

Old Man Rattlesnake and the salmon.

During my visit to the Leavenworth Fish Hatchery, there were several Native American displays. One was a story telling session, inside a large, colorful, inflated salmon. Two ladies from the Yakima Indian tribe sang songs and told a couple of stories. One was about salmon. As with many Native American stories, the main characters are animals with superpowers and human characteristics. It was an emotional story, told well by the ladies, wearing long skirts, and braided hair. It begins with the Creator giving humans the gift of salmon, along with instructions as to how to take care of them. They were never to be greedy or wasteful, only taking the amount of salmon that they needed to eat. For the first few generations, the people were obedient. However, their attitude changed and they became wasteful. Before long, there were no salmon left, and the people started to go hungry. Seeing that they had been disobedient, they were desperate to find a way to bring back the salmon to their rivers. One day, the story says, some of them found a dead salmon on the side of the river. "If we can bring it back to life, other salmon will return." They tried jumping over the fish five times, as legend said that that would revive the creature. Nothing happened. "Let's call on Old Man Rattlesnake. He is wise and has great powers." He lived away from the people, and was so old that he took a long time to walk. As he was on his way, Coyote, the shrewd and sneaky one, tried to trick the people into believing that he had great powers. He wanted to be famous. He quickly jumped over the fish, and at the fifth jump, knocked it with his stick, claiming that he had made it move. However, the people knew not to trust him. Then Old Man Rattlesnake arrived, and with great effort jumped four times. At the fifth jump, he suddenly disappeared into the fish which sprang to life. The salmon then returned to the rivers, swimming upstream. The people had learned their lesson about being greedy and wasteful. To this day, if you cut open a salmon, and look at its spine, you can see a long, white line of flesh which is the mark of Old Man Rattlesnake, and how he revived the salmon.

Related vocabulary: braids, wasteful, shrewd, sneaky.

1. Her mother braided her hair every morning. She would part the hair into three sections and fold them over expertly.
2. The Yakima Indians learned not to be wasteful with the Creator's gift of salmon.
3. She is a shrewd business woman. She thinks and plans carefully, making the most of every opportunity.
4. Watch out for him. He's like a sneaky fox. He'll know your private information without you realizing.

