

expression resembles something like a spider's web – with many little threads radiating from the centre, crisscrossing one another. As with the web, the structure emerges as it is made, and you must simply listen and trust, as the Pueblo people do, that meaning will be made. (1996, 48-49)

Patience and trust are essential for preparing to listen to stories. Listening involves more than just using the auditory sense. We must visualize the characters and their actions. We must let our emotions surface. As the Elders say, it is important to listen with “three ears: two on the sides of our head and the one that is in our heart.”

COYOTE'S EYES

Long time ago, when mountains were the size of salmon eggs, Coyote was going along, and saw that Rabbit was doing something. Now, this Rabbit was a Twati, an Indian doctor, and as Coyote watched, Rabbit sang his spirit song, and the Rabbit's eyes flew out of his head and perched on a tree branch. Rabbit called out, “Whee-num, come here,” and his eyes returned to their empty sockets.

This greatly impressed Coyote, who immediately begged Rabbit to teach him how to do this.

Rabbit said no.

Coyote begged.

Rabbit said no.

“Oh, please,” cried Coyote.

“No,” replied Rabbit.

“But it's such a wonderful trick! Teach me.”

“No.”

“But I'll do exactly as you say!”

“I will teach you,” said Rabbit, “but you must never do this more than four times in one day, or something terrible will happen to you.” And so Rabbit taught Coyote his spirit song, and soon Coyote's eyes flew up and perched on a tree.

“Whee-num! Come here!” called Coyote, and his eyes returned to him.

Now Rabbit left, and Coyote kept practicing. He sent his eyes back and forth to the tree four times. Then he thought, “I should show off this new trick to the Human People, instead of just doing it for myself.”

So Coyote went to the nearest Indian village, and yelled out for all the people to gather around him. With his new audience, Coyote sang the Rabbit's song, and the crowd was very impressed to see his eyes fly out of his head and perch on the branch of a tree.

"Whee-num!" Coyote called out. His eyes just sat on the tree and looked down at him. The Indian people started to laugh.

"Come here!" shouted Coyote. His eyes just looked at him.

"Whee-num!" Just then a crow flew by, and spotting the eyes, thought they were berries. The crow swooped down and ate them.

Now Coyote was blind, and staggered out of the village, hoping to find new eyes. He heard the sounds of running water, and felt around, trying to find the stream. Now, around flowing water, one finds bubbles, and Coyote tried to take these bubbles and use them for eyes. But bubbles soon pop, and that's what Coyote discovered.

Now Coyote felt around and discovered huckleberries, so he took those and used them for eyes. But huckleberries are so dark, everything looked black. Now Coyote was really feeling sorry for himself.

"Eenee snawai, I'm just pitiful," Coyote cried.

"Why are you so sad?" asked a small voice, for little mouse had heard him.

"My dear Cousin," said Coyote, "I've lost my eyes ... I'm blind, and I don't know what to do."

"Snawai Yunwai," replied Mouse. "You poor thing. I have two eyes, so I will share one with you." Having said this, Mouse removed one of his eyes and handed it to Coyote. Now Coyotes are much larger than mice, and when Coyote dropped Mouse's eye into his socket, it just rolled around in the big empty space. The new eye was so small it only let in a tiny amount of light. It was like looking at the world through a little hole.

Coyote walked on, still feeling sorry for himself, just barely able to get around with Mouse's eye. "Eenee snawai, I'm just pitiful," he sobbed.

"Why are you crying, Coyote?" asked Buffalo in his deep voice.

“Oh Cousin,” began Coyote, “all I have to see with is this tiny eye of Mouse. It’s so small it only lets in a little bit of light, so I can barely see.”

“Snawai Yunwai,” replied Buffalo. “You poor thing, I have two eyes, so I will share one with you.” Then Buffalo took out one of his eyes and handed it to Coyote. Now Buffaloes are much larger than Coyotes, and when Coyote tried to squeeze Buffalo’s eye into his other socket, it hung over into the rest of his face. So large was Buffalo’s eye that it let in so much light, Coyote was nearly blinded by the glare ... everything looked twice as large as it ordinarily did. And so, Coyote was forced to continue his journey, staggering about with his mismatched eyes. (Tafoya 1982, 21-22)

Terry Tafoya shares one of many meanings from this story. He says, “Coyote, in his normal state represents a bit of everything. He must not be understood by knowing only one legend, but in the context of the many legends in which he and his counterparts in other tribes appear” (1982, 22). Throughout this book other Coyote stories and other Indigenous stories and views about oral tradition are shared to build the kind of holistic context that Tafoya implies. Over the years this story has become important to my teaching and learning, as other meanings unfold in various contexts.

At the end of the story, Coyote staggers because he has only “accommodated the elements of Mouse and Buffalo into his strategies; he is not very successful because he has not learned balance. To be a whole human being (one might say a complete Coyote), one must learn to switch back and forth between the eyes of not only Mouse and Buffalo, but ... all the other animals of legend” (Tafoya 1982, 24).

The other animals have cultural symbolic meanings too, and their relationships with Coyote must be understood. Thomas King, who is of Cherokee descent, describes the positive effect of Trickster’s learning in bringing about balance: “The trickster is an important figure ... it allows us to create a particular kind of world in which the Judeo-Christian concern with good and evil and order and disorder is replaced with the more Native concern for balance and harmony” (1990, xiii). The balance and harmony discussed by Tafoya and King depend on understanding the concept of First Nations holism, sometimes symbolized by the medicine wheel (Battiste 2000; Bopp et al. 1984; Cajete 1994; Calliou

1995; Graveline 1998; Pepper and Henry 1991) and sometimes by the sacred circle of life (Sioui 1992).

Holism: Creating a Context for Orality

An Indigenous philosophical concept of holism refers to the interrelatedness between the intellectual, spiritual (metaphysical values and beliefs and the Creator), emotional, and physical (body and behaviour/action) realms to form a whole healthy person. The development of holism extends to and is mutually influenced by one's family, community, band, and nation. The image of a circle is used by many First Nations peoples to symbolize wholeness, completeness, and ultimately wellness. The never-ending circle also forms concentric circles to show both the synergistic influence of and our responsibility toward the generations of ancestors, the generations of today, and the generations yet to come. The animal/human kingdoms, the elements of nature/land, and the Spirit World are an integral part of the concentric circles (see Figure 1).⁴

Each Indigenous group has developed its own cultural content for the holistic circle symbol; however, a common goal has been to attain a mutual balance and harmony among animals, people, elements of nature, and the Spirit World. To attain this goal, ways of acquiring knowledge and codes of behaviour are essential and are embedded in cultural practices; one practice that plays a key role in the oral tradition is storytelling. Some stories remind us about being whole and healthy

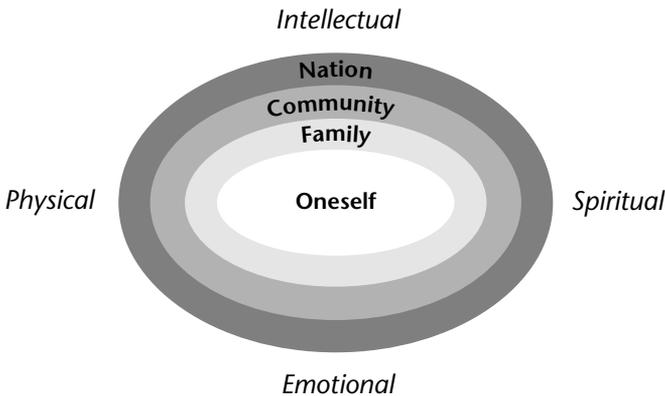


Figure 1 Holism: A context for Indigenous storywork