



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

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## Heroes and Heroines in the Family

Guide for Curriculum Unit 93.02.03  
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This unit includes a study of fairy tales and folktales from the American Indians, Europeans, Puerto Ricans, Afro Americans and other Americans. The goal of this unit is to make students acutely aware of themes common in all these tales, and to help them see that these universal themes are praising the talents and strengths of common people who overcome the bad and evil in their lives. In studying these tales and thinking of how these characters became heroes and heroines, I hope my students will come to realize that they, too, have the potential to be heroes and heroines.

The unit starts with a reading of Indian folktales and then proceeds to look at European fairy tales, Puerto Rican tales, Afro-American tales, and concludes with a study of American folktales. I've chosen these groupings and the order for specific reasons. I believe that starting with Indian folktales will bring cohesiveness to the class because we do not have any American Indian students and no prejudices against them appear to exist. Therefore, I anticipate high interest from the students. Looking at European fairy tales next should sustain if not increase their enthusiasm for the unit because all students should be familiar with them. Then the unit looks at Puerto Rican and Afro-American tales. These will have special appeal to my students who are of these ethnic origins, I hope, because I want the students to realize that all of them have the potential to be heroes and heroines. Race, nationality, etc. have nothing to do with it. I want them all to realize that through self reliance, ingenuity, and courage they can make a good life for themselves.

Finally, the unit concludes with a study of American folktales. These tales also show how the common man, people like themselves, became heroes and heroines.

There are many activities required of students. These include telling a tale, dramatizing a tale, identifying words, writing an essay, and writing a fairy tale. But the primary goal of this unit cannot be captured in a lesson plan or student assignment. It doesn't have improving English skills as its focal point. The primary goal is improving students' belief in themselves. The primary goal is to awaken in the students an awareness of their individual importance and their power to make good lives for themselves.

(Recommended for English or Reading, Grades 7-8)

### **Key Words**

*Fairy Tales Literature Writing Instruction Reading Ethnicity Puerto Rican Afro-American*

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