



# Fantasy, Fables and Folktales: A Literary Journey

Activities for the Classroom

# Overview

Traditional literature encompasses the vast array of oral and recorded stories from cultures all over the world. Some of these stories, called folktales, are a result of people’s attempts to explain their origins or natural phenomena that they did not wholly understand. Other traditional literary forms consist of ballads, limericks, fairy tales, tall tales and fables, each with a unique purpose and style. Beginning with oral storytelling and developing into written versions from many sources, traditional literature serves as a link to a child’s social consciousness and understanding of ethnic customs.

*During the following activities the essential questions are addressed:*

- How do fables, folktales, myths, tall tales and fairy tales differ from each other and from other forms of stories?
- Why do authors write fables, folktales, myths, tall tales and fairy tales?
- How are culture and tradition conveyed through folklore?

With your students, create reading strategies to explore several genres of folklore and analyze unique qualities of each. Make comparisons between folk tales and fairy tales, discovering their purposes and characteristics. By exploring native myths, students will develop an understanding of cultural roles in explaining natural phenomena. They can also apply new knowledge by developing their own interpretations of tall tales and fables, and create their own contemporary versions of traditional stories.

Individually and in cooperative groups, students can explore literature and apply their knowledge to new situations as they prepare a variety of products.

*Direct your students to:*

- Identify common elements and construct a working definition of folktales
- Use figurative language to create vivid descriptions
- Participate in literature circles to refine discussions of stories
- Create original tall tales and ballads based on specific genre characteristics
- Examine the purpose and content of myths and legends as explanations for unknown phenomena related to cultural groups around the world
- Relate the elements of traditional fables to modern culture
- Dramatize original fables
- Compare different cultural versions of various fairy tales
- Compose a “fractured fairy tale” based on the Cinderella story
- Create limericks based on common elements of fairy tales
- Present a skit, puppet show or pantomime about a “mixed up” fairy tale

- Use point of view to retell a story
- Participate in a fairy tale play

## Genre Studies

Your students can focus their study of traditional literature by enjoying fables, legends, ballads, fairy tales, creation myths and tall tales.

### Create a Personal Fable

Aesop is famous for his fables, short stories about truths of life and human nature, most of which feature animals. Though some people believe Aesop never lived, those that do think he lived in the 6th century B.C., lived on the island of Samos and spent part of his life as a slave. There are over 655 fables with Aesop's name on them; however, it is agreed that he did not create all these. As his fame grew, other fables were put in his name.

To create a personal fable, have your students start by choosing animals with characteristics that match various friends or family members. Have them create a story starring these animals using plot elements from family history. Be sure to include a moral at the end!

### Fairy Tales, Myths and Legends

Fairy tales are fanciful and imaginary stories about people, fairies, animals or things that have magical powers. There are many universal themes in fairy tales. One way for your students to analyze these themes is to read several versions of the same story. Read and compare Cinderella stories from different cultures and use the model to analyze other fairy tales. Have them select a tale from the following list and locate different versions of that story theme. Try to locate stories from various countries and cultures. Discuss the similarities and differences among the tales. Use world maps to locate the countries where other versions originated.

- Snow White
- Little Red Riding Hood
- Beauty and the Beast
- Hansel and Gretel
- Rumpelstiltskin



### Myths

From the beginning of time, people have tried to understand their world. They've wondered how the world came to be, why there are stars at night and the sun in the day, what makes rain, wind, lightning, thunder, and snow and how man came to be. Different cultures have their own explanations for these mysteries or myths. The Greeks are famous for theirs, but in the United States, we have our own myths and legends that started with Native Americans.

Native American myths and legends come from old traditions, those concerned with living day to day. These stories tell of wars and hunts, of love affairs and family quarrels. They explain the natural world. They answer questions. How was the world created? What makes day and night? Why do the seasons change?

Native American tales of the creation of the world are not very different from stories told by people around the world. There are three central types of Native American myths and legends, centering on creation (of people), the great flood and origin of earth and seasons.

### **Tall Tales**

When the United States was being settled in the 1800s, people often liked to create tall tales, stories of people who were larger than life or had superhuman qualities. As people moved westward, they liked to create stories about people particular to their region who were facing the same challenges they were. These characters often brought solutions to real-life problems. Many of these stories seem to be based on real people; however, as the stories were told and retold, details became changed and exaggerated.

In addition to the exaggerations, Tall Tales have many other elements. The main character needs to solve a problem, main character is bigger than life and has super-human abilities, the plot is humorous and impossible, the story includes lots of action and the main character solves a problem or overcomes an obstacle.



Have your students read from Mary Pope Osborne’s book, [American Tall Tales](#), including several stories such as *Paul Bunyan* and *Davy Crockett*.

With your students, identify the exaggerations and similes in each story. Use these ideas to help your students write his or her own tall tale about another character.

### **Ballads**

A ballad is a narrative poem, most often of folk origin, set to music and intended to be sung. Ballads are often sung about westward expansion, making the setting a very important element to the story. Have students listen to several ballads on the “Ballads of America” CD.

Discuss the setting and how important it is to the story. Challenge your students to create his or her own ballad, using their hometown as the setting.

# Ideas to Support Reading

Encourage your students to:

- Attend a storytelling session at your local public library, which probably has scheduled story times. Although many story times are geared to younger children, your child may enjoy observing the storytelling techniques used by adult presenters. Some stories may be read aloud or retold orally. If possible, have your students interview the storyteller prior to the session and ask questions about his or her background, techniques, or why the story was chosen.
- Learn about the *Junior Great Books* program, which promotes reading and discussing great works of literature for many age groups. If your school already uses this program, by all means take part in its implementation. If your school does not yet sponsor this program, learn how you can help create one by going to their web site.

<http://www.greatbooks.org/typ/>

Instructions for your students to start a book club:

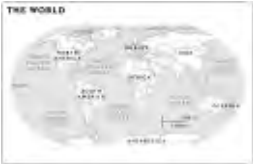
## Part 1

- Call or email your buddies who like to read. (Eight to twelve is a good size.) See if they want to get together to read and discuss the same book.
- Ask them to bring one other person.
- If you are in school, ask permission to hang posters advertising your club.
- Make sure your friends are really dedicated to reading and discussing books and will come to the meetings.
- Decide if members who have not finished reading the book can come to the discussion.

## Part 2

- Decide when to meet. Once a month usually works out best.
  - Decide where to meet. Different people can host the club each month.
  - Bring your books, of course, and snacks.
  - Select someone to lead the discussion. Have members write down questions that can be used.
  - Share your knowledge of literature circles with your friends.
  - Keep the discussion on track.
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- With your students, develop a rating system for books. It can be a simple list of titles and with a point scale, such as 5 = liked a lot to 1 = disliked. This list should be kept in a visible spot to encourage your students to

evaluate stories. If your students are part of a book club, this might also work well.

- Find books in your school without book jackets. Have your students create new covers to enhance the appearance of the books.
  - Find a map of the United States that can be colored on or otherwise decorated. Have your students read a book that relates somehow to a specific state. Examples include the setting of the story, the author's home or something about the plot. Each time she or he reads a book, have him or her mark that state on the map. As an alternative, use a world map to focus on international folklore.
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- 50 Ways to Keep Your Kids Reading All Summer  
[http://www.childrenslit.com/th\\_fiftyways.html](http://www.childrenslit.com/th_fiftyways.html)  
This comprehensive list presents tried and true methods of encouraging your students to read.
  - Locate stories on the Web. The following sites specifically contain stories from traditional literature.
    - Aesop's Fables <http://www.aesopfables.com/>  
An online collection of 655+ fables some with images and audio.
    - Hans Christian Andersen <http://hca.gilead.org.il/>  
Extensive site of information about Hans Christian Andersen including the text of most of his original tales.
    - American Folklore <http://www.americanfolklore.net/>  
Collection of American folklore, tall tales, and legends from each of the 50 states.
    - International Children's Digital Library <http://www.icdlbooks.org/>  
The mission of the ICDL is to select, collect, digitize and organize children's materials in their original languages and to create appropriate technologies for access and use by children 3-13 years old.
    - Refer to book lists of traditional literature. The following sites contain bibliographies that can help you locate reading materials geared to your students interests.
    - Book Adventure [http://bookadventure.org/ki/bs/ki\\_bs\\_helpfind.asp](http://bookadventure.org/ki/bs/ki_bs_helpfind.asp)  
A searchable database of literary genres to help children select books of interest to them.
    - Children's literature web site with specific bibliographies of folklore
      - Johnny Appleseed  
[http://www.childrenslit.com/th\\_appleseed.html](http://www.childrenslit.com/th_appleseed.html)
      - Tall Tales [http://www.childrenslit.com/th\\_talltales2.html](http://www.childrenslit.com/th_talltales2.html)
      - Cinderella [http://www.childrenslit.com/th\\_cinderella.html](http://www.childrenslit.com/th_cinderella.html)

## Oral Storytelling

Traditional literature has its roots in oral storytelling. Folklore shared in all parts of the world began long before there were printed books. Many tales share common themes that have been adjusted for different cultures. Most storytellers add their own vocabulary and presentation techniques to offer their own versions of classic tales.

Have your students research traits of story tellers and discuss these traits with them. Have them pick out a story to tell to the family and help them develop a creative way to tell it.

*Here are some hints for oral storytelling:*

- Effective oral storytelling requires practice and a thorough knowledge of the story content.
- Use plenty of expression when reading. If possible, change your tone of voice to fit the dialogue. Use soft and loud voices at appropriate times. Change enunciation to suit the speech patterns in the story.
- Practice using unfamiliar vocabulary, including the pronunciation of other languages.
- Sound effects can be very motivating to the listener. Practice the sound to make sure it conveys the desired meaning.
- Adjust your pace to fit the story. During a suspenseful part, slow down and lower your voice.
- Use props to help tell the story.
- Ask the audience to respond to cues or ask them questions during the telling.

## Reading Aloud

Even though your students may be avid readers, consider reading aloud with them which can serve as a catalyst for verbal interaction. Continue reading aloud books that challenge your student's listening, vocabulary and thinking skills. Reading books that are above your student's reading level will help them grow as a reader.

- Have your students read to younger siblings or friends. Encourage them to practice prior to the reading time.
- Organize a storyfest with your student's peers where they can share books aloud. You might consider having a theme for the storyfest, such as focusing on animal stories, a certain geographical location, stories by a particular author or stories where food is a major theme.
- Set up a classroom story time. Include reading books aloud and personal storytelling. Most children love to hear about family traditions and stories of the past.

<sup>1</sup> Research for Better Teaching, Inc., 1993.

- During storytelling times, jazz up the atmosphere with special lighting, seating (try a pillow pile) and soft music.
- Use actions along with words for dramatic impact.
- Take turns reading aloud.
- After reading, ask your students questions about the story, such as their favorite part, most interesting part and the most surprising part. Here are some pointers from the National Education Association web site, which sponsors Read Across America.

<http://www.nea.org/readacross/resources/fourthroughsix.html> (Accessed May 15, 2005).

- Ask your students to compare a book to another familiar book. How are the characters alike or different? Do the stories take place in similar settings? How are the illustrations the same or different?
- Ask what part of the story or book your students liked best and why.
- Ask if your students liked the ending of the story. Why or why not?
- Ask your students what type of mood the story or chapter in a book creates. Ask how the author creates the mood. For example, does she use certain words, events or settings that create a particular feeling?
- If your students has read more than one book by the same author, ask how the books are similar or different.

## Ideas to Support Writing



Experts in the field of language arts and English recognize that effective reading and writing strategies support each other in promoting literacy. Your students have spent a considerable amount of time reading traditional literature and writing to extend his or her knowledge of folklore. To extend writing skills further, you might find the following activities useful.

### Individual Writing Activities

Budding authors need encouragement to continue to develop their skills. Use these ideas to motivate your students to write.

- **Journal writing** – A gift of a journal notebook or diary is a way to get young people into the habit of writing daily. A journal begins the writing process, and may be the source of ideas for a new poem or story. Journals also provide a private outlet for their emotions.
- **Letter writing** – Encourage your students to correspond regularly with long distance friends and family, or become pen pals. Supply them with stationery (or the materials to make their own), envelopes, postage stamps, an address book and a box for saving letters. For variety, suggest that they design their own picture postcards.

- **Gifts of writing** – Greeting cards with personal messages and poems are more meaningful when they're homemade, rather than store-bought. An older child may enjoy the challenge of writing a ballad or song lyrics in honor of a special someone or occasion. Homemade books and calendars also make nice gifts of writing.
- The *WritingFix* web site offers interesting and interactive ways to assist with the writing process. <http://writingfix.com/>
- **Books about writing** – Find storybooks in which writing is important to the plot or character development, as in *Dear Mr. Henshaw* by Beverly Cleary, *Harriet the Spy* by Louise Fitzhugh, or *Mostly Michael* by Robert Kimmel Smith.
- *6 + 1 Traits of Writing: The Complete Guide Grades 3 and Up* by Ruth Culham can help students learn how to structure their writing and takes them through a complete writing process.
- The *Write On Reader* web site was created by students in response to a *Thinkquest* challenge. It contains many useful links about such topics as how books are made, author interviews, book awards, and writing hints. <http://library.thinkquest.org/J001156/index.htm>
- Write a Biopoem<sup>1</sup> based on the character of a book. This activity requires your students to make inferences and to synthesize his or her learning. The Biopoem format is as follows:
  - Line 1 = character's first name
  - Line 2 = 4 character traits
  - Line 3 = relationship to another character in the story
  - Line 4 = "Lover of" 3 things or people
  - Line 5 = "Who feels" 3 items
  - Line 6 = "Who needs" 3 items
  - Line 7 = "Who fears" 3 items
  - Line 8 = "Who gives" 3 items
  - Line 9 = "Who would like to see" 3 items
  - Line 10 = Resident of
  - Line 11 = character's last name

Example:

***Snow***

*Beauty, kindness to others, naïve, trusting*

*Evil queen's curse*

*Delight in dwarfs and walks through the forest; apple-devourer*

*Needed and encouraged by dwarfs, but frightened and fearful*

*Dreams of pleasant times, beauty, companionship*

*Fearful of woodsman, loneliness, heartache*

*Gives graciously unto others her innocence, respect, obedience*

*Who would like to see her contented dwarfs*

*Lady of the golden coffin*

***White***

## Family Writing Activities

Parents can encourage writing by modeling its use in a variety of ways. Here are some examples of activities that families can do together.

- **Family newsletters** – Some extended families keep in touch through a family newsletter. With news and photos students can write up news stories and send them by regular or email to other family subscribers.
- **Scrapbooks and photo albums** – Keep souvenirs of family activities in an album. Students can write in dates, captions and short descriptions of the activity in the snapshot.
- **Travel journal** – When students take trips for a day or longer, have them keep a journal of where they go and what they see.
- **Writing to parents** – Encourage personal correspondence within student's families. For example:
  - Have your students write you while away from home
  - Have your students write to the tooth fairy.
  - Encourage your students to write you a letter or poem.
  - Have your students create a certificate of achievement for siblings or friends for swimming across the lake, or being very cooperative during a trying week.
- **Become the family historian** – Have your students collect and record family stories by interviewing various members, especially elders. They can concentrate on people, events, objects, important transitions, work or travel. Have them ask the following questions and write about them:
  - Immigration- When did your family first come to America? What were the circumstances?
  - Courtship- How did your parents meet? Can you describe their wedding?
  - Work- What is your parent's job?
  - Holidays- What is your family's favorite holiday? Do you have special foods or customs?
  - Vacations- Where did you go? What did you do for fun?
  - Daily life- What are your parent's hobbies and interests?
  - Photographs- Look at them and describe their meaning.

## Publishing

All writers young and old dream of having their work published. If your school publishes a newspaper or literary magazine, this is a good first start to publicly acknowledging your student's writing. Here are some other ways to expand writing beyond the family circle.

- Submit stories and poems to local or national publications, either print or Web-based. Many magazines for young people run writing contests as well.
- Your students may subscribe to a special interest magazine (not necessarily one with a literary focus). If it has a Letters to the Editor

section, have them submit a letter and check in future issues to see if it is printed.

- Help your students publish stories on the Web. The following sites promote student-submitted original stories.
  - <http://www.kids-space.org/> Go to the Story Book section to read stories submitted by other children, and see how to submit your own story.
  - <http://realkids.com/home4.htm> Young Writers' Clubhouse contains tips about writing.
  - <http://www.stonesoup.com/> The online version of Stone Soup. Look for the Writing section to read original stories by children and submit stories for possible publication.

## Dramatic Interpretation Activities

Drama activities support literary interpretation. Although your students may not be interested in acting, some of these are game-oriented and can be used in a variety of settings.

### Reader's Theater

Reader's Theater is a technique that allows children to perform dramatic interpretations of stories without using staging, costumes or actions. Its primary purpose is to enable a group of readers to retell a story using a narrator to describe the action and using dialog as appropriate. It is an easy way to add some spice to storytelling.



Here is a link to seven free Reader's Theater plays composed, under supervision, by 8th grade students. Help your students select a script, print it and perform with friends. Costumes are optional! From the Whootie Owl web site <http://hazel.forest.net/whootie/script.html> (Accessed May 15, 2005).

Aaron Shepard, a professional writer of Reader's Theater scripts, has developed an extensive web site of information about Reader's Theater.

<http://www.aaronshep.com/rt/>

A link to Aaron Shepard's collection of free printable scripts is located here. Enjoy using this extensive collection to enhance your child's dramatic interests.

<http://www.teachingheart.net/readerstheater.htm>

Reader's Theater books are:

*Readers On Stage* – this book contains scripts, worksheets and tips for performance.

*Stories On Stage* – this book contains 15 play scripts from 15 different authors.

*Folktales On Stage* – this book contains 16 fairy tale and folktale plays from around the world.

### **Dramatic Interpretation**

The following activities come from a web site devoted to drama activities prepared by a former elementary school drama teacher.

<http://www.childdrama.com/>.

- The Jeffrey Game <http://www.childdrama.com/jeffrey.html>
- Mirror Mirror <http://www.childdrama.com/mirror.html>
- Rhyme Charades (indicates younger ages but is easily adaptable for older children) <http://www.childdrama.com/rhyme.html>
- Musical Freeze Improvs <http://www.childdrama.com/lpfreeze.html>
- Gibberish Sentences <http://www.childdrama.com/gibberish.html>
- Paper Masks <http://www.childdrama.com/papermasks.html>
- Story Story <http://www.childdrama.com/storystory.html>
- I Am Walking – Instant Version  
<http://www.childdrama.com/iamwalking.html>
- Hangman Charades <http://www.childdrama.com/hangman.html>

### **Puppetry**

Puppetry offers children a chance to act without being in the spotlight. As there are many types of puppets that can be created, it is also an avenue for artistic creativity. A few types of puppets that students can easily make are paper bag puppets, sock puppets, marionettes and finger puppets. Below are some web sites that could be useful in helping your students create puppets.

Paper bag puppets:

<http://www.childdrama.com/puppetlunch.html>

Giant newspaper puppets:

<http://www.childdrama.com/puppetnews.html>

Japanese doll theater puppets:

<http://www.childdrama.com/puppetdoll.html>

# Book Lists to Support Literature Activities

Organized by topic, this list is adapted from one located at the following web site: Book It! <http://www.bookitprogram.com/parents/readinglist.asp> (Accessed May 15, 2005). Additional books have been added.

## To help you select appropriate books for your child:

- *99 Ways to Get Kids to Love Reading and 100 Books They'll Love*, by Mary Leonhardt ISBN 0609801139.
- *Books to Build On: A Grade-by-Grade Resource Guide for Parents and Teachers*, edited by John Holdren and E.D. Hirsch, Jr. Delta, 1996. ISBN 0385316402.
- *Choosing Your Children's Books: 8 to 12 Years Old*, by Valerie White. Bayley & Musgrove, 1994. ISBN 188272612X.
- *What Else Should I Read? Guiding Kids to Good Books* (2 volumes), by Matt Berman. Libraries Unlimited, 1995-1996. ISBN 1563082411 (volume 1), ISBN 1563084198 (volume 2)

## Guides to the benefits of reading:

- *How to Get Your Child to Love Reading: For Ravenous and Reluctant Readers Alike*, by Esme Raji Codell ISBN 1565123085
- *How to Hook Your Kids on Books: Create a Love for Reading That Will Last a Lifetime*, by Karen O'connor. Thomas Nelson publishers, 1995. ISBN 0785279423
- *Keeping Kids Reading: How to Raise Avid Readers in the Video Age*, by Mary Leonhardt. Crown Publishers, 1996. ISBN 0517701146
- *Raising a Reader: Simple and Fun Activities for Parents to Foster Reading Success*, by Bonnie D. Schwartz ISBN 1578860512

## Recommended books for oral storytelling:

- *Ready-to-Tell-Tales From Around the World*, by David Holt and Bill Mooney, editors; August House, 19--
- *More Ready-to-Tell-Tales From Around the World*, by David Holt and Bill Mooney, editors; August House, 2000
- *Read All About It: Great Read-Aloud Stories, Poems and Newspaper Pieces for Preteens and Teens*, edited by Jim Trelease. Viking Penguin, 1993. ISBN 0140146555.
- *Parent's Guide to Storytelling: How to Make Up New Stories and Retell Old Favorites*, by Margaret Read MacDonald. Harper, 1995. ISBN 0064461807.
- *Read-Aloud Handbook*, by Jim Trelease. 5th edition. Penguin Books, 2001. ISBN 0141001615. (Also by this author: *Hey! Listen to This:*

*Stories to Read Aloud.* ISBN 0833589164.)

- *Read to Me: Raising Kids Who Love to Read*, by Bernice E. Cullinan. Scholastic, 2000. ISBN 043908721X.
- *Reading Magic: Why Reading Aloud to Our Children Will Change Their Lives Forever*, by Mem Fox ISBN 0156010763

**Children’s Drama and Theater Selections:**

- *101 Drama Games for Children: Fun & Learning with Acting & Make-Believe*, by Paul Rooyackers (1998, Hunter House, 17.95/spiral)
- *101 More Drama Games for Children: Fun & Learning with Acting & Make-Believe*, by Paul Rooyackers (2002, Hunter House, 17.95/spiral)



Junior National Young Leaders Conference  
1919 Gallows Road  
Suite 700  
Vienna, VA 22182

Accepting nominations online at:  
[www.cylc.org/JrNYLCnom](http://www.cylc.org/JrNYLCnom)