

# WHY THE BEAR HAS A SHORT TAIL

From *The Book of Nature Myths*

By Florence Holbrook

One cold winter morning when the fox was coming up the road with some fish, he met the bear.

"Good-morning, Mr. Fox," said the bear.

"Good-morning, Mr. Bear," said the fox. "The morning is better and brighter because I have met you."

"Those are very good fish, Mr. Fox," said the bear. "I have not eaten such fish for many, many days. Where do you find them?"

"I have been fishing, Mr. Bear," answered the fox with a grin.

"If I could catch fish like those, I would love to go fishing, I would do it all the time, but I do not know how to fish," said the bear sadly.

"Why, Mr. Bear, It would be so very easy for you to learn," said the fox. "You are so big and strong and smart that you can do anything."

"Will you teach me, Mr. Fox?" asked the bear brightly.

"Well," the fox paused and then said in a whisper, "Mr. Bear, I would not teach just anybody how to catch fish...it is my secret, you see. If everyone knew how to do it, then there would be no fish left for me."

The bear's smile faded away. "Oh, please, Mr. Fox!"

"Well," the fox continued with another grin, "You are such a good friend that I will teach you. Only you must promise not to tell the others. Come to the pond, and I will show you how to fish through the ice."

So the fox and the bear went to the frozen pond. First, the fox showed the bear how to make a hole in the ice.

"That was easy for you," said the fox, "but many an animal could not have made a hole as large and round as you, Mr. Bear. Now comes the real secret. You must put your tail down into the water and keep it there. That is not easy, and not every animal could do it, for the water is very, very cold. But you are a smart animal, Mr. Bear, and so I know you will be able to do it. Now you know that the secret of catching fish is to keep your tail in the water for long time. Then when you pull it up, you will pull with it as many fish as I have."

The bear put his tail down into the icy blue water, and the fox went away **chuckling**.

**Chuckling** means  
to laugh quietly.

The bear shivered and waited.

All day the bear waited. The sun rose high in the sky, and still the bear sat with his tail through the hole in the ice. Sunset came, but still the bear sat with his tail through the hole in the ice, for he thought, "When an animal is really as smart as me, he will not be afraid of a little cold."

It began to get dark. At last, when he was sure that he had



waited long enough, the bear said, "Now I will pull the fish out of the water. How good they will be!"

He pulled and pulled, but not a fish came out. Worse than that, not all of his tail came out! The end of the bear's long tail was frozen solid to the ice beneath the water. The bear howled in pain so loudly that animals across the forest

turned and looked at each other in surprise. “What could that be?” they asked.

The bear slowly got up from his seat by the ice, rubbing his backside in pain. He went down the road towards his den, growling angrily, "I wish I could find that fox.”

But the **cunning** fox was curled up in his warm nest, his belly full of a delicious fish dinner. And whenever the fox thought of the bear he laughed.

<p><b>Cunning</b> means to be smart and tricky.</p>
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