

Miwuk: Creation of Man

After Coyote had completed making the world, he began to think about creating man. He called a council of all the animals. The animals sat in a circle, just as the Indians do, with Lion at the head, in an open space in the forest. On Lion's right was Grizzly Bear; next Cinnamon Bear; then Black Bear; and so on to Mouse, who sat at Lion's left.

Lion spoke first. Lion said he wished man to have a terrible voice, like himself, so that he could frighten all animals. He wanted man also to be well covered with hair, with fangs in his claws, and very strong teeth.

Grizzly Bear laughed. He said it was ridiculous for any one to have such a voice as Lion, because when he roared he frightened away the very prey for which he was searching. He said man should have very great strength; he should move silently, but very swiftly; and he should be able to seize his prey without noise.

Buck said man would look foolish without antlers. And a terrible voice was absurd, but man should have ears like a spider's web and eyes like fire.

Mountain Sheep said the branching antlers would bother man if he got caught in a thicket. If man had horns rolled up, so that they were like a stone on each side of his head, it would give his head weight enough to butt very hard.

When it came to Coyote's turn, he said the other animals were foolish because they wanted man to be just like themselves. Coyote was sure he could make a man who would look better than Coyote himself, or any other animal. Of course he would have to have four legs, with five fingers. Man should have a strong voice, but he need not roar all the time with it. And he should have feet nearly like Grizzly Bear's, because he could then stand erect when he needed to. Grizzly Bear had no tail and man should not have any. The eyes and ears of Buck were good and perhaps man should have those.

Then there was Fish, which had no hair and hair was a burden much of the year. So Coyote thought man should not wear fur. His claws should be as long as Eagle's so that he could hold things in them. But no animal was as cunning and crafty as Coyote so man should have the wit of Coyote.

Then Beaver talked. Beaver said man would have to have a tail, but it should be broad and flat so he could haul mud and sand on it. Not a furry tail because they were troublesome on account of fleas.

Owl said man would be useless without wings. But Mole said wings would be folly. Man would be sure to bump against the sky. Besides, if man had both wings and eyes he would get his eyes burned out by flying to near the sun. But without eyes he could burrow in the soft cool earth, where he could be happy.

Mouse said man needed eyes so he could see what he was eating. And, nobody wanted to burrow in the damp earth. So the Council broke up in a quarrel.

Then every animal set to work to make a man according to his own ideas. Each one took a lump of earth and modeled it just like himself. All but Coyote, for Coyote began to make the kind of man he had talked of in the Council.

It was late when the animals stopped work and fell asleep. All but Coyote, for Coyote was the cunningness of all the animals. He stayed awake until he had finished his model. He worked hard all night. When the other animals were fast asleep he threw water on the lumps of earth and spoiled the models of the other animals. But in the morning he finished his own and gave it life long before the others could finish theirs.

Thus man was made by Coyote.

THE END

Source: Judson, Katherine Berry, 1912. Myths and Legends of California and the Old Southwest. Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co. pp. 51-53