A great deal of folklore research has gone into the concept of diffusion of tales. The folklorist Stith Thompson researched European tale types in Native American folktales in the first half of the twentieth-century. Although most Native American folktales, including those Humashima told, are unique to this continent, the four hundred years of contact between Europeans and the indigenous people of North America inevitably resulted in cross-cultural influences.

For the full introduction to this story and for other stories, see *The Allyn & Bacon Anthology of Traditional Literature* edited by Judith V. Lechner. Allyn & Bacon/Longman, 2003.


No one could run faster than Rabbit. He had won many races and prizes. He had won Frog’s tail from Frog and Bear’s tail from Bear. Rabbit’s own tail was very long.

One sun, Turtle, who had no tail at all, went to Rabbit and said: “Spepa-leena, my friend, I would like to race with you. I think I can beat you. I would like to win those tails, yours and the others.”

Rabbit laughed, for Ar-sikh’ was such a slow traveler. Rabbit made fun of him before the people. But Turtle insisted, and Rabbit finally agreed to race with him. “Beating you will be easy,” said Rabbit. “When do you want to race?”

“Let us race tomorrow while the morning is young,” said Turtle.

The people all gathered the next morning early to watch the strange race between Rabbit, the swift-jumper, and Turtle the slow-walker. They started, and Rabbit quickly left Turtle far behind.

“No use for me to run all the way now,” Rabbit remarked to himself. “I will sit down awhile and wait for that silly Ar-sikh’. That will make him feel foolish.” So Rabbit stopped to rest. He went to sleep. When he awoke, he was surprised to see Turtle moving slowly along some distance ahead.

“I must have slept long,” said Rabbit, and he hopped swiftly after the slow-walker. He passed Turtle and kept on going until, when he looked back, he could not see the other. Then he sat down to wait, and again he fell asleep. While Rabbit slept, Turtle crawled by, and when Rabbit opened his eyes there was Turtle far ahead. But that did not worry Rabbit. He easily overtook the slow one.

That is the way they raced, Rabbit running and resting and going to sleep, and Turtle plodding, plodding without a stop. The race trail was long. It went to a half-way stake and returned to the point of starting. On the home stretch, Rabbit decided to take one last rest. He intended to stay awake, but in spite of himself, he fell asleep. When he finally awoke he could not see Turtle anywhere.

“He ought to be in sight by now,” said Rabbit. “Perhaps he has given up.” Then Rabbit...
rubbed his eyes and looked again. Away off, near the finish-line, he saw a speck. It was Turtle. Rabbit was startled. He jumped up and ran. He ran faster than he’d ever run before but he had slept too long. Turtle crawled over the finish-line first. Rabbit was a few leaps behind. The people laughed and laughed at Rabbit, and he was very much ashamed.

Cutting off his own tail so that there was only a little stump left, Rabbit gave it to Turtle. He also gave Turtle the other two tails. Turtle first tied on Bear’s tail. It was too long and bushy. He threw it aside and tied on Rabbit’s own tail. That did not suit him either, as the fur was thick and fine—the water and mud would make it too heavy. Then Turtle put on Frog’s tail.

“That is the tail I need,” said Turtle. “Frog’s tail matches my color, it hasn’t any fur or hair on it, and it is just the right size.”

All turtles have tails like that today, while rabbits have scarcely any tail at all.