



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

We Want Our Rites! Folk and Fairy Tales as Initiation

Guide for Curriculum Unit 84.04.07
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This unit has been developed around the idea that oral traditions, in the form of folk and fairy tales, have been passed from generation to generation not only for the sake of the story, but, more importantly, because they contain, in a symbolic form, ancient patterns of human behavior which can be adapted and used by individuals going through “difficult” life situations. Many of the patterns of human behavior found in folk and fairy tales resemble ancient initiation rituals. These rituals were used to pass adolescents quickly from childhood to adulthood. They actually worked to create a new identity.

In this unit students will be entertained with stories told to them by the teacher; be informed of another level of meaning in the stories; led through a dramatization of the material and finally provided with questions to reflect on the relevance of the stories and the new interpretation to their own lives. Students will write and tell or dramatize their own tale with themselves as the hero(ine). Through storytelling, story dramatization and initiation rituals it is hoped students will improve language arts skills, increase understanding of dramatic processes and become aware of folk and fairy tales as transmitters of information valuable for understanding themselves and others. A Certificate of Initiation (developed for this unit by the author and beautifully elaborated and calligraphed by Pamela LaRegina of Supercalligraphy in Branford) is included for copying (copyright permission granted for instructional use only by P. LaRegina) and used to culminate the unit.

(Recommended for English classes, grades 6 through 9)

Key Words

Fables Literature Oral Tradition Folklore Fairy Tales Sociology Initiation Rituals

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