



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1984 Volume IV: The Oral Tradition

Folklore in the Oral Tradition; Fairytales, Fables and Folk-legend

Guide for Curriculum Unit 84.04.01
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My intention is to give students an overview of works from various cultures considered to be in the oral tradition, with a special focus on American oral tradition. We will seek out themes and symbols recurring throughout the network and explore various interpretations. Commonalty and divergence of theme and symbol will be discussed. The various motivations for story telling warrant class discussion or investigation. Much emphasis would be on basic skills like recalling sequence of events, separating main ideas from details, recognizing fact from opinion, summarizing, outlining and note-taking. There is also a lot of substance in the tales and legends which allows for making comparisons and contrasts, tracing patterns and motifs, translating imagery, relating to a larger frame of reference, making inferences, recognizing cause and effect relationships, determining significance and last but not least expressing individual interpretation. I have not recited this litany of skills with the presumption that I can touch on each and every one here, but rather to suggest the potential source of wealth for skill development in folklore.

The approach could be multimodal, using literature, recordings, drawing and acting. Students could also fashion tales of their own, purely as an exercise. The tales which the students concoct would be based upon a folk model, but could not be considered the same as the model itself, as this small study of folklore will reveal.

I have tried to present a unit of folklore in the oral tradition which will use a sampler of fairytales or "marchen," fables, and folk-legend. Grimm's and Andersen's tales would probably be most suited and most useful if presented to students in part. "Aesop's Fables" have the same type of flexibility. The stories, songs and poems of folk-heroes can also be selected from anthologies. Chesnutt's "Conjure Woman" and Hurston's "Mules and Men" are highly manageable texts to use in entirety, but if necessary, the nature of the stories while best as a connected series, allows the high school teacher, under pressure of time, to use selections from each.

(Recommended for English One and Two classes, grades six through ten)

Key Words

Fables Folklore Oral Tradition Fairy Tales Literature

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