

LAST CHANCE TO TELL THE TALE OF COYOTE AND MEDICINE MAN

a story telling parlor game by Bryan Hansel

In the never ending struggle between Coyote and Medicine Man, Medicine Man is winning and we can see end of the world is coming soon. The deserts and mountains are gone. The Milky Way blinked out of existence for a day, and soon, because the Medicine Man's medicine is so strong, he'll return everything to the way it was before Coyote's creations. To celebrate our ending, let's tell the story of our beginning.

WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY

- Paper
- Pencils
- Big hat
- Hand-sized rock
- Lantern
- Shadow puppet screen
- Shadow puppets of Coyote and Medicine Man
- Enough paper and materials to make shadow puppets of the other characters
- Shadow scenery of the sun, stars, mountains, forest, river, village, fish, birds, spear, fire, sea, clouds, desert, arctic, plains, animals (You can add more as need. Should have two per player)
- A piece of paper for every type of scenery. Write the scenery's name on the paper and drop in the hat when instructed.

MAKE CHARACTERS

As we've always believed, we were all part of our creation. At the end of the world, we become part of the creation story again. Everyone takes a piece of paper and writes his or her name at the top, and then folds the top of the paper over to hide the name. Throw the paper into a hat.

After everyone finishes, each person pulls one piece of paper from the hat and then writes a mythological name such as Cloud Swallower, Thunder Being or Walks With A Heavy Foot. Afterwards, fold the paper over, put it into the hat and draw a new one.

Next write a two or three sentence character sketch. Fold the paper and put it into the hat. Draw a new one and repeat this for "Alignment," "Role in Creation," "Fate" and "How the World Remembers." For alignment write either: benevolent or malevolent. For "Role in Creation" put the pieces of paper with the scenery types written on it into a hat. Each person draws two and records both on the paper. Then write a statement about how he or she helped create the scenery types and a statement about how he hindered the creation of the scenery types. For "How the World Remembers" write about whether the character worked with Coyote or Medicine Man at creation and how he or she is remembered for that.

All these should somehow relate to our culture. These descriptions will be weaved into the story we tell, so make them fun, unusual and distinctive. When finished unfold the paper and pass each piece to the person whose name appears at the top.

EXAMPLE CHARACTER

Jane Smith

Character's Name: Cloud Swallower

Sketch: A kind old woman who lives at the edge of the village. She helps everyone who comes by her house and often talks while tending her garden.

Alignment: Malevolent

Role in Creation: Stars and Animals. Helped put the stars into the sky with a stick and make the animals out of clay. Hindered by hiding the stars in a bag and eating all the animals as they were made.

Fate: Falls into the sea.

How the World Remembers: As the hero who helped Coyote when all the odds were against him.

COYOTE

Coyote is the creator of our world and a trickster. Though his tricks may succeed, the end results are usually positive for the people. He is kind and mean. He is smart and dumb. He can become man or woman. He can also mimic any person or animal when he desires. Coyote wants to create the world.

MEDICINE MAN

Before creation, Medicine Man had the job of keeping everything as it was and changing back everything that Coyote did to the way it was. Coyote was always trying to trick Medicine Man into letting him create something. Usually, Medicine Man liked to sit around a fire smoking his pipe. Medicine Man wants to stop the world's creation.

SETTING UP THE PUPPET THEATER

We know the world ends at midnight and we want to watch the stars wink out of existence, so we'll tell the story of creation outside under the remaining stars while hoping to catch a glimpse of Coyote and Medicine Man. Make a fire ring and build a small, but warm fire, place enough chairs around it for everyone gathered.

Just beyond the reach of the fire, hang a white shadow puppet screen. You can hang this in a frame or from trees. Remove wrinkles from the screen as wrinkles will spoil the shadow effect. Place a lantern far enough from it to light the screen and allow shadows to fall on it. At the bottom of the screen, you can place a board or such to hide the actors.

Any actors should avoid stepping in front of the lantern until he brings a puppet in. Staying below the board hides the actors. Enter or exit the screen from either the right or the left. Entering or exiting from the lantern makes it look like the puppet is entering or leaving from the sky.

MAKING PUPPETS

Make the puppets from cardboard. You can get creative and make arms and legs as needed. You could also cut out sections and use colored cellophane for eyes or other features. Make each puppet distinctive so that the audience can tell which one it is immediately. To the bottom of the puppet attach a wooden dowel which allows the actor to hold and move the puppet.

MAKING SCENERY

Make the scenery from cardboard and just like with the puppets attach wooden dowels. You can sharpen the wooden dowels at the end and stake them into the ground. This allows you to quickly change out the scenery as needed. If a person wants to incorporate a piece of scenery that isn't mandatory into the story, he or she makes it at this time. You should also add any scenery that ends up in a character sketch. For example, a fishing pole or a stick.

WHEN ACTING

When acting, be loud with a booming, but funny puppet voice. Project your voice to the fire because the screen can make it hard to hear. Move your puppet up and down or wiggle it back and forth very slightly when you speak so the audience can tell which puppet is talking.

TELLING THE STORY

The elder in the group always starts the story and he also picks the initial actors for Coyote and Medicine Man. Except when his character is on the screen, the elder runs the hand game (see Playing the Hand Game). When his character is on the screen the second oldest runs the hand game.

STARING THE TALE

The elder designates an actor for Coyote and an actor for Medicine Man. The actors place a fire scene shadow in the middle of the screen. Coyote and Medicine Man are sitting around the fire.

The elder stands to the side of the screen and addresses those gathered around the fire by saying, "The end of the world is now. We can see the stars blinking out of existence, but even in the old days, before the world was created, Coyote and Medicine Man sat around a fire and discussed the creation. Coyote always a force for change wanted something new and Medicine Man a force for keeping everything the same wanted things never to change. And so started the creation of the world."

The elder then tells the actors to discuss the world before creation and how the Coyote wants to create things and change things and how Medicine Man wanted to keep things the same. After the discussion ends, Medicine Man exits the screen and Coyote says how he wants a new friend to help him make things. He says, "I think I will make a few new friends."

INTRODUCING THE CHARACTERS

Each player starting from the elder's left brings his or her character up to the screen and introduces his or her name and uses the character sketch to talk about him or herself. He or she also tells us the character's alignment. If any extra scenery that's important to a character was made, the player places it so it casts shadows on the screen during the character's introduction. Alternatively, one person can be the actor and the player can introduce his or her character while sitting in the audience.

EXAMPLE INTRODUCTION

I am Cloud Swallower, a kind old woman who lives at the edge of the village. I like to tend my garden day and night. When I have visitors, I'll often till away, pulling weeds, planting seeds while they talk. I am malevolent.

THE CREATION STORIES

After the introduction is over, the creation stories begin. A creation story is a scene that tells how one type of scenery was created. Each story follows a general outline, and the actors involved in the scene play out a story that they create on the fly. These stories should incorporate the character sketches and details of each character in the scene.

The elder starts with his character and plays the hand game with the second eldest. In turn, each player plays a creation story for each of his scenery types. If a player is playing Coyote or Medicine Man then his turn is skipped until relieved of duty. Here's the general outline that a story follows (note on terms: player = person whose turn it is; other character = character mimicked by Coyote or picked by Medicine Man; actors = everyone playing a puppet):

The players tell the audience, "This is the story of the creation of" a scenery type from his character sheet.

- Hand game is played with the player. (See Playing the Hand Game)
- Coyote or Medicine Man picks a character.
- Player tells the audience what he or she was doing and why he wanted that type of scenery.
- Coyote enters and comes up with a scheme to help trick the Medicine Man so that that scenery was created.
- The other character enters. If benevolent, he or she helps by saying or doing something helpful. If malevolent, he or she hinders by leading the characters towards something else. If the coyote is mimicking the character he or she acts exactly opposite of his or her normal alignment.
- The player and Coyote then add some details to the story based on the other character's statement or action.
- The Medicine Man shows up and uses his medicine to make an obstacle.
- The elder plays the hand game with someone in the audience and calls out the results. If the audience member wins, the player applies his alignment to Medicine Man's obstacle making it harder or easier by introducing his role in creation. If malevolent, he tells the story of how this obstacle combines with what he did to hinder creation. If benevolent, he tells the story of how this obstacle combines with what he did to help creation. If the audience member loses, he does the opposite of his alignment. (Keep track of this result.)

- The Coyote figures out a way around any hindering or describes the result of any helping. Then tells us how the scenery was created or that it was created.

NOTE: You can be loss with this exact procedure everyone is creating good stories. The key is for the player to introduce the scenery, add details based on alignment and mimicking, then add an obstacle. Resolve the obstacle with the hand game based on alignment and the character sheet. Then resolve the story.

EXAMPLE CREATION STORY

In this story is Cloud Swallower. She plays the hand game and loses, so Coyote picks Walks With A Heavy Foot to mimic. Walks With A Heavy Foot is a benevolent, peace-loving dude who helps out the villagers whenever he can, he also likes fishing.

Cloud Swallower: At night the world is so dark and all I can do is stumble around (she moves the puppet around the screen in a stumbling fashion). One day, I stumbled so hard that I ran into Coyote (she makes her puppet shadow run into Coyote). I said, "Coyote, why don't you light up the night sky so that we can see if we need to get around, but keep it dark enough to sleep if we want to sleep."

Coyote: I have an idea. Perhaps if we visit Walks With A Heavy Foot, we can get him to catch some glowing cave fish. These we can put into the sky before Medicine Man stops us. Let's visit him. (Both puppets disappear off the right side of the screen).

Walks With A Heavy Foot (played by Coyote using a funny voice): (Appears from the right) I'm Walks With A Heavy Foot and I like to fish. I use this fishing pole.

Coyote and Cloud Swallower enter from the left.

Cloud Swallower: Walks With A Heavy Foot, we want to make the night sky not so dark so we can see enough not to stumble. We need to catch some glowing cave fish.

Walks With A Heavy Foot (played by Coyote using a funny voice – so he does the opposite of his alignment): I know exactly where to catch them. Follow me. (adds a water scene to the shadow). Dive into the water. (All three dive into the water.)

Coyote (to the audience): Cloud Swallower has no idea that I've taken the form of Walks With A Heavy Foot. Ha Ha Ha! (exits stage left)

Walks With A Heavy Foot (played by Coyote): At the bottom, just put your feet into the mud and then the fish will swim to you and you can catch them with your hands.

Cloud Swallower: As the fish come near me, they make everything glow. (brings in fish scenery)

Coyote: And then Walks With A Heavy Foot starts to float to the surface. (moves him up to the surface)

Medicine Man enters from above.

Medicine Man: I see you're trying to catch glowing cave fish to light the night sky. This I cannot allow. I use my medicine to turn the mud to stone, and your feet become stuck. You will die without air.

Cloud Swallower gasps and wiggles her puppet: Oh, no!

Elder and audience play hand game and losses.

Elder calls out: We lost the hand game.

Cloud Swallower (has alignment malevolent but because the hand game lost the action becomes opposite of her alignment and she uses the helping statement for creation on her character sheet): Coyote throws me a stick and I stab all the glowing cave fish with it. They swim so hard that they pull the stone to the water's surface where I toss the stick into the sky. The fish become the stars (Adds star scenery).

Coyote: And that's how the stars were created.

AFTER ALL THE STORIES ARE TOLD

After all the players tell the two stories of creation on their character sheets, it's time to tell of the character's fate. Each player gets screen time. The results of the hand game that you tracked during the creation stories comes into play.

- If both hand games were won, then the character's fate and how the world remembers him matches exactly with the character sheet.
- If both hand games were lost, then the character's fate and how the world remembers him is exactly opposite of the character sheet.
- If only one hand game was won, then the player picks which one is the same and which is opposite.

The player tells the audience who she or he is, what he or she helped create and his or her fate and how the world remembers him or her.

EXAMPLE ENDING

Cloud Swallower lost one and won one.

I am Cloud Swallower and because I speared glowing cave fish the night sky has stars and because I ate all the animals Coyote made more. Now there are enough animals roaming the lands for our people never go hungry. I'm remembered as the hero who helped Coyote when all the odds were against him. And my fate is to rise into the sky.

PLAYING THE HAND GAME

To play the hand game, hide a rock in one hand and hold your hands out to the player. The player picks one hand. If that hand holds the rock, the player wins.

The hand game helps determine who appears in each creation story. If the player loses the hand game, whichever person is playing Coyote picks another character to join the scene, but the character is actually Coyote in disguise and played by Coyote. If the player wins the hand game, the person playing Medicine Man picks another character to join the scene and the character is played by its player. When played by the Coyote, he can make a parody of the character.

Once a creation story, a person from the audience can attempt to become the Coyote or Medicine Man. He plays the hand game with the elder. If he wins then he becomes the character that he'd like. If he loses, then the elder makes him whatever he'd like, either Coyote or Medicine Man. The elder picks who gets to play the hand game if there are multiple players desiring to play.

DESIGN NOTES:

Made for 2012 Game Chef: Last Chance. This game is also a 24-hour game.

Ingredients used: Coyote, Lantern, Doctor and Mimic

Inspirations:

- Parlor Games: Amusements and Entertainments for Everyone edited by Roy Finomore
- The Storytelling Stone edited by Susan Feldmann

You can find this game on my website at www.emptygamebox.com.