



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1993 Volume II: Folktales

Folktales—The Mirror of Humanity

Guide for Curriculum Unit 93.02.02
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One of the most stimulating and enjoyable ways of exploring ourselves and people of differing backgrounds is through folktales. Nowhere else can we find the insight and understanding that tales invariably provide for us. The title of this unit suggests that folktales are a mirror. When we look inside of this mirror we see ourselves; who we are, who we have been. The recurring themes and motifs that are in stories passed along through the oral tradition are not there coincidentally. They are there because they are among the primary concerns and preoccupations we have as human beings. As a teacher and storyteller, I have found in folktales, a clearer sense of my self worth and an understanding of others. I have seen my personal hopes and fears mirrored in stories from many cultures. I appreciate more the common ground upon which we all stand as human beings.

My goal is to provide for teachers and students a similar path of discovery. This unit gives order to that process. The first section discusses and defines the function of folktales, emphasizing how they reflect the collective nature of our human psyche and consciousness. Next, I give strategies for preparing and acclimating your class to storytelling and folktales. I have included ideas of how you, as a teacher and beginning storyteller, might approach storytelling yourself. The unit schedule suggests a time table you may want to follow as you explore the folktales in the next section. Here, I discuss the function of tales within the West African, Haitian, and African American traditions. From each of these cultures I have selected at least two stories to explore in detail.

Throughout the unit you will find an array of activities and exercises that relate to the stories and goals presented. It is my hope that, upon completing this unit, both teacher and student will have rediscovered the value of the oral tradition and that all will have had ample opportunity to participate by collecting and telling their own folktales!

(Recommended for Drama/Theater, Language Arts, Social Studies, and English; Grades 4-8)

Key Words

Drama Folktales Literature Oral Tradition

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