



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
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Multiculturalism Through African Folk Tales And Mayan Myths

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by Rebecca Brown

The great myths can teach us many things for in them we find history and geography and astronomy and word origins. But most of all, we find the struggles of human beings including all the passions and frailties that are to be found in humans today. We are connected to these ancient civilizations in Greece and Rome by some words in our language, to be sure, but we are even more directly connected to them by these myths, for it is in these tales that we see ourselves.

We struggle just as the ancients did to know where we fit on this planet and how we should conduct our lives, and we wonder on occasion just as any culture does, whether our lives and actions are all part of some grand plan. When earlier civilizations struggled (to understand the mysteries of life) they wrote stories to help them see their world and their place in the world more clearly. The Greeks had a word for it all right; to them the word for story was *mythos*.

The great myths are valuable in their own right, not just because they provide the mental “hooks” or schemata, but also because they enable us to gather and understand new material. These myths have survived through the centuries because they have had something important to say, and because people of widely disparate ages and cultures have found in these tales lessons and inspiration for their own lives. This enables us to appreciate people of all cultures.

Children will find that these stories require a more active use of their imagination than they are accustomed to providing, but although their creative power may have been dulled by monster cartoons and by basal readers that feature such exciting tales as “Dick and Jane Go Shopping,” these powers can be resuscitated by having to form a mental picture of someone extracting the teeth from a dragon, for example, or of the way the world would look to someone riding on the back of a flying horse.

This unit will study two cultures through myths and legends. Through the process of this unit students will achieve an understanding of the Mayan culture and, due to the vast range of cultures across the African continent, various cultures from several African regions. This understanding will be reached via classroom activities and writing assignments. This unit is designed for a seventh-eighth grade language arts curriculum with interdisciplinary learning throughout other subjects areas including social studies, math, science as well as art.

I chose to develop a unit focusing on African and Mayan cultures because of the cultural background of my students at Fair Haven Middle School. The student body is comprised of Afro-American and Hispanic

nationalities. This study of two cultures would be most meaningful because of their heritage. Students will study and research in depth the culture, laws and religion of African and Mayan folk tales and myths. Their thinking skills will be challenged and increased through the content and lessons of this fifteen day unit. Even the most reluctant readers and writers will be motivated.

This unit upon successful completion will enable students to recognize, define, create and understand characteristics and elements of folk tales and myths. They will be able to inform, describe, entertain and define Mayan and African myths. This unit will show and give the students an awareness of different groups and cultures by reading their folk tales and myths. As a culmination of this unit, the students will write their own myths and folk tales. Toward the end of the three week period, the students will make a comparison and analysis of the things they have learned about myths. This will include their own observations and personal connections after they explore myths of ancient cultures from different parts of the world and further their appreciation of these cultures.

Students will be able to define and recognize the style and tone of the Mayan myths. This will increase their knowledge and add to their enthusiasm of multicultural literature. Every curriculum should motivate learning as well as foster enjoyment. Our heritage is created upon myths. This is the foundation for all cultures. Important to this unit is that the student understands the meaning of each folk tale or myth and is able to interpret it through the characters presented in the stories.

Life's experiences are universal and folk tales and myths are fun. My students loved mythology stories. Wouldn't we all love the powers of Zeus or the strength of Hercules? The writing part of the unit will explore their varied talents and creativity. They will collaborate together. What god would you be? What kind of powers do you want to have and why? The students' imaginations will be stimulated in a positive manner.

I have found in my teaching experience that students will perform if there can be some humor. These myths and folk tales provide this element. The later part of this unit will be individual or paired presentations. There is a lot of wisdom in the humor that is part of the telling of myths and folk tales. This is especially true because many of the truths about nature in animals and humankind are unique and characteristically different. There are habits and ways that are inherent to the natural reality of creation. Because of this, learning is achieved through a development of the students' sense of respect for others and acceptance of the difference of peoples around the world.

At this age level, respect is a quality that needs to be nurtured. Understanding and learning about how other people live in response to their environment will hopefully help them increase their respect for others. When they will finally create their own myths and folk tales they will gain a new sense of confidence. They will surely enjoy listening to the stories and making their own. With some confidence and fun, they will not be reluctant to be in front of the class.

Mayan and African tales show the cultures in the past and in the present in how people live and relate with each other. A goal of the unit is to foster respect for people of all cultures. Their stories "come to life." My students enjoyed mythology so much that some of the books are worn because they have been read so often. They have been read so many times. Students often ask where other people in these cultures get their philosophy for life. They ask questions like did this really happen or who made the laws? How do we explain the mysteries in life? How did people in other cultures make sense of the realities of life and death? These questions are universal for all cultures.

A variety of exercises and materials will be used in this unit. Speakers from each culture will spend a class

period with us. They will bring in some form of media and props for the students to see and touch.

We will then begin our journey into Mayan and African folk tales and myths and further our exploration of multiculturalism.

AFRICAN MYTHS, LEGENDS AND FOLK TALES

The study of African myths will serve to illustrate the colorful heritage of a unique continent while providing the students with an enhanced view of its culture. The study of the myths and legends is intended to highlight the way in which the people share a close bond with the elements of nature. The continent is teeming with an abundance of animal life and vegetation. Nature stands as the foundation upon which the people of Africa build their villages, towns and communities. Elements of nature can be found in the countries' indigenous religions where God, man and nature are fused; nature is vital to survival as it is from nature that the individuals take their foods and water supplies; animals serve as means of transportation, laborers and food. The African people maintain a high reverence for all things natural. As part of the desire to give praise and thanks to the natural elements, the people of Africa immortalize nature through myths and legends. Each myth is designed to entertain the listeners while providing them with a history lesson of sorts as well as moral instruction.

After the students are exposed to these various stories they will be more familiar with African terminology and some of the history of Africa. We know that primitive man was born in Africa millions of years ago but we do not really know anything about the way in which the earliest people thought. We can only guess from the growth of languages in historical times and from some religions. The myths of Africa passed down from long, long ago gave us an ancient view of reality. ¹

Knowing religion and laws through myths and oral tradition is an integral part of the learning that can be derived from this unit. Most peoples in tropical and southern Africa accept the idea of a "high God," or rather, a sky god who is often associated with thunder or lightening. The earth, the sun and the moon, are the most prominent gods; the sea gods are worshipped among the western tribes. These are the good gods, although the sun sometimes has a double: it causes life but also drought and so death. Earth is always a female deity who favors those who worship her but metes out inexorable punishment to the disobedient and neglectful. The forest is a mysterious deity, elusive and whimsical. The forest contains almost everything its inhabitants need: fruit, game, wood for burning as well as making tools and furniture, bark for clothes, leaves for vegetables, lianas for the rope and for snares, roots and juices for medicine and strong drink. ²

The study of the African myths will aid the students in understanding why the myths employ a lot of magic animals. People from every country have wondered about the origins of animals, and in Africa which has such an immense variety of wildlife, there are many stories that explain different characteristics and origins. An example of this is Tanzania, where the giraffe is the national emblem, a story is told that after god had exalted all the animals, he asked each one if they had a special wish. The giraffe said, "Lord, my wish is to have wisdom." "Well spoken," God answered, "and so you will never speak, for talkative people are fools, but silence is wisdom." ³ That is why the giraffe sees and hears everything, but never makes a noise.

Many African people believed that everything in nature had a spirit. Some spirits were strong and powerful like the strong-willed mind of a great chief or a killer lion. Some were weaker, more diffused, like the spirits of the

trees. The basic idea behind this is power. Students will learn to identify the animals or trees that are considered powerful and compare it to the Mayan myths or other classic myths that they have studied previously. These myths often reoccur.

Students readings will be part of a discussion of their reactions in terms of the relevance of this study in their lives. For example, with African myths we know that many aspects of nature we meet have certain powers. A lion, a snake, lightening and a river can kill people, so they must have very strong spirits. In English too, we use the word “spirit” in the sense of “energy” and we know today that trees, animals, lightening and rivers do have certain amounts of energy which scientists see as mechanical force—but which many people see as religious. ⁴

Learning from stories with moral lessons is important in this study for two reasons. First of all there are lessons inherent in nature told in legends that are true and cannot be argued, and second of all, the giving of advice through stories is the most potent form of convincing at any time in history. Fables are stories with a moral lesson at the end. They are a way of saying things in an indirect manner—through them problems can be talked about without directly offending anyone and advice given in an amusing and memorable way. In present day Africa, this function of the fable is still very much alive, and there are thousands of them.

Africa had great kingdoms, warriors and empires such as those of Benin, the Yoruba, and the Ashanti and the mysterious civilizations of ancient Zimbabwe, Askum and Meroe; but most communities were composed of a chief, his wives and their children. Gradually, retainers would cluster around the compound of the chief. There would be the farmlands and the builders. ⁵

History is learned in an indirect way too through stories from the people who have lived in a particular culture. Students who are beginning an understanding of the events that happened in Africa through their myths will connect to the realities of the continent’s history. Students can reflect, through any country’s stories, how one learns the history of that culture.

MAYAN MYTHS, LEGENDS AND FOLK TALES

“The world that he, or she, creates is a world of fantasy. Yet it exists everywhere, within and beyond the territory of the Maya. This is a world unreal as it may be, that makes it possible to find what is true for each of us.” ⁶ It is common to think of the Maya as people who built what many believe to have been the most brilliant civilization in the western hemisphere. During their classic period, which lasted from AD 200 to 800, the Maya perfected the art of paintings, sculpture and architecture and developed a system of writing. Palaces and pyramids at such sites as Tikal in Guatemala and the Uxmal in Yucatan bear witness to a culture of great competence and refinement.

Like the nations of Western Europe, the Maya speak not one language but a group of related languages. According to a well known theory, the two million Maya speakers of today all descended from a tribe that lived in the mountains of Western Guatemala some four thousand years ago. Over the centuries small groups of people broke away and gradually developed their own way of speaking. ⁷

Although Maya stories were not collected before 1900, there exists a remarkable sixteenth century document in which the stories are woven together in a lengthy origin legend, like a novel. This is the well known *Popol*

Vuh (The Council Book). Written in the language of the Quiche Maya, *Popol Vuh* was discovered in the Guatemala highlands about 1700 and became a subject of serious scholarship beginning in the late 1800's. Today it can be compared with modern folk tales to show that recently collected stories hark back at least four hundred years ago.

Stories, in the sense that the term here is understood, create a world that could be hardly put together out of actual experience, even though the narrator may insist the story is true, as folk narrators often do. Most Maya storytellers make a distinction between myths and other kinds of stories. Myths take place in an ancient time before the world was as it is today.

Myths explain such things as how the moon came to be and how the woodpecker got its red crest. As defined by a Cakchiquel storyteller, a tale of this kind is called an *ejemplo*, a tale that explains things.⁸ The term is used in Yucatan, but with a broader meaning. The Yucatec *ejemplo* may be an origin myth, a story about Christ, or any tale with a moral. An ordinary folk tale or fairy tale, on the other hand, is called a *cuento*.⁹

After studying the Mayan folk tales and myths, the students will have material to look into the Mayan culture and its magnificent civilization. It is hoped then that students can understand the way of life of the Mayan through some of the stories they hear in the classroom. An example of this is the Maya practice of what is sometimes called "slash and burn agriculture." Before a field can be cultivated, trees and brush must be cleared away, then burned to ashes. This goes on for years and it can be considered grueling work. But making it into a religious duty helps the men to endure it easily. Special prayers are recited for each stage of the job, ceremonies are held, sacrificial offerings of food are brought to the field and the corn itself is addressed with such mystical names as "divine grace" or "Our Lord's sunbeams."¹⁰ It is important for the students to realize that the myths and legends and folk tales arise from a need to survive and understand the mysteries of the world in which this particular people lived.

In remote areas, even in the twentieth century, the Kekchi Maya have continued to address prayers to the Lord of the Hills and the Valleys, also called Lord of the Thirteen Hills. The people of Yucatan have not abandoned the old rain God, Chac (who has a frog orchestra, since frogs when they croak, are thought to be calling the rain). And, not surprisingly, the Lacandon have kept up an elaborate mythology explaining the origins and activities of the various gods.¹¹

The Mayan had great respect for the powers of nature and so they had them as gods. They have the Sun god, the Rain god and the Underworld god. The students are expected to take all these down in notes for the third week of analysis and data gathering for full reflection and for comprehension through discussion. They were fearful when natural events such as droughts, made them think the gods were angry. All Maya gods are related to nature. Sunrise, sunset, rainfall and sunshine all were important to the people's survival so it isn't surprising that they believed gods controlled all the elements.

It will be of great interest to also explore through the myths the religion of the Maya. Religion was a strong force in the Maya life and regulated almost everything. Because of its importance, priests were the highest class of citizens. Frequently, they were also the ruling chiefs. Only priests were educated to know all of the gods, prayers and rituals. Ordinary people were not allowed to enter the temples. The Supreme Being and the creator of the universe was a king god named Hunab Ku. The next most important gods were those of the sun and the moon. The corn god was responsible for a successful harvest.¹²

It is important for the students to learn about the advanced systems of economy, science and government in

ancient civilizations. Many of the other books about the Maya will attest to the accomplishments of the Mayan scientists, especially in astronomy. They apparently used their advanced mathematics to calculate time and developed a calendar very similar to the one we have today. Scientists think that the Maya had the most advanced writing system of all native American groups. Maya recorded their language by using a system of hieroglyphic, which are picture symbols. These symbols represented either sounds, ideas or individual words. Students will reflect and discuss why this knowledge is important to the study of any culture and increase our appreciation of its people.

This study also hopes to bring students into the significance of Mayan art, music and architecture. Books that will be made available to them in the classroom, and the video they will see will enable them make a picture of the physical environment of the Maya. ¹³ We will compare Maya to other cultures that we have discussed in other classrooms as well as other subject areas.

**** This unit follows the successful study of the Greek myths; accordingly, students begin the study with a firm understanding of the definition of *myth* as well as a recognition of the elements of a myth.**

OBJECTIVES

This unit is designed to study the myths of various African cultures and of the Mayan people. At the end of this unit, the student will:

1. Gain an increased appreciation of several African cultures through the reading of African myths;
2. Gain an increased appreciation of the Mayan culture through the reading of Mayan myths;
3. Identify unique characteristics of African myths;
4. Identify unique elements of Mayan myths;
5. Improve his or her higher thinking skills through analysis of the myths;
6. Widen his or her experience of the writings of the African people;
7. Widen his or her experience of the writings of the Mayan people;
8. Practice informal discussion about folk tales and myths;
9. Study and master narrative and descriptive writing; and
10. Recognize that an appreciation of another culture extends to an appreciation, acceptance and understanding all cultures.

WEEK ONE

DAY 1

The first day of the unit will serve as the foundation upon which the next three weeks will be built. On this day, it is crucial to draw forth prior knowledge while exciting the students' quest for new knowledge. Before introducing the students to the African myths, the teacher will ask the students to recall their definition of myth. The teacher will guide the students through a review in which an established definition of myth is brought forth. Building upon this definition, the teacher will tell the students that they are about to embark on a wonderful journey into the world of cultures that differ from their own.

Before introducing students to the African myth, the teacher will lead the class in a discussion on forms of entertainment in today's society. The teacher will direct the conversation to focus on television, movies and novels. The teacher will incite the students to identify the elements of these mediums that attract the students. *Why do we watch television? What keeps us viewing a particular movie? What makes us want to turn the pages of a book?*

From the discussion of the mediums listed, the teacher will redirect the students' thinking. Students will be asked to think about countries and cultures that do not have television sets or movie theaters, public libraries or large bookstores. *How do these people entertain themselves?* The teacher will allow the students to brainstorm about possible answers to the question. The students will share their responses. The responses will serve as a springboard for the introduction to the topic of the unit. Students will be made aware of the fact that they are about to begin a study of two cultures that use an oral tradition as a means of entertainment. The people of Africa and the Mayan peoples both engage in telling tales or myths. Beyond entertaining, the myths also serve to educate and inform. The students will soon see how this is so.

Before the study of the African myths commences, the teacher will ask the students to complete a K-W-L chart. K-W-L is a meaning-making strategy that engages students in active learning. The strategy creates an instructional framework that begins with what the students **know** about the topic to be studied, moves to what the students **want to know** as they reflect on their knowledge and generate questions about the topic, and leads to a record of what students **learn** as a result of their engagement in the K-W-L strategy.

With the introduction of the myths as a means of entertainment, education and information combined with a recognition of prior knowledge of Africa, the students are set to begin their adventure into the African culture.

DAY 2

The second day will begin with a review of yesterday's lesson. The students will be reminded that African myths are designed to teach and entertain. The teacher will ask if any students can identify the continent of Africa on a map. With the location established, the students will sit on the floor. They will be told this arrangement is to help them relax and get prepared to take a journey through the villages of Africa, across its rivers and into the jungles. The teacher will read aloud an African myth. Upon completing the tale, the teacher will ask the students a series of questions.

Did the myth entertain you? What elements of the myth kept you listening?

What did the myth teach you about the African culture?

What is your personal reaction to the myth?

[The teacher must work to ensure that the students are able to identify unique aspects of the African culture as provided in the myth. It may take several readings before students are able to do this.]

At the end of the discussion the teacher will read another myth to the class. During this reading the students should attempt to mentally answer the questions while they listen. At the end of the second reading the teacher will again engage the students in a conversation in which they provide their responses and reactions.

Day Two has served to provide the students with a sampling of the African culture. Students will be encouraged to add information to their K-W-L charts. As the unit progresses, students will see their knowledge of the culture expanding.

DAY 3

On the third day the students will continue their exploration of the African culture through the myths. The class will begin with a review of the common elements identified in the myths they have heard thus far. It is essential that they students are constantly reminded of the culture's intention to inform, educate and entertain via the myths.

On this day, students will work in pairs. Each group will be provided with two short myths. For each myth, one member of the set will read the tale aloud while the other listens attentively. After each reading the pair will discuss the story and attempt to identify the essential African elements. Each group will be encouraged to share its findings with the class.

After the class has completed the paired readings, the teacher will introduce the students to the idea of the "storyteller." The teacher will tell the students that in their groups they each functioned as a storyteller; one who tells another a tale. The teacher will help the students understand that the people in Africa rely upon the storyteller to provide the myths; the storyteller is the one who continues the tradition of the myth. Because of the African storyteller, the students are able to experience the wonderful humor and adventure found within each myth and they are able to learn about a culture distinctively different from their own.

DAY 4

On the fourth day, the tradition of the myth as embedded in the culture of Africa comes to life. On this day, the students will experience the wonder of an African storyteller. There are two wonderful and exciting storytellers available. Sylvia and Jeff McQuillau are from New Haven and they have the ability to hold the students spellbound. Another exciting storyteller is Sara DeBeer from West Hartford. These individuals come highly recommended and tell exciting tales of African tribes.

Sitting on the floor at the feet of the storyteller, students will watch and listen to tales straight from the mouth of an individual from Africa. The storyteller will provide the students with a vivid taste of the African culture.

Students will be allowed to ask questions of the storyteller. Students will be encouraged to display their knowledge of myths.

DAY 5

At the end of the week during which the students have been presented with information, Day Five will serve as a reflection and response day. Students will continue to add to the K-W-L chart. Students will be encouraged to review the chart and summarize what they have learned throughout the week.

Students will also be asked to provide a journal type response to several questions. Journal responses are

designed to be informal writings whereby the student is not concerned with formalized writing but rather concentrates on reflection. The responses will be based on the myths read and heard over the past four days. The questions will include:

Provide a brief summary of your favorite myth. What did the myth teach you? What did you learn about the African culture from the myth?

What did you learn about the African culture this week?

How can you apply this new knowledge to your own life?

In what ways can you teach this to others?

Does the new knowledge make you want to learn more about the African culture?

Has your appreciation of the African culture been increased by this new knowledge?

Does it increase your desire to learn more about other cultures?

AFRICAN TALES SUGGESTED READINGS:

Stories of Sun and Moon (Knappert, Jan)

The Orphan Boy (Mollel, T. and Paul Morin)

The King and the Tortoise (Mollel, T.)

The Name of the Tree (Lottridge, C.B.)

Origin of the Yoruba Tree (Knappert, J.)

Swahili: Story of Creation (Knappert, J.)

Lord of the Dance (Tadjo, Veronique)

The Singing Man (Medearis, Angels S.)

The Princess Who Lost Her Hair (Mollel, T.)

WEEK TWO

The second week of this unit on Multiculturalism through African and Mayan Myths and Folk Tales will focus on MAYAN MYTHS. The structure of the day to day activities will use the same format as week one, except that there will be distinguishable difference in the way the stories are presented. Students are encouraged to make special note of the differences as well as the similarities in order for them to be prepared for the assessment and reflection activities in the third week.

DAY 1

On the first day of the second week, the students will be introduced to the Mayan culture. Day One will serve as a knowledge building day. The Mayan are a complex people, not often studied in great detail. The students will be provided with information on where the Mayan people lived. This information will be put forth through the use of maps and a video. These visual aids will assist the students in situating themselves for their journey through the Mayan culture. The teacher will guide the students to an understanding of the Mayan myths as a means of entertaining and educating. It will be pointed out that while the purposes are the same for both the African and Mayan myths, the elements employed to fulfill these purposes are vastly different. The teacher will provide the students with a blank K-W-L chart. K-W-L is a strategy that creates an instructional framework that begins with what the students **know** about the topic to be studied, moves to what the students **want to know** as they reflect on their knowledge and generate questions about the topic, and leads to a record of what students **learn** as a result of their engagement in the K-W-L strategy. Using prior knowledge as well as information gathered on this day, students will fill in the chart.

DAY 2

The second day will begin with a review of yesterday's lesson. The students will be reminded that Mayan myths are designed to teach and entertain. Using a map, the teacher will ask the students to recall the areas in which the Mayan people lived. With the location established, the students will sit on the floor. They will be told this arrangement is to help them relax and get prepared to take a journey through the villages of the Mayan people, across its rivers and into the natural surroundings of this unique culture.

The teacher will read aloud a Mayan myth. Upon completing the tale, the teacher will ask the students a series of questions.

*Did the myth entertain you? What elements of the myth kept you listening?
What did the myth teach you about the Mayan culture?
What is your personal reaction to the myth?*

[The teacher must work to ensure that the students are able to identify unique aspects of the Mayan culture as provided in the myth. It may take several readings before students are able to do this.]

At the end of the discussion the teacher will read another myth to the class. During this reading the students should attempt to mentally answer the questions while they listen. At the end of the second reading the teacher will again engage the students in a conversation in which they provide their responses and reactions.

Day Two has served to provide the students with a sampling of the Mayan culture as illustrated through the myths. Students will be encouraged to add information to their K-W-L charts. As the unit progresses, students will see their knowledge of the culture expanding.

DAY 3

On the third day, the students will continue their exploration of the Mayan culture through the myths. The class will begin with a review of the common elements identified in the myths they have heard thus far. It is essential that students are constantly reminded of the culture's intention to educate, inform and entertain via the myths.

On this day, the students will work in groups of four. Each group will be provided with copies of several Mayan myths. Each group will select an individual to read the stories aloud. The readers will be encouraged to show enthusiasm and excitement while presenting the tale. After each reading the groups will discuss the stories and attempt to identify the essential Mayan elements. After the class has completed the group exercise, the teacher will introduce the students to the art of Mayan storytelling. The teacher will remind the students that they have experienced telling stories as well as being told stories. The teacher will help the students understand that Mayan storytelling has some unique traits. For example, Mayan storytellers will often announce "This is a tale of the ancient time . . ." or "This is a tale once told by the ancestors . . ." before launching into the retelling. The Mayans have also been known to slip into a singsong of paired phrases while telling a myth.

DAY 4

On the fourth day, the tradition of the myths embedded in the culture of the Mayan civilization will come to life. A guest speaker who has taught writing Mayan tales will come to the classroom to read stories and discuss patterns and recurring themes. The speaker's name is Tamara Petro. Ms. Petro hails from New Haven and is a fantastic storyteller of Mayan myths. She is wonderful for students of all ages as her stories come to life through the use of vivid images and intriguing voice intonations..

The students will have some time allotted for discussion about common themes and ideas that they have found in the stories they have read throughout the week. There will also be time to ask questions of the guest speaker.

DAY 5

At the end of the week during which the students have been bombarded with information, Day Five will serve as a reflection and response day. Students will continue to add to the K-W-L chart. Students will be encouraged to review the chart and summarize what they have learned throughout the week.

Students will also be asked to provide a journal type response to several questions. Journal responses are designed to be informal writings whereby the student is not concerned with formalized writing but rather concentrates on reflection. The responses will be based on the myths read and heard over the past four days. The questions will include:

Provide a brief summary of your favorite myth. What did the myth teach you? What did you learn about the Mayan culture from the myth?

What did you learn about the Mayan culture this week?

How can you apply this new knowledge to your own life?

In what ways can you teach this to others?

Does the new knowledge make you want to learn more about the Mayanculture?
Has your appreciation of the Mayan culture been increased by this new knowledge?
Does it increase your desire to learn more about other cultures?

MAYAN TALES SUGGESTED READINGS:

The Lord of the Clouds (Morales)

Rabbit and Coyote (Thompson, J.E.S.)

Rabbit Gets Married (Thompson, S.)

Toad and Hawk (Thompson, S.)

How Music Came to the World (Ober, H.)

The Bird Who Cleans the World (Montejo, V.)

Who Cuts the Trees Cuts His Own Life (Montejo, V.)

Rosalie (Thompson, J.E.S.)

WEEK THREE

During the past two weeks, the students have studied the myths of the African and Mayan peoples. The myths have provided the students with an insight into the cultures' histories, ideas and beliefs. As a result of the study, the students have gained a knowledge of two cultures that differ from their own, they have experienced aspects of these cultures and they have gained an appreciation for cultural groups outside of their own cultural identity. The final week of the unit will provide the students with an opportunity to put their newly acquired knowledge use. Week three will not only call upon the new information but will also require the students to employ their unique sense of creativity and writing abilities.

DAY 1

Students will be engaged in a brief review of the African and Mayan myths. The teacher will guide the students through a discussion of the individual aspects of each culture's myths. The teacher will highlight the important elements contained in the myths. It is essential to ensure that the students have a firm understanding and recognition of the similarities and differences between the Mayan and African myths. With this understanding and recognition, the students will be presented with a preview of the week's undertaking: the writing of a short, original myth based upon African or Mayan details.

The students will be writing their own myths. They will be creating either an African myth or a Mayan myth. The teacher will ask the students to review their K-W-L charts. The charts, which were employed throughout weeks one and two, will serve as a guideline for the students. Using the information contained on the charts as well as their recollection, the students must decide whether they will write a myth based on the African elements or a myth that employs the themes and elements of the Mayan people. The teacher will allow the students several minutes to review the information and make a decision.

After each student has chosen the culture that they will base their myth upon, they will begin to write. Day one of the third week will serve as the pre-writing step of the writing process. The students will be provided with an outline worksheet. The worksheet will ask the students to provide information on their myth. Each student must answer questions on their myth's plot, characters, events and resolution. With the general information completed, the stage is set for the writing to begin.

DAY 2

Using the K-W-L chart and the worksheet begun in class yesterday, the students will actively begin writing their myth. The teacher will encourage the students to review the elements of the culture's myths by rereading some of the myths and recalling the tales presented by the storytellers. The students will spend the time writing their rough draft. The teacher will be available for conferences, questions and concerns.

DAY 3

On the third day of the final week, each student will be engrossed in the writing of his or her myth. At this stage of the writing process, the teacher will meet individually with the students to discuss their myths. The teacher wants to ensure that the students are writing a myth that contains elements related to the chosen culture, including the essential lesson to be taught.

The students will be encouraged to share their works-in-progress with each other. Peer response is critical to the writing process. Students are more apt to respond to another student's suggestion than to one made by the teacher. The teacher will encourage the students to react critically to each other's works and to also make grammatical corrections.

DAY 4

As the final week of the unit draws to a close, the students will complete the writing of their myths. Day four will be an opportunity for students to have final teacher conferences, a last peer response and editing session and the writing of the final draft. As students continue to work on their tales, the teacher will be preparing for the last day of the unit. The teacher will inform the students that on the final day, they will each be required to share their myth with the class. In an effort to make the presentations interesting and exciting, the students are invited to a "Mythical Party." At the party each student will function as a "storyteller." Students will be encouraged to bring props, costumes and other tale enhancing items. For those students who complete their

final draft on Day four, they may begin preparing for their presentation.

DAY 5

On the final day of the unit, the students, who will be referred to as “guests,” will arrive in costume (where applicable) and everyone will sit on the floor. As with the formal African storyteller and Mayan myth expert, sitting on the floor allows for a relaxed atmosphere and a greater involvement in the telling of the myth.

Each guest will be asked to come forward and share his or her tale. It is hoped that the writing will illustrate the teaching of the past three weeks. The final writing will highlight the ways in which the students understood the elements of the Mayan and African myths, the students increased knowledge of these distinct cultures and their deepened appreciation for that which is different from them.

Any study of cultures that extend outside of the identities of the students in the classroom, should be designed to elicit a strong appreciation, understanding and recognition of the differences that exist among the people of the world. From this appreciation and understanding, students will gain a wider latitude of acceptance for all people. A society that is made up of many cultures demands an educational provision of multicultural enhancements. The classroom is a bastion in which students learn about acceptance, appreciation, understanding and awareness of all cultures. Multicultural education is a must in today’s society.

Notes

1. Knappert, J. *Kings, Gods and Spirits* , p. 30.
2. Ibid, p.32.
3. Ibid, p.41.
4. Knappert, John. *Kings, Gods and Spirits* , p.7.
5. Ibid, p,9.
6. Bierhorst, J. *The Monkey’s Haircut* , p. 4.
7. Ibid, p. 15.
8. Ibid, p. 16.
9. Ibid, p. .15.
10. Bierhorst, J. *The Monkey’s Haircut* , p. 32.
11. Ibid, p. 34.
12. Green, J. *The Maya* , p. 21.
13. Green, J. *The Maya* , p. 35.

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