



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2024 Volume I: Myth, Legend, Fairy Tale

Legends, Myths, Folktales - History's Voices and Stories of a People

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by Felicia Smith Fountain

Stories, folktales, myths, legends and even epic poems such as Beowulf have a purpose beyond entertainment. Beowulf, often tackled by college students and some high school students, revealed the important value put on strength for the Anglo Saxons. When oral stories in their various forms are passed down it may benefit the people that the legend or folktale is told about. It is important to find the artifacts about people and regions—unearthing the artifacts left within oral stories passed down. The work cannot stop there. Oral stories, folktales, myths and legends that have been adjusted, embellished or even twisted are of importance. Ancient beginnings and the exploration of cultural landscapes can be found when doing an “archaeological dig” through century old folktales, legends and myths.

When an oral story or folktale is adapted and told by another set of people about that same people how does that happen? Who decides that there will be another adaption of a people’s or region’s oral stories? This unit will help us look at stories from regions, but also who told those stories. Through this unit students will gain more insight into history embedded in oral traditions and folktales as well as influences that changed those oral stories. The impact and results of the variations in folktales, legends and oral stories, etc., will also be researched and analyzed by students who will then make connections to any variety of changes that occurred in the people of that region or country.

A driving theme is that Social Studies is more than just the geographic layout of landforms, tectonic plates, bodies of water and the people who lived there. It involves the study of land, people, culture, events as well as the changing of hands of economic, social and political power.

A unit that approaches Social Studies through the lenses of stories, fairy tales, legends and myths is a creative and authentic way to deepen the Social Studies curriculum for New Haven Public

Schools students. While this unit will be social studies-focused, it has a strong English Language

Arts focus as well and would be successful as an integrated or interdisciplinary unit. There are a few ways to look at a unit involving myths, stories, legends and fairy tales. Fairy tales, myths and creation stories are an effective way to introduce the study of a society or set of people.

Students will read folktales of the people from countries in Africa, Europe, South America, China research narratives. Learning the major characteristics of folktales, legends and myths will be a part of the unit as well.

Although the focus of the unit is to learn about countries, regions and people based on oral traditions. Students researching and documenting their own family stories based on interviewing family members is one of the unit's major project. Those stories will be written and illustrated by students. Additionally, scholars will have the choice to have their stories printed, bound and published in a collection or uploaded to a digital portfolio created by students.

(Developed for Social Studies, World History, and History, grades 7-8; recommended for American History, World History, Greek and Roman Mythology, and Humanities, grades 8-12)

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