



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

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## **A Dash of Folk, A Pinch of Fairy: Recipes for Playmaking**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 84.04.06  
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This unit, “Recipes for Playmaking,” attempts to explore the “oral tradition” as it exists in folk tales and to connect theater and folk literature together through the use of creative dramatics. The theories of Bruno Bettelheim in “The Uses of Enchantment” are discussed. Folk tales are very vital and can bring many things to students: a sense of a shared past and experiences, entertainment and the raw material for drama. Through the dramatization of folk tales students can learn not only the rudiments of theater but to express their own inner selves. Folk tales can be the catalyst for introspection asking a child to see what in himself is like the character in the story.

Though folk tales appear to be simple with uncomplicated, stereotyped characters and predictable situations, that simplicity is deceptive. Folk tales possess the wisdom of the ages. These stories were created long ago by people who used the tales to educate their children while entertaining them. Bruno Bettelheim brought the power of folk tales back into the lime-light with his writings.

Folk tales speak to children in a magical way sharing with them the soothing message, that we are all alike, we all have problems and these problems can be solved when we look inside ourselves for the answers. Acting takes this process one step further.

Drama is an art form that requires a person to use his inner feelings and past experiences to create art. Bringing folk tales and drama together makes for an exciting curriculum that can be used by any Language Arts or English teacher. Children will not only work on improving their speaking and listening skills but they will crawl inside the literature, coming out with a better understanding of all the elements of literature: plot, character, style, etc.

The most important element of this unit I feel is its sense of play. Students will enjoy the learning process, playing the enclosed games and participating in a wide variety of activities while studying the folk tale. I think teachers will enjoy this unit too and I encourage all to give it a glance and to adapt it to their special needs. There is magic in both the theater and folk tales and this magic makes for a powerful educational experience.

(Recommended for Theater classes, grades 5 and 6; Language Arts classes, grades 5 through 8; and English classes, grades 9 through 12)

### **Key Words**

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