



African-American Folktales and Their Use in an Integrated Curriculum

Guide for Curriculum Unit 93.02.08
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In this unit I will research to find African-American folktales which may be used to address the interest and reading levels of students in the elementary grades. These folktales will be used in conjunction with their reading series "Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Treasury of Literature." These folktales will be used in all curriculum areas of study. The areas of study to which these folktales will apply are reading, listening, speaking, vocabulary, writing, art, math, social studies, science and music. It is my intention to develop students' listening, reading, speaking and writing skills through the use of African-American folktales across the curriculum. I will show the format for which folktales can be used as supplemental reading materials for the classroom teacher. It is my hope that students will become better listeners, better readers, better writers and better storytellers of folktales.

Students should be read folktales and told of their origins and storytelling before they attempt to read or write folktales which I will also address in this unit. Reading folktales to students will allow discussion of the main idea, characters, plot, setting, and language of folktales. This will give students time to develop mentally what folktales entail. They should also be given the opportunity to act out folktales read to them.

The suggested way to teach folktales is by building background (origin), vocabulary strategies (key words/spelling), language (proper nouns), reading of a folktale by the teacher (discussion), story follow-up (discussion after reading), summarizing the literature (reviewing the tale read), appreciating literature (writing in journal), critical thinking activities (discussion purpose question), learning through literature (comprehension skills taught) and poetry elements (techniques). Teacher choices (integrated curriculum projects) and multicultural perspectives will deal with other folktales and their origins.

Storytelling is something students love to do because they are constantly telling the teacher or classmates jokes or funny stories about themselves. In hearing folktales told to them you find them really listening intently. When we have social skills lessons, students will tell something positive about themselves which makes them storytellers.

Storytelling among African-Americans is in the midst of a sweeping renaissance. These stories or tales were brought to America by African captives, the art form remained dormant among escendants of the original captives except in the family and church meetings. Now, through the work of several African-American writers and pioneers, the art is being resurrected.

African-American folktales that appeal to students are animal tales. The characters in most of these such as Ananse the Spider, Tortoise, Elephant, Monkey, and Hare. There are more than two hundred stories dealing with the Tortoise in Nigeria alone. These animal tales traveled from Africa to the New World in the oral tradition that the slaves carried with them on the middle passage, the route across the Atlantic from West Africa to the West Indies and America. Ananse became established as the principal figure in the folk lore of the Caribbean, but he is largely unknown in the United States. Here it is the Hare, otherwise known as Brer Rabbit, both regions, making mischief in Caribbean folk lore as well as in the Signifying Monkey stories of the black oral tradition of the United States.

(Recommended for Social Studies, Reading or History, Grades 2-4)

Key Words

Afro-American Folktales Literature Africa

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