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How the Red Bird Got His Color

A Cherokee Oral Narrative

Retold by Barbara Shining Woman Warren



About The Storyteller



My name is Barbara Warren. I am Cherokee, and I live in Northern California. My home is in the beautiful foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

For many years I was a Kindergarten teacher. Although I am now retired, I serve as a Trustee on the local elementary school board, and as an Elder at our local American Indian Education Program. As a member of the Cherokees of Northern Central Valley, I keep close ties with my Cherokee community.

I love to sing! I sing with Otsigeya, "We Women", Cherokee Hand Drum Singers. Many of our songs are in the Cherokee language.

Also, I love to tell Cherokee stories...especially to children!

When all of his feathers were *gi-ga-ge, tsi-s-qua* flew off to show his family and friends how beautiful he was. That is why, from that day to this you can see *to-tsu-wa* flying around the woods in Cherokee country.



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Cherokee Vocabulary

- wa-ya wolf
- gv-li raccoon
- tsi-s-qua bird
- u-wo-di-ge brown
- gi-ga-ge red
- to-tsu-wa red bird

Away they ran through the woods to the rock that oozed red paint.

When they came to the rock, **wa-ya** reached up and plucked a twig from a tree branch. He chewed the end of the twig until it was soft and pliable like the end of a paint brush.

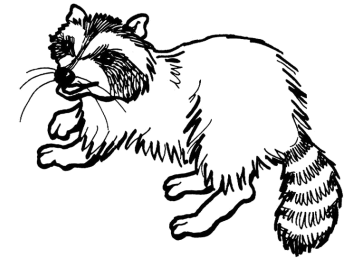
Then he dipped the end of the twig into the red paint and began to paint the feathers of **u-wo-di-te tsi-s-qua**.



Wa-ya said, "***U-wo-di-ge tsi-s-qua***, if you can help me to see again, I will take you to a magic rock that oozes red paint. We will paint your feathers ***gi-ga-ge***."

U-wo-di-ge tsi-s-qu began pecking away at the dried mud on the eyes of ***wa-ya***. Soon *wa-ya* could open his eyes again. True to his promise ***wa-ya*** said,

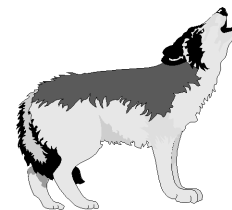
"Thank you, my brother, now jump up onto my shoulder."



Gv-li loved to tease ***wa-ya***. One day ***gy-li*** teased ***wa-ya*** so much that ***wa-ya*** became very angry.

Wa-ya began to chase ***gv-li*** through the woods. ***Gv-li***, being the clever animal that he is, kept ahead of ***wa-ya***.

Gv-li came to a river. Instead of jumping in the river, he quickly climbed a tall tree and peered over a branch to see what ***wa-ya*** would do next.



When **wa-ya** came to the river, he saw the reflection of **gv-li** in the water. Thinking that it was **gv-li**, **wa-ya** jumped in and tried to catch him.

Wa-ya continued to search for **gv-li** for such a long time that he became so tired he nearly drowned. Finally, tired and exhausted, **wa-ya** climbed up the river bank and fell fast asleep.

After a while, **gv-li** quietly climbed down the tree and slipped over to the sleeping **wa-ya**.

While **wa-ya** slept, **gv-li** began to plaster the eyes of **wa-ya** with mud.

Then when he had finished, **gv-li** ran off through the woods laughing to himself thinking of the clever trick he had played.

Later, **wa-ya** woke up. He began to whine, "Oh, someone please help me. I can't see. I can't open my eyes." But no one came to help him.

At long last, **u-wo-di-ge tsi-s qua** heard the cries of **wa-ya**. He flew over to **wa-ya** and landed on his shoulder.

He said,

"What's the matter Brother Wolf? Can I help you?"



Wa-ya cried,

"I can't open my eyes. Oh, please help me to see again."

U-wo-di-ge tsi-s-qua said, "I'm just a little brown bird but I will help you if I can."