The 1st Digital Library of the Caribbean (dLOC) Lesson Plan Competition

1st Place

“Folklore and Oral Traditions”

by

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2. Title and Overview

Folklore and the Oral Tradition

This lesson will introduce students to the tradition of the oral story and the significance folklore (literature) plays in how culture is transferred from one generation to the next. What can we learn about our roots from literature, specifically folklore? By exposing students to folklore from a variety of cultures ranging from the Caribbean tales to Celtic myths students will be able to recognize cultural details in stories by picking out references to animals, nature, how people lived, worshipped and even thought. Students will work cooperatively in groups to brainstorm and draw conclusions about the cultural depicted in their story. This lesson will help them to understand how literature often reflects a specific period of time or specific customs and beliefs of the people who first told the story.

3. Lesson Goals and Objectives

Florida Sunshine State Standards:

SS.912.A.1.2 - Utilize a variety of primary and secondary sources to identify author, historical significance, audience, and authenticity to understand a historical period.

LA.1112.2.1.8 - Explain how ideas, values, and themes of a literary work often reflect the historical period

LA.1112.2.1.7: The student will analyze, interpret, and evaluate an author's use of descriptive language (e.g., tone, irony, mood, imagery, pun, alliteration, onomatopoeia, allusion), figurative language (e.g., symbolism, metaphor, personification, hyperbole), common idioms, and mythological and literary allusions, and explain how they impact meaning in a variety of texts with an emphasis on how they evoke reader's emotions.

Teaching objective simply stated:
Students will experience the rich culture that folklore provides by reading orally selected text and picking out elements that identify cultural details.
Students will analyze cultural details to infer customs, beliefs, and how people of another culture may have lived.
Students will understand the connection that often exists between different cultures as it is portrayed in folklore.
Students will understand that literature often reflects historical information about specific times and the people who lived at that time.
4. Historical Background

The practice of oral story telling has existed since man has had the ability to speak. Its’ purpose was to entertain, inform, instill morals and values in people and perhaps most importantly it was and still is a means for the transfer of culture. The subject matter of oral stories varies from culture to culture and can include myths and legends, stories of creation, hero tales and accounts of migration. These are all the elements of folklore, which is the focus of the Caribbean Lesson Plan.

The tradition of oral story telling has connotations of “the old days” when people had nothing better to do than roll up a stone, sit around the fire and spin tales of days gone by, but in actuality the oral tradition still plays a vital role in many cultures, the Caribbean culture being just one. A primary reason for the preservation of the oral tradition is simply the fact that almost half of the Caribbean population can not read or write. This fact holds true for many under developed countries around the world boasting a worldwide literacy rate of only 49% on the average in these areas.

Sadly, the Caribbean communities lay claim to an extremely high rate of illiteracy with over 40% of the citizens of countries like Haiti lacking the ability to read or write. Although this rate is high, there are many countries around the world that share rates as high or higher, including much of the African continent with only 30% of the population in areas such as Ethiopia and Niger reported as literate. It is only through an awareness of statistics like these that we can understand the significance of the oral tradition and of the telling and re-telling of folklore.

Folklore, which is basically the creative expression of the traditional beliefs and customs of people that is shared through oral story telling, is not studied or valued for its literary quality but for its’ historical content. It is safe to say that the tale itself and more specifically the words will have changed over time as the story was told time and time again, all by different speakers. But the allusion to a specific time and its’ people is captured in the essence of the tale. By looking closely at the details in a story we can learn how people lived, what they believed, what they valued and much more. This fact stands true whether we are looking at folktales that are hundreds of years old or that are fairly recent. Regardless of the age of the tale it is still a window into the soul of it’s’ people.

For example, if we were to look closely at Haitian folklore we find that the Haitian people are fond of proverbs and stories which teach a lesson. They also love to tell jokes and riddles, thus it is not surprising to find their stories featuring pranksters and tricksters in the form of personified animals, such as the Haitian characters Bouqui and Malice, two rogues who constantly cause each other grief with their chicanery. A similar prankster found in African and Caribbean folklore is Anansi the spider, who is often portrayed as wise and skillful. The Anansi tales of West Africa are synonymous with the Native American tales of Coyote or Raven, a factor which emphasizes the reality of the interconnectedness of folklore all over the world. Folklorist have studied tales from all over the world tracing origins and creating a kind of trail of cultural migration for these tales.

Of interest is the fact that not only do the stories themselves convey a sense of tradition but the manner in which the stories are told adhere to traditional patterns. The
Haitian storyteller calls her subjects by shouting ----Cric? If there are those who wish to listen to a tale then they would respond by shouting back------Crac?

The focus of this lesson is to utilize the book “Children of Yayoute-Folk Tales of Haiti” written by Francois Marcel-Turenne des Pres and teach students to closely evaluate some of the folktales for their cultural content by recognizing details that hint to the customs or mores of its people. Students will learn that folklore and the oral tradition hold a significant place in the world of literary and social sciences for the vast historical content that it provides and the cultural footprint it leaves for those who are willing to listen-----Cric?

5. Target Audience

Grade level: 7th-12th
Subject areas: English/Literature and Social Studies or World History

It is worth mentioning that I feel that this lesson could be modified for a Technology class by having students peruse the assigned websites and pick their own folk tales. It would also make a great format for a reading class and art teachers could use it and have students illustrate the folk tales focusing on emphasizing cultural details in their work.

6. Required Materials

Chart paper or white board
Yellow highlighters for each student
Copy of the detail chart for each student
3 column comparison chart for each student
Copy of the rubric for each student. (They will hand this in with their work for teacher to use for grading.)
One class set of folktales from any of the websites listed.
http://www.dloc.com/?b=UF00078311 (Children of Yayoute-tales of Bouqui and Ti Malice- folklore of Haiti)
http://www.canteach.ca/elementary/africa2.html (Where Stories come From-a Zulu (Africa) tale.)
http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/skull.html (The Disobedient Daughter Who Married a Skull- a Nigerian tale)
http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt/cft/cft04.htm#page_1- (Connla and The Fairy Maiden- a Celtic tale)
http://www.eldrbarry.net/rabb/rvn/first.htm (Raven and the First Men- a Native American Indian tale)

7. Teaching Activities

1. Start with a whole group discussion on the oral tradition and folklore.
   Have student’s list reasons for oral story telling on a chart paper. (I usually have my kinesthetic students as my recorder at the front of the class)
   Discuss how folklore transfers culture, entertains, teaches etc. (10-15 minutes)
2. Provide students with a copy of the detail chart and explain how referencing cultural
details provides us with information on how people live, think and worship within a
society. (10 minutes)
If you want to spend more time choose a short tale and go through it charting your
details for the whole group. (20-30 minutes)
3. Assign students to groups and have them count off within their group using the same
number sets within each group. (i.e. - #1-#5)
Give each group a copy of the folktale they will be using.
Assign one or two students in each group to read the tale to the others in the oral
Tradition. (10 minutes)
Each student must fill out their own detail chart but they can collaborate their
choices within the group. (10 minutes)
As a group they should review the questions for inferring the meaning of details
and create a summary regarding their tale. (The teacher should be circulating within
each group to ensure they are working well and cooperating as well as checking on
the level of understanding etc.) (10 minutes)
4. Once all students have completed the detail chart they are to move to a different
group, this time all 1’s, all 2’s, all 3’s etc. will be together. In these groups there
should be a representative for each of the folk tales. (allow 20-20 minutes)
5. Each student will be ask to share a short summary of their folk tale and what they
learned from it specifically sharing details which led to their conclusions.
The group will decide which 3 stories to compare and contrast on their charts.
Each student should make a note on their 3 column chart of the details/ conclusions
from each of the 3 stories the group has selected.
6. Once the comparisons have been completed the students should highlight those
details/conclusions they found similar.
7. Students will then prepare a written summary (assessment) stating what they
learned from their folk tale and what similarities they found when they compared
them. (15-20 minutes, students that need more time can opt to complete the
assignment at home.

8. Grading Assessments
In order to assess the learning outcomes of the specific objectives outlined in this
lesson I have created the following rubric to address all the objectives. Adjustments can
be made on a personal basis but the rubrics prevents me from being to subjective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements in cultural detail chart</th>
<th>4-5 points</th>
<th>2-3 points</th>
<th>0-1 points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At least one cultural detail found for 6 of the 7 components.</td>
<td>At least one cultural detail found for 4 of the 7 components.</td>
<td>At least one cultural detail found for 2 of the cultural components.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comparison chart</strong></td>
<td>Completed using 3 of the folklore stories. At least 5 details listed. Commonalities highlighted.</td>
<td>Completed using 3 of the folk tales and at least 3 details for each. Commonalities highlighted.</td>
<td>Only partially completed and attempts made to identify commonalities.</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Summary of inferences made from details found in folk tales.</strong></td>
<td>Summary includes specific examples, is neat, well written and demonstrates a connection from one folk tale to another.</td>
<td>Summary includes examples, is neat, well written and attempts to demonstrate connections between cultures through literature</td>
<td>Makes a reference to the cultural details found in the folk tale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cooperative Group points.</strong></td>
<td>Worked well with others, contributed to group discussions and stayed on task. Required no teacher intervention</td>
<td>Usually worked well with others, contributed some to group discussions and required very little teacher intervention to monitor behavior.</td>
<td>Rarely cooperative and unwilling to contribute to the group. Does not stay focused on the task.</td>
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</tbody>
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9. Measured impact of Lesson Plan

I am an American Literature teacher and I teach standard students whose abilities range from students who have difficulty reading to students who function at a fairly high level. Because of this I use a lot of cooperative groups. The beauty of using cooperative groups is that it allows you to mix low level learners with high level learners and the need for teacher intervention becomes minimal, it seems like there are always a couple of strong leaders in the group. Once these students begin to synthesize information the other students jump on board quickly. This is why I decided to use groups with this lesson. It also allows more content to be covered in a short amount of time as students are teaching each other by sharing responses.

I found that students really enjoyed the folk tales. Most students did very well in picking out the cultural details and some were quite literate about the use of symbolism. Almost all the students found a cultural detail for every component in the chart. Because we adhere to a strict curriculum guide and we are in the last 9 weeks we were not able to commit 2 class periods to the lesson so I had to use whole group discussion to compare the various cultural details students were able to ascertain. Basically we completed the comparison chart as a group. The students found that most western cultures had similarities with the use of personification through animal characters and found that their cultures also had some kind of belief in a God as well as a belief in the supernatural. They also found that the people of the Caribbean, African and Native American cultures...
had more in common with each other and they deducted that there may have been some blending of cultures due to people moving to other countries or even slaves being introduced in some areas. Overall, I think they were able to connect how literature reveals information about specific cultures as well as what it tells us historically. I think the hardest part of this lesson was determining the time allotted for specific tasks because some students finish quickly while others take longer to process. Each teacher will have to modify depending on their students. The most rewarding thing about this lesson is the fact the student’s learned something and they appeared to have fun while doing it, which makes me think they will look at folk tales from a new angle now.

**10. Certification Statement**

Please see my email regarding the certification statement. Thank you for this valuable opportunity. Karen Pharis (pharisk@bellsouth.net)
Using the details cited above discuss the following questions within the group:

1. Did the story have any sensory or visual imagery, use of personification, if so what? What could they symbolize?
2. What values or human characteristics were mentioned in the story which might have indicated that a lesson was being taught: (i.e.-greed, laziness, stubborn, foolish)
3. Is there anything which indicates religious beliefs or supernatural beliefs, if so what were they and what does this tell us about the people?
4. Based on the details you recorded, what might the peoples concerns or fears about life be? Does it answer a question for them? (i.e.-how was the world created etc?)
5. Did they respect nature, man or a particular power?
6. Do your details tell you anything about how they got food, shelter etc?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>References to objects</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>References to animals</td>
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<tr>
<td>How they lived, got food, kinds of houses etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did they worship</td>
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<td>How did they think</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did the story teach something?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of personification</td>
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<td>Folk Tale from</td>
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