

## **Coyote Speaks: Wonders of the Native American World**

Ari Berk, Carolyn Dunn



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A one-of-a-kind compilation of beliefs, stories, and cultural artifacts from Native American tribes.

*Coyote Speaks* explains how to look at and appreciate Native American culture. For thousands of years, tribal ways and wisdom have been passed down in story, song, dance, and art from elder to child, from tribe to tribe, and from Native peoples to the world at large. This book gathers many of these beliefs and traditions, enabling the outsider to appreciate the vast and diverse world of the First People. Among the subjects addressed are: the meanings of certain animals and symbols, what shamans and medicine people do, and how the natural world, the animal world, and the spirit world interact. Of the more than five hundred known tribes, nearly fifty are represented, from all regions of North America.

The book is profusely illustrated with paintings, artifacts, and photographs and includes a glossary of tribes and an index.

#### From Children's Literature:

"This generously sized and exquisitely presented mix of original poetry, retold traditional stories and linking commentary is an answer from within Native America to two centuries of decontextualized appropriation of story. Of the more than 500 tribes of North America, nearly 50 find expression in this meticulously crafted collection that opens windows onto indigenous traditions while avoiding the pitfalls of essentialism. The stories are contained within chapters focused on medicine people, word magic, creation, the magic of art and artifacts, hero figures, guardians of wild places, trickster and related animal characters, and stories from tribal memories. A final chapter looks forward, addressing mythmaking in the 21st century. Within each content area, however, the lines between story and commentary are gently blurred, so that form and content both reflect societies with story at their heart. Even the introduction begins with brief text that erases distinctions between what we think of as real and imaginary, then moves through a Cherokee ballgame story and concludes with this reminder: "When we walk the lands of these stories in our imaginations, it is vital to understand that we are guests and need to tread softly." The retellings are simple, vital, fluid and direct, each in a style fitting to the story. Some like the transformation tales are short and pointed. Others like "The Daughter of Sun" span vast periods of mythic time, so we can feel the sweep of the storyteller's prose. Still others such as "Song of the World" (Pima) employ both prose and song. Here the tale moves from its launching in primordial time, through the journey of the first man, and then in a swift onetwoconclusion, arrives right into the reader's here and now: "He picked up the sun and placed it in the sky, and it is still there, just as he made it." Parchment-effect pages showcase the rendering by Berk of selected petroglyphs. The book is additionally enriched by the incorporation of a range of artwork from photographs of southwestern kachinas and bone artifacts from the Arctic, to stunning contemporary art such as Hazel Merritt's iconic painting of a satellite dish with a Navajo wedding basket design on it. As an example of how text and form are perfectly married, the facing page carries a poem titled "Beautyway" that evokes both the Dine ceremony and the troubled ecology and history of the Four Corners region. Back matter contains a list of tribes and nations mentioned in the book, a select bibliography, a note on sources, extensive illustration credits and an index. In all, Coyote Speaks is a gift offered up with a delicate and caring touch, inviting both young readers and adults to explore its pages again and again." **Reviewer: Uma Krishnaswami** 

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