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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1997 Volume II: American Children's Literature

Cultural Unity through Folktales

Guide for Curriculum Unit 97.02.09
by Stella J. Samuels

Folk tales provide insights into the values, customs and behaviors of a society. Levette Davidson, in his book *A Guide to American Folklore*, states that “comparative studies in folklore provide a bridge from one folk culture to another.” The purpose of this unit is to reiterate the essential unity of diverse cultures and to help seventh-graders understand their own culture and those of their neighbors. Four different categories of folk tales will be studied, and in each section will be found a variety of activities that have been designed to bring about greater understanding and appreciation of differing ways of life. An extensive annotated bibliography has been provided.

Our categories include Tall Tales, a uniquely American genre of folktales, such as the stories of Paul Bunyan and Pecos Bill; Trickster Tales, usually animal stories such as those of Brer Rabbit and Coyote; and Legends, the creation stories of Native Americans and other cultures, which will be used to help us develop a greater appreciation of our earth. We will also study Cinderella stories in versions of the classic tale from twenty-one different cultures. Discussions on relevant issues arising from these stories, such as beauty, sibling rivalry, jealousy, feelings of inferiority, knowing your own worth, rewards, death and extended family, are part of this unit’s activities.

(Recommended for Reading, Social Development, and Social Studies, grades 7-12)

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