Coyote and the Buffalo

Folk Tale Retold by Mourning Dove

COMMON CORE

RL 1 Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain. **RL 3** Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story. **RL 5** Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

DID YOU KNOW?

Mourning Dove . . .

- was born in a canoe while her mother was crossing a river in Idaho.
- learned to read English by poring over melodramatic dime-store novels.
- was the first woman ever elected to the Colville tribal council.

Meet the Author

Mourning Dove c. 1885–1936

Mourning Dove is the pen name of Christine Quintasket (kwən-tăs′kət), who triumphed over adversity to become one of the first female Native American novelists. As a child, Quintasket was enthralled by the traditional stories told by her elders. As an adult, she worked to preserve these tales. By publishing stories that recount the history of her people, she carried on the work of the storytellers she so admired.

Determined to Write Quintasket grew up on the Colville Reservation in Washington State with her mother, the daughter of a Colville chief, and her father, an Okanogan. When Quintasket was 14, her mother died, leaving her to run the household and help raise her younger siblings. Despite her many responsibilities, Quintasket pushed herself to learn to write in English. She later attended secretarial school to learn how to type and business school to hone her grammar and writing skills. She drafted a novel in 1912 but put it away for several years until she met Lucullus McWhorter, a Native American–rights activist, who offered to edit it.

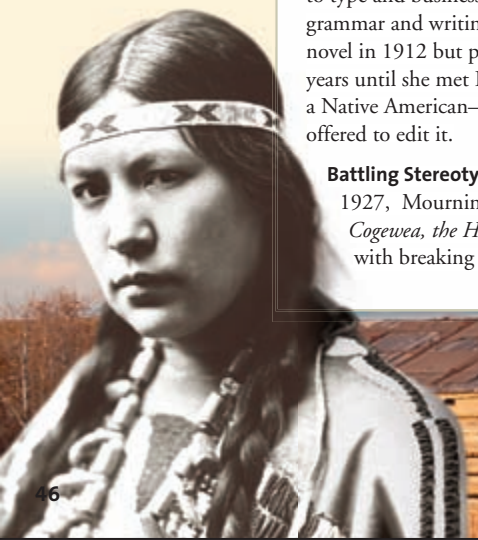
Battling Stereotypes Published in 1927, Mourning Dove's novel, *Cogewea, the Half-Blood,* is credited with breaking down the stereotype of Native Americans as stoic, or unfeeling. "It is all wrong, this saying that Indians do not feel as deeply as whites," the author asserted. "We do feel, and by and by some of us are going to make our feelings appreciated, and then will the true Indian character be revealed."

Chronicling Her Culture After *Cogewea* was published, Mourning Dove began to record traditional stories of the Okanogan and other Colville tribes. A migrant worker, she picked fruit ten hours a day but managed to do her writing at night. *Coyote Stories,* from which "Coyote and the Buffalo" is taken, was published in 1933. "Coyote and the Buffalo" is a folk tale once told by Okanogan storytellers in Salish, their native language. Mourning Dove's retelling includes Salish words and place names. This story and others like it help keep the Okanogan culture alive today.

Mourning Dove's Legacy In addition to preserving her people's culture, Mourning Dove worked hard to promote their welfare. She fought for their rights in court, started organizations supporting Native American crafts, and paved the way for female participation on tribal councils. Worn down by chronic illness and fatigue, the writer and activist died in 1936.

Author Online

Go to thinkcentral.com. KEYWORD: HML11-46



TEXT ANALYSIS: TRICKSTER TALES

You already know that a folk tale is a simple story passed orally from one generation to the next. **The trickster tale** is a type of folk tale that features an animal or human character who typically engages in deceit, violence, and magic. Often, trickster tales are mythic, explaining how some aspect of human nature or the natural world came to be. The opening lines of "Coyote and the Buffalo" announce what this trickster tale will explain.

No buffalo ever lived in the Swah-netk'-qhu *country. That was Coyote's fault.*

Tricksters are **archetypal characters**—character types that can be found in literary works from different cultures throughout the ages. As incurable practical jokers, with universal appeal, they appear frequently in American literature and film—from the coyote of Native American myths to the tricksters of 20th-century animated cartoons and beyond. As you read this tale, notice how Coyote's character is developed. He demonstrates the trickster's contradictory qualities of being foolish yet clever, greedy yet helpful, and immoral yet moral. In addition, Coyote is given the human characteristic of speech. The first words out of his mouth further clarify his character type:

"Now I will have some fun," Coyote remarked. "I will have revenge for the times Buffalo made me run."

READING STRATEGY: PREDICT

Tricksters are often schemers or scoundrels—they don't usually act as other characters do. Using your background knowledge of this character's contradictory qualities, as well as text clues, can help you **predict** upcoming story events. As you read, use a chart like the one shown to record Coyote's key traits and unusual behavior. Pause occasionally to predict what will happen next.

Coyote's Traits and Behavior	My Predictions
Coyote is "foolish and greedy"; it is his fault there are no buffalo in Swah-netk'-qhu country.	This story will reveal that Coyote did something reckless or unwise to scare away the buffalo.

Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

Why do we root for the "BAD GUY"?

Wherever they go, they ignore the rules. They stir up trouble. And yet we admire and love them despite—or maybe because of—their bad behavior. Many societies have famous villains or trickster figures, who both infuriate and inspire the people around them.

QUICKWRITE Think about movies or books in which the villain is more compelling than the hero. What qualities does such a villain typically display? Which of these traits contribute most to his or her appeal? Record your responses in a short paragraph.

Coyote and the Buffalo

Retold by Mourning Dove

BACKGROUND "Coyote and the Buffalo" is one of many traditional stories featuring the Animal People, a race of supernatural beings believed by the Okanogan to have been the first inhabitants of the world. The Animal People had magical powers and could alter their shapes. When human beings appeared on the earth, the Animal People were changed into different animal species. Coyote, one of the most important Animal People, is thought to have made the world habitable for humans by killing monsters and bringing fire and salmon.

Analyze Visuals ▶
Describe the artwork on page 49. How is the use of color significant? Does the color treatment cause this coyote to reflect the **traits** of a trickster? Explain your answer.

No buffalo ever lived in the *Swah-netk'-qhu*[1] country. That was Coyote's fault. If he had not been so foolish and greedy, the people beside the *Swah-netk'-qhu* would not have had to cross the Rockies to hunt the *quas-peet-za*[2] (curled-hairs).

This is the way it happened:

Coyote was traveling over the plains beyond the big mountains. He came to a flat. There he found an old buffalo skull. It was the skull of Buffalo Bull. Coyote always had been afraid of Buffalo Bull. He remembered the many times Bull Buffalo had scared him, and he laughed upon seeing the old skull there on the flat.

"Now I will have some fun," Coyote remarked. "I will have revenge for the
10 times Buffalo made me run."

He picked up the skull and threw it into the air; he kicked it and spat on it; he threw dust in the eye sockets. He did these things many times, until he grew tired. Then he went his way. Soon he heard a rumbling behind him. He thought it Ⓐ was thunder, and he looked at the sky. The sky was clear. Thinking he must have imagined the sound, he walked on, singing. He heard the rumbling again, only

1 Targeted Passage

Ⓐ **TRICKSTER TALES**
In the first paragraph, the Coyote is "foolish and greedy". The Joker, in Tim Burton's 1989 film *Batman,* also shares some of the traits of a trickster. Based on lines 5–13, what other **character traits** would you attribute to this trickster?

1. ***Swah-netk'-qhu*** (shwə-nĭt'kwə): the Salish name for the Columbia River and its waterfall.
2. ***quas-peet-za*** (kwəs-pēt'zä): a Salish word for buffalo.

Coyote Survivor, John Nieto. Serigraph, 29″ × 22″.

much closer and louder. Turning around, he saw Buffalo Bull pounding along after him, chasing him. His old enemy had come to life!

Coyote ran, faster than he thought he could run, but Buffalo gained steadily. Soon Buffalo was right at his heels. Coyote felt his hot breath.

"Oh, *Squas-tenk',*[3] help me!" Coyote begged, and his power answered by putting three trees in front of him. They were there in the wink of an eye. Coyote jumped and caught a branch of the first tree and swung out of Buffalo's way. Buffalo rammed the tree hard, and it shook as if in a strong wind. Then Buffalo chopped at the trunk with his horns, first with one horn and then the other. He chopped fast, and in a little while over went the tree, and with it went Coyote. But he was up and into the second tree before Buffalo Bull could reach him. Buffalo soon laid that tree low, but he was not quick enough to catch Coyote, who scrambled into the third and last tree.

"Buffalo, my friend, let me talk with you," said Coyote, as his enemy hacked away at the tree's trunk. "Let me smoke my pipe. I like the *kinnikinnick.*[4] Let me smoke. Then I can die more content."

"You may have time for one smoke," grunted Bull Buffalo, resting from his chopping.

Coyote spoke to his medicine-power, and a pipe, loaded and lighted, was given to him. He puffed on it once and held out the pipe to Buffalo Bull.

"No, I will not smoke with you," said that one. "You made fun of my bones. I have enough enemies without you. Young Buffalo is one of them. He killed me and stole all my fine herd."

"My uncle,"[5] said Coyote, "you need new horns. Let me make new horns for you. Then you can kill Young Buffalo. Those old horns are dull and worn."

Bull Buffalo was pleased with that talk. He decided he did not want to kill Coyote. He told Coyote to get down out of the tree and make the new horns. Coyote jumped down and called to his power. It scolded him for getting into trouble, but it gave him a flint knife and a stump of pitchwood.[6] From this stump Coyote carved a pair of fine heavy horns with sharp points. He gave them to Buffalo Bull. All buffalo bulls have worn the same kind of horns since. B

Buffalo Bull was very proud of his new horns. He liked their sharpness and weight and their pitch-black color. He tried them out on what was left of the pitchwood stump. He made one toss and the stump flew high in the air, and he forgave Coyote for his mischief. They became good friends right there. Coyote said he would go along with Buffalo Bull to find Young Buffalo.

They soon came upon Young Buffalo and the big herd he had won from Buffalo Bull. Young Buffalo laughed when he saw his old enemy, and he walked out to meet him. He did not know, of course, about the new horns. It was not much of a fight,

3. ***Squas-tenk'*** (skwəs-tĭnk'): a Salish word referring to Coyote's spirit helper.
4. ***kinnikinnick*** (kĭn'ĭ-kĭ-nĭk'): the Salish word for the bearberry shrub. The Okanogan toasted bearberry leaves and then crumbled them and mixed them with tobacco for pipe smoking.
5. **my uncle:** Terms like *uncle, brother, sister,* and *cousin* were sometimes used as a sign of respect. Here, Coyote is using the term to flatter Buffalo Bull.
6. **pitchwood:** the sap-filled wood of a pine or fir tree.

Language Coach

Connotation The images or feelings connected to a word are its **connotation**. Why does Coyote refer to Buffalo Bull as "My uncle" in line 39 (see footnote 5)? How might the meaning differ if Coyote had used one of these terms to address Buffalo Bull: *Mister, Your Honor*, or *Worthy Opponent*?

B **TRICKSTER TALES**

This trickster tale is **mythic** in that it explains how something came to be—in this case, the lack of buffalo in a certain geographic area. What second mythic explanation is offered in lines 39–46?

that fight between Young Buffalo and Buffalo Bull. With the fine new horns, Buffalo Bull killed the other easily, and then he took back his herd, all his former wives and their children. He gave Coyote a young cow, the youngest cow, and he said:

"Never kill her, *Sin-ka-lip'*![7] Take good care of her and she will supply you with meat forever. When you get hungry, just slice off some choice fat with a flint knife. Then rub ashes on the wound and the cut will heal at once." C

Coyote promised to remember that, and they parted. Coyote started back to his own country, and the cow followed. For a few suns he ate only the fat when he was hungry. But after awhile he became tired of eating fat, and he began to long for the sweet marrow-bones and the other good parts of the buffalo. He smacked his lips at the thought of having some warm liver.

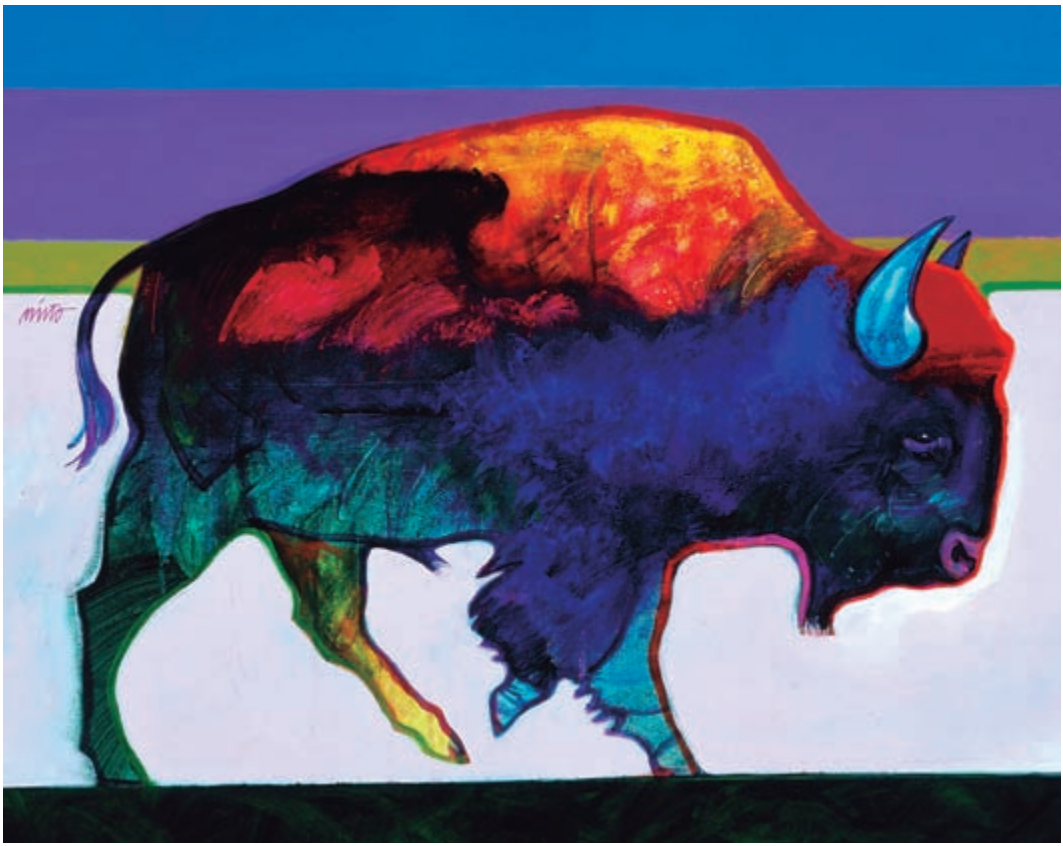
Targeted Passage

C **PREDICT**

Consider what you know about the **archetypal** trickster character and think about Coyote's behavior thus far. How do you think Coyote will respond to Buffalo Bull's instructions? Give reasons for your prediction.

7. ***Sin-ka-lip'*** (sĭng'kə-lĭp'): the Salish name for Coyote; it means "imitator."

Buffalo, John Nieto. Acrylic, 30″× 40″.



"Buffalo Bull will never know," Coyote told himself, and he took his young cow down beside a creek and killed her.

As he peeled off the hide, crows and magpies came from all directions. They settled on the carcass and picked at the meat. Coyote tried to chase them away, but there were too many of them. While he was chasing some, others returned and ate the meat. It was not long until they had devoured every bit of the meat.

"Well, I can get some good from the bones and marrow-fat," Coyote remarked, and he built a fire to cook the bones. Then he saw an old woman walking toward him. She came up to the fire.

"Sin-ka-lip'," she said, "you are a brave warrior, a great chief. Why should you do woman's work? Let me cook the bones while you rest."

Vain Coyote! He was flattered. He believed she spoke her true mind. He stretched out to rest and he fell asleep. In his sleep he had a bad dream. It awoke him, and he saw the old woman running away with the marrow-fat and the boiled grease. He looked into the cooking-basket. There was not a drop of soup left in it. He chased the old woman. He would punish her! But she could run, too, and she easily kept ahead of him. Every once in awhile she stopped and held up the marrow-fat and shouted: *"Sin-ka-lip',* do you want this?" D

Finally Coyote gave up trying to catch her. He went back to get the bones. He thought he would boil them again. He found the bones scattered all around, so he gathered them up and put them into the cooking-basket. Needing some more water to boil them in, he went to the creek for it, and when he got back, there were no bones in the basket! In place of the bones was a little pile of tree limbs!

Coyote thought he might be able to get another cow from Buffalo Bull, so he set out to find him. When he came to the herd, he was astonished to see the cow he had killed. She was there with the others! She refused to go with Coyote again, and Buffalo Bull would not give him another cow. Coyote had to return to his own country without a buffalo.

That is why there never have been any buffalo along the *Swah-netk'-qhu.*

4 **Targeted Passage**

D TRICKSTER TALES

Coyote is not the only character who plays the role of trickster in this tale. Reread lines 77–83. Notice how the old woman turns the tables on Coyote, teasing him with some tricks of her own. An **archetype of mythic literature,** the trickster character appears frequently in American popular entertainment—from animated cartoons to superhero comic books and the hugely popular movies based on them. Tricks and counter-tricks have kept Wile E. Coyote in the American public eye since 1948. Where else have you seen a trickster such as Coyote in action?

Comprehension

1. **Recall** Why is Buffalo Bull so enraged at Coyote at the beginning of the story?
2. **Recall** How does Coyote convince Buffalo Bull to spare his life?
3. **Summarize** According to the story, why don't buffalo live in the *Swah-netk'-qhu* country?

Text Analysis

4. **Analyze Predictions** Review the chart you completed as you read. How accurate were your predictions? Did the fact that the trickster is a somewhat familiar **archetypal character** make it easier to predict Coyote's actions, or did his behavior surprise you? Explain your answer, referring to both your chart and the selection.
5. **Interpret Trickster Tales** Trickster tales endure, in part, simply because they are fun to read. But they also often serve to teach a lesson or moral. What does "Coyote and the Buffalo" teach or explain? Support your answer with specific lines from the story.
6. **Draw Conclusions** Trickster tales, like other forms of folk literature, offer readers insight into a society's way of life. What information about the following aspects of Okanogan culture did you glean from this tale?
   - traits or qualities the Okanogan admired as well as those they disapproved of
   - the traditional role of women in Okanogan society
   - Okanogan rituals and religious beliefs
7. **Make Judgments** Review the paragraph you wrote earlier about famous or compelling villains and tricksters. What character traits does Coyote share with these characters? In your opinion, is Coyote an admirable character? Explain, citing evidence from the text to support your opinion.

Text Criticism

8. **Critical Interpretations** Critic Paul Rodin has argued that a trickster "is at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself. . . . He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites." Identify the ways in which Coyote fits this definition of a trickster. Cite evidence from the selection to support your answer.

Why do we root for the "BAD GUY"?

What makes Coyote appealing, despite his character flaws? Can you think of a famous person who fits the "trickster" label?

COMMON CORE

RL 1 Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain. **RL 3** Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story. **RL 5** Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.