

How the Prairie Chicken Got Red Eyes - Duane Hollow Horn Bear - Storytelling

Grandchildren, I want to share a story with you today about how the prairie chickens got their red eyes. You know, Iktomi isn't just a story.

Iktomi was walking along one day and he was going across the prairie. He went through the ravines, over the hills...and then he saw this body of water. As he gets closer and closer to this water he sees all of these prairie chickens along the water's edge. You could see them by the water and they are there dancing.

Iktomi's thinking to himself, "Oh how wonderful a prairie chicken would taste today."

He thinks up a plan. He takes off his robe, he lays it down on the ground, and he picks up buffalo chips...buffalo chips... many of them. He bundled them up and put them over his shoulder. And then he's walking along going close to where the prairie chickens are at and they see him. They see him and they're ready to fly away and they say,

"Wait. He doesn't see us."

But the others say, "He knows we're here. It's Iktomi."

"No, what is that he's carrying?"

"I don't know. Ask him."

"Iktomi!! Hey Iktomi!! What do you have?"

He goes on.

"Iktomi, what do you have in your bundle there?"

"Leave me. Leave me alone. I'm in a hurry. I'm in a hurry."

"Iktomi, what is it?"

"Well, if you must know, these are new songs that I have created for some people way up north, and I'm in a hurry to get them up there. So leave me be."

"Iktomi, share with us one song."

"No time, no time."

"Ikto, come on please? Just one song."

"Well if it will make you be quiet. But we have to do something. You see all the sticks and branches about? Go around and pick up all the sticks...as many as you can gather. There are a lot of you. We can do this quickly. Go. Go."

So they go and pick up all of these long sticks.

"Put them around in a circle. All around in a circle. Bend them over and we will make the roof on top too. And over here."

He picks up a stick and says, "Right here. Here, a small door."

"You know, when we go in there, and I sing my song, I don't want my songs, my voice, to go out across the prairie where someone else is going to take the song. It's a new song."

"OK."

So they do this. All the sticks are close together.

"Quickly! Go inside!" And he's looking at them.

"Oh these prairie chickens are nice and thick."

They go in, and he goes in, and he stands by the door.

"OK. I have to tell you that this is the song that I'm going to sing that you have to dance with your eyes closed. If any of you open your eyes as I am singing this song, your eyes are going to turn red. You don't want that to happen. OK. Now you promise."

"Yes, we promise."

"OK."

So Iktomi begins ...(Lakota songs)... And so the prairie chickens are dancing.

"Close your eyes tight."

And they're dancing. Their eyes are tight and they're tightly closed. He has a stick nearby. He picks up his stick.

(Lakota song with claps).

They hear a noise, and one of them starts thinking, "What is that noise?"

One of them starts to open his eyes and looks out, and Iktomi is hitting them over the head one by one. He's knocking them out, and he's knocking them out. The one opens his eyes, and he looks up, and he says,

"Fly away! Fly away! Get out! Get out! He's going to kill all of us!"

But he gets a lot of them. And the rest all get away.

Today if you see a prairie chicken and you see them up close, their eyes are going to be red.

Cooking the Prairie Chickens with Duane Hollow Horn Bear

He picked up all of these, after he shook the buffalo chips off his robe, and he was pulling them out of that makeshift hut, putting them into his robe.

"Oh look at this! Nice and plump. They will be delicious."

He puts in as many as he thinks he can carry, and he puts it over his shoulder. And he's going, but he's tired, he's tired.

"That was a lot of work. Oh there's a tree, I think I'll rest."

But he's looking at his bundle. They're all tied up with prairie chickens.

"I'm hungry. I think I will cook those prairie chickens right now."

And so, he digs a hole. He digs and digs a big hole. And he goes and gathers the firewood. And he lays those prairie chickens down on the robe side-by-side.

"Oh look at this. Nice and fat. That's going to be delicious."

He lays a row. And he puts on more firewood. And then he lays another row. He lays them and covers them with some soft dirt...covers them all up, and he builds a fire. He builds a big fire up around these. He sits back.

"This is going to take a little while. But it's going to be worth it. They're going to be delicious."

The wind starts to blow a little bit. And that tree he's under...the two branches up there are rubbing... squeaking noise...irritating.

Iktomi says, "Little brothers don't play like that. It's irritating. Don't play like that."

But they continued.

"That squeaking sound...I asked you not to do that. Don't do that. It's not nice."

But they continued to rub.

Iktomi says, "Little brothers I'm just going to have to straighten you out."

And so he reaches his arms up into the branches, and he's going to snap that one off that is making all that noise. And yet suddenly the wind stops. And the branches close in on his wrist. And he pulls. And he pulls.

He says, "Ha ha! Let me go! Let me go. Come on! I said let me go! Let me go! I have some cooking down here. I am cooking ducks, little brother. Let me go!"

But try as he could, he could not pull his arm loose.

"Let me go!" And he says, "Who's that?"

And it's a coyote. Coyote is coming. The ground is hot and the ground is steamy. And from that fire there's this wonderful smell of pheasants cooking.

"Why does your fire smell so good?"

"Don't you mind that. Just be on your way. I've got nothing here. I'm not cooking anything."

"Did you say cooking?"

"No. No no no. I don't have any prairie chickens."

"Prairie chickens, did you say prairie chickens?"

"I don't have any prairie chickens." (To the tree..."Let go of me. Let go of me.")

"Get away from there. There's nothing there."

Coyote is smart. He looks. "Ah ha! They must be underground."

And so he clears away the fire. And he starts to dig under the dirt with a stick.

"Here it is. Look at this. All the prairie chickens are just nice and tenderly cooked."

Oh coyote is having a feast, and Iktomi is caught in the tree.

“You there! Get away! Those are mine! Get away!”

But coyote is having a feast. Oh he’s having such a feast.

“Whoa. That was delicious. Well I guess that’s all of them.”

He gets set to leave. And Ikto says, “Yes go. Be on your way. I’m glad you didn’t eat all of them.”

Coyote says, “Oh there’s more?”

“No, no, there’s no more.”

Coyote says, “You’re a shrewd person, Iktomi.”

He digs a little more. And he finds the second layer.

“Oh,” he says, “I think I can handle this too.”

So he tears into it. He digs and digs and eats and eats. And he eats and he eats.

Oh Iktomi is mad. But coyote gets his fill.

“Well I better get going.”

Iktomi is mad. Coyote goes off.

(To the tree...) “You see what you caused? Now I have no pheasants.”

And then the wind picks up, and they let go. But coyote had taken the dirt in the ashes and he had covered everything up. But he had taken the legs of the prairie chickens and he stuck them down upside down into the ground. So Iktomi comes around. He wasn’t watching. He couldn’t see everything that coyote was doing. Here’s one. But all he pulled up was a leg...just a claw. And he’s just pulling up claws. “He has tricked me! He’s got them all. Whoever eats my food will surely die,” he said.

And that’s the end of that story.

Iktomi Gets Revenge with Duane Hollow Horn Bear

And so now, children, I’m going to tell you another story about Iktomi and how he gets revenge. Or he thinks he gets revenge.

Iktomi is wandering off the direction he thought coyote went thinking he was maybe carrying some prairie chickens or he might have dropped some. He was hungry. And he comes to this shady tree over. He sees something laying there, and there is coyote, just laying as plump as can be. – sound asleep – sound asleep – or so he thinks. But coyote had seen him coming and he says,

“I’m too full to run away. I can’t run away. I’ll pretend that I am dead.”

So he flops down on the ground and he just lays there and breathes very lightly – like he’s dead.

Ikto comes over, “I told you anyone who eats my food is going to die.”

And he kicks him. Coyote just lays there. He lifts his arm up, drops it, and his arm just falls down.

“Yeah he overate, and he killed himself. Well maybe I could feast on what’s inside of him.”

He built a fire quickly. He built a fire quickly and he goes to dragging coyote by the back legs. And coyote is being drug towards that fire. And he gets them close and he says,

“I don’t know if I should say a prayer for you. I don’t know what words to say for you except that anyone who eats my food will die.”

And just as he’s going to pick up coyote and throw him into the fire, coyote swivels around and he bites Iktomi. And he swivels around with a big skirmish, and he knocks Iktomi into the fire. And coyote runs off in the other direction howling and laughing away. And Iktomi is fighting and fighting to get out of that fire and he’s a terrible mess. Smudged fire on him...smudged black marks and ashes...he’s a mess. Well, that’s all he could get to eat that day.

Iktomi & the Lizard Children with Duane Hollow Horn Bear

I would like to share another story with you today children, about Iktomi who was walking along and he didn’t look very happy. He was very sad. Coyote had taken all his food. He had gotten himself all burnt. He was sad, angry...hungry. Then he heard this laughing.

“Why are people laughing? There’s nothing to be happy about.”

He sits down in his sadness.

“They should stop laughing. There’s nothing to be happy about. I lost everything. I’m sad. I’m so sad. Why are they still laughing? Maybe I will go see.”

Curiosity always gets the best of Iktomi. So he goes and near this little creek...this little river...he peeks through the bushes and there’s all of these little lizards. Lizards. They’re playing along the riverbank. They’re taking these little small rocks...they’re taking them up on the bank. One would get on one, and then slide on the rock and go down into the water.

They’re screaming and they’re laughing. They’re having a great time. And Iktomi is watching them saying,

“Oh, they get to have all the fun. Me, I’m so sad. I wish I could play like them. Oh I want to play like them. But who’s watching over them? Oh grandpa is there.”

Over under the tree in the shade grandpa is sitting back watching over all of these children. They’re all having a good time taking their little rocks up and sliding down. Screaming – splashing in the water – so Iktomi goes over to grandpa and he says,

“Grandpa, grandpa, can I play with the kids? Can I play with the children?”

“No Iktomi. This is not for you. These are not your ways. Go. Be on your way wherever you are going.”

“Grandpa, please? Grandpa, just one time, please?”

“Iktomi, I said no. This is not for you. Just go along. Go along your way.”

“Grandpa, please,” Iktomi was just about ready to cry. Well he is crying, and he is saying,

“Please! I want to have fun with the children. Please! Just one time.”

So grandfather finally says, “OK, Iktomi, just one time and on your way. I’m watching you.”

“Thank you, grandfather.”

He goes, and he runs around the kids, and he picks up a flat stone. He runs up and he says,

“Look out! Here I come!”

And sure enough he slides down and he splashes into the water. He’s laughing.

“This is fun. This is really fun. Grandpa, I’m going to do it one more time.”

“Ikto, no.”

“Grandpa, I’m going to do it one more time. Then I’ll go.”

He gets another one just a little bit bigger. And he goes up. He comes down,

“Hey!!!” Then he splashes into the water. “This is such great fun. You know what? I’m going to make this my game. Get away, this is my game now.”

And he gets a huge rock.

Grandfather says, “Iktomi! Iktomi, no!!”

“No, this is my game grandfather. This is my game now.”

He takes this huge rock. He’s huffing and puffing. He takes it up to the top of the bank there. And he gets on.

“Get away! Get away! Get away!”

And he pushes off, and here he comes. Screaming and hollering down the hill. Then he doesn’t see this little branch sticking out of the sand. And the rock hits it. And the rock stops. Iktomi falls forward and whap! The rock smashes him.

All the kids are screaming and grandfather says, “Come on kids! Come on children! Let’s go home!”

And they all scatter away. Iktomi is flat as a pancake under that rock because he didn’t listen.