



Center for Indian Community Development

Memorandum

DATE: March 14, 1996
TO: Laura Lee George
FROM: Ruth Bennett *RB*
RE: Frog, Coyote, Living Together
CC: Lois Risling

As requested in our meetings of March 7 and March 12, 1996, I am sending you a draft of an interpretation of Frog, Coyote, Living Together for your project. I appreciate your comments and suggestions.

[link with title in Hupa language, Cha'ahL XontehL-taw hiL]

Frog, Coyote, Living Together

What the Story Means

by Ruth Bennett, PhD.

The story tells about what happens to Frog when she marries Coyote. As the story unfolds, it appears anything but unhappy. Frog welcomes Coyote when he first comes to her house, and her family feeds him. Her mother even sings hay miLk'idiLdin, "love medicine," for him. For awhile things go well, and Coyote even owns a house in his wife's people's property, but eventually he strays. Frog's family will not suffer Frog to be beaten by him, and the pair separate.

Perhaps Frog, Coyote, Living Together, is one told to the k'inahLdung, the girl in training for the Flower Dance, who has just reached puberty, and is about to enter into a ceremony that will announce her arrival to womanhood. Such a time is an appropriate time for a girl to hear about Frog's unhappy marriage, because she probably will be married herself, and the story provides important lessons for those who are contemplating married life.

[link with " ch'ininyahit angkya ch'ahl ta:k'iLtsit," he found it was Frog leaching acorns, on p. 1]

Lessons that are given to the audience in Hupa stories are often not stated as morals, as they sometimes are in European fairy tales. But the lessons are similar in the sense that they provide general principles for leading a successful life, or they provide bad examples that are to be avoided. These lessons are inferred from the behavior of the characters and their consequences. Even a short Hupa story offers many lessons for life, depending upon how it is interpreted. An understanding of Hupa and Northwestern California Native American culture is essential for interpretation of many of the lessons in the stories because certain events depend upon a knowledge of what these events mean within the culture. The storyteller does not explain the meaning of these events to his listeners, because the stories are oral tradition, passed on from generation to generation, and in ancient times, the listeners were members of the younger generation who were experiencing the culture directly, and already knew something about Hupa life.

In this discussion two of the lessons will be explained, by connecting them with their source in the story as well as in Hupa culture.

[link with De:q'inikiwwina:w, she sang like this, on p. 5]

Lesson #1: Watch Out for What You Ask For: You May Get It

This lesson reaches its dramatic peak when Frog's mother sings her "love medicine" song, although it is acted out through the three characters: Frog, her mother, and Coyote. This is a lesson to women who want someone in their life. Frog is so certain

about Coyote that she has her mother sing a song for him. The consequences are that she gets him as her husband, but this results in him beating her.

We see the power of songs in Hupa culture depicted in this sequence of events. A love song is "Love Medicine," in this instance, so powerful that it results in a marriage. The power of the mother is inferred from her ability to sing such powerful medicine, and prepares the reader at the end of the story for the family's intervention in the marriage to save Frog after Coyote beats her.

Frog has to be rescued because she is in a situation she cannot handle herself.

[link with , "'isdo' dikiyang whiL-na:'isto:'n, I wish she would dance with me, p. 24]

Lesson #2: The Wise Man is One Who Sees Beyond a Woman's Physical Appearance

This lesson reaches its first emotional peak when Coyote falls in love with Frog at the Brush Dance. This is when he sees her dancing, and notices her beautiful abalone dress.

There is a clue to Frog's physical appearance in her name. She is not the ideal of feminine beauty: her eyes are very large, and even though large eyes are considered beautiful, her eyes are too large, and they bulge out. And more, she has bumps all over her.

The inference that Frog is not extremely beautiful is one that explains why Coyote may want to run away from her. Also, we are told that he is attracted to her at the Brush Dance because she looks so good in her abalone dance dress. Then beats her when he learns it is her under her beautiful abalone dress, presumably because at that point he knows that it is the dress that is so good-looking, rather than the woman. But eventually, he is driven away, so we learn that his bad treatment of a woman who has been good to him is not tolerated.

The Brush Dance is one of the scenes for the story, and understanding that this is an important ceremony in Hupa culture as well as the nature of the ceremony, are both important for understanding what happens between Frog and Coyote. The essentials that are relevant for interpretation are

- the Brush Dance is a healing ceremony, where unmarried girls and males of all ages dance a series of dances throughout the night, to bring about the healing of a sick baby attended by ^{the} her mother, a medicine woman, and her assistant
- the costumes are beautiful, made from shells, feathers, seeds sewn on deer hides
- the Brush Dance is also a social ceremony, where people can meet and get together, but governed by rules of good behavior

[link with Xon'na:we:ch'ing, the brush dance house, p. 28]

Coyote violates the second Hupa institution. Previously, he has run away from his marriage, and now he is beating someone up at a sacred dance. The lessons thus have broader significance in terms of consequences, not only for the people involved, but for the entire community. Coyote is shown to be really a scoundrel, as he has the audacity to return to the Brush Dance just after he has beaten his wife.

[link with hayaL hayde xwa:'at Le:a:tsilay, and then that wife hates him, p. 33]

The significance of Coyote's actions is brought out by the storyteller in the Hupa language, with the end of the story being so final:

At the end of the story, hayaL hayde xwa:'at Le:a:tsilay, "and then that wife hates him."

[link with "Then that's why they hate each other," p. 37]

After reading about these two lessons in the story, perhaps you can find more. Remember to think about the behavior of Frog, Coyote, and her family in deciding what the story means. Look carefully at the illustrations, as these can provide clues as well.

[link with "The End," p. 37]

If you found this story interesting, you may want to read other Hupa Frog stories:

[link with "Hupa Frog stories," text above]

Hay no:nt'ik

The End

[link with text in line above, "The End"]

Other Frog stories can be found, too, from other tribes in Northern California. Some of these are:

Frog's Love Medicine (Frog and Q'unch'iwilchwil), A Hupa Story, by Minnie Reeves, in Hupa Stories, Anecdotes, and Conversations, Victor Golla, ed., ms.

Origin of the Flower Dance by Sam Brown, in Edward Sapir's Hupa Texts, ed. Victor Golla, ms., pp. 59-65.

Coyote and Toad, by Sykes Mitchell, in Wintu Myths, Cora Du Bois and Dorothy Demetracopoulou, eds. University California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, vol. xxviii, 1925, p. 383.

Frog Story, by Georgia Orcutt in Karuk Myths and Formulas, E. W. Gifford and A. L. Kroeber, eds. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1980, p. 216.

Medicine to Get a Husband by Nettie Reuben, translated by William Bright, in He Was Dug Up, ms.

The Toad and the Mouse, by Florence Shaughnessy, in The Yurok Language: Grammar, Texts, and Lexicon, R.H. Robins, ed., University California Press, Berkeley, Ca., 1958, pp. 164-5.

Sun Man and Frog Woman, in Maidu Texts, ed. Roland Dixon, Pub-AES, vol. iv, 1912, pp. 172-181.

Young Man Who Married Frog Girls (#12), in Pliny E. Goddard, Tolowa Tales and Texts, ed. A.L. Kroeber, ms. (1958)
