How Man Got Fire
Adapted by Susan LaBella
From a Native American Tale

NARRATOR 1:
Many, many years ago, when humans were new to the world, they did not have fire.

NARRATOR 2:
During spring and summer, the days and nights were warm, and the humans were happy.

NARRATOR 3:
But when winter drew near, they became afraid. They knew wind, ice, and snow would come, and the days and nights would be very cold.

NARRATOR 4:
Animals also lived on Earth at that time. One of them was Coyote.

NARRATOR 5:
One day as Coyote passed the village, he heard humans talking.

Man 1:
Feel how the sun warms Earth and makes these stones hot to touch.

Man 2:
If only we could have a small bit of the sun in our teepees during the long, cold winter.

COYOTE:
I feel sorry for the humans. Hmmm. Maybe I can help.
NARRATOR 1:
Coyote knew of a faraway mountaintop where three Fire Beings lived. He knew the Beings were selfish with their fire because they thought having fire would make humans too powerful.

NARRATOR 2:
Nevertheless, Coyote went to the Fire Beings’ mountain. He quietly crept up to the top of the mountain.

NARRATOR 3:
As Coyote got near, the Beings jumped up and looked around. Their eyes were blood red. Their hands were like the claws of a vulture.

FIRE BEING 1:
What’s that? What did I just hear?

FIRE BEING 2:
A thief! Creeping in the bushes!

NARRATOR 4:
The third Fire Being looked closely.

FIRE BEING 3:
No…it is just a coyote.

NARRATOR 5:
So the Fire Beings sat back down and paid no more attention to Coyote. But Coyote watched the Fire Beings closely.

NARRATOR 1:
He watched them feed the fire with pine cones and dry tree branches.

COYOTE (whisper):
Look how they stamp on the small flames that fly onto the dry grass.

NARRATOR 2:
He watched them take turns guarding the fire.

COYOTE (whisper):
Look how two Beings sleep while the third stands watch.
NARRATOR 3: In the early morning, Coyote watched as the Being guarding the fire went into a teepee and called out…

FIRE BEING 1: Sister! Sister! Hurry! It’s your turn to guard the fire.

NARRATOR 4: But his sister, who was still half asleep, moved slowly to take her turn.

NARRATOR 5: So Coyote came up with a plan.

NARRATOR 1: He hurried down the mountain to tell his friends.

NARRATOR 2: He told his friends about the humans who feared the cold winter and about the selfish Fire Beings.

NARRATOR 3: And he told his friends about his plan.

COYOTE’S FRIENDS: The humans need to have fire. We will all help.

NARRATOR 4: So Coyote hurried back up the mountain.

FIRE BEING 2: What is that? Is it a thief?

FIRE BEING 3: No, it’s just an old gray coyote hunting for food.

NARRATOR 5: The Fire Beings sat around the fire…and Coyote waited. He waited through the day. He waited through the night. When morning came…

FIRE BEING 1: Sister! Sister! Get up! It’s your turn to watch the fire.
FIRE BEING 2:
I’m coming. Stop shouting!

NARRATOR 1:
But before she could get out of the teepee, Coyote jumped from the bushes, grabbed a glowing piece of fire, and ran down the mountain.

NARRATOR 1:
The Fire Beings ran after him.

FIRE BEINGS 1, 2, 3 (in unison):
Stop, thief! Stop!

NARRATOR 2:
Finally, the Fire Beings caught up to Coyote. One reached out…

FIRE BEING 3:
A-ha Coyote I’ve got you!

NARRATOR 3:
But he didn’t…not really. Instead, he just touched the tip of Coyote’s tail. The heat of his claw turned Coyote’s tail white.

EVERYONE (in unison):
And that is why today the coyote’s tail has a white tip.

NARRATOR 4:
With that, Coyote shouted and threw the fire away to his friends waiting at the bottom of the mountain.

NARRATOR 5:
Squirrel saw the falling fire first.

SQUIRREL:
Got it!

NARRATOR 1:
Squirrel put the fire on his back. He carried it through the tree tops. The fire burned his back so badly that squirrel’s tail curled up.
EVERYONE (in unison):
And that is why today the squirrel’s tail is curled up and back.

NARRATOR 2:
Squirrel threw the fire to Chipmunk. Chipmunk was so afraid she just stood there.

CHIPMUNK:
Ch-ch-chatter, ch-ch-chatter…

NARRATOR 3:
As Chipmunk turned to run, one of the Fire Beings reached out and clawed at her back.

EVERYONE (in unison):
And that is why today chipmunks have three stripes on their backs.

NARRATOR 4:
Chipmunk quickly threw the fire to frog just as one of the Beings grabbed frog’s tail.

FROG:
Dude! My tail!

NARRATOR 5:
Frog had to think fast. So he took a BIG leap, leaving his tail in the Being’s hand.

EVERYONE (in unison):
And that is why today frogs have no tails.

NARRATOR 1:
Frog tossed the fire to wood. Wood swallowed the fire.

NARRATOR 2:
The Fire Beings were stumped. They tried singing to Wood. They tried talking to Wood. But Wood would not give up the fire.

NARRATOR 3:
The Fire Beings knew they had lost their fire. They high-tailed it back to their mountaintop, never to show their gruesome faces again.
NARRATOR 4:
But wise Coyote knew how to get fire from Wood. So he showed the humans the trick of rubbing two sticks together to make flames.

EVERYONE (in unison):
And that is why today fire keeps man warm and safe throughout the cold winter.

NARRATOR 5:
But whatever happened to the selfish Fire Beings? Someone said they were last seen trying to find a way to roast marshmallows....