video, consider this: is this story a folktale or a myth? Is it a bit of both? Explain.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5d2Zh318kRY>

Trickster Tales: A Special Kind of Folktale

- While a trickster tale does explain the origins of something (typically something in nature, like how tornadoes began or why deer have antlers), the main purpose of the story is to pass on a **moral** to the audience.
- The moral of a trickster tale is usually very obvious and intended for **children**, while the themes behind a myth are usually more subtle
- At some point in the story, a character (usually an animal) tries to trick another



Trickster Tale Requirements

- Step One:** Must have a natural setting and characters- Characters must be well-developed and must include animal characters with human qualities (i.e. A coyote that can speak, etc.)
- Step Two:** Must include a magical happening or magical transformation that refers to an explanation to something in the natural world. In most trickster tales, the magical happening is a creation of a characteristic of an animal (i.e. a buck's antlers, an elephant's tusks, etc) or a natural force in the natural world (i.e. tornados, hurricanes, etc.).

Trickster Tale Requirements

- **Step Three:** Must include a trickster. Someone in the story that either tries to trick all other characters or tries to foil the plan for everyone involved.
- **Step Four:** Include a moral in the story. The ending of the trickster tale needs to serve as a moral compass for the reader- a cautionary tale that bad things will happen or things will not go your way if you do wrong.

