

Genre Focus Lesson

I. Objectives

- To read to enjoy a work of legend, myth, or folklore
- To activate prior knowledge about legends, myths, and folklore
- To identify and understand the elements of legends, myths, and folklore
- To identify and understand the forms of legends, myths, and folklore
- To respond and connect to legends, myths, and folklore
- To write a fable

II. Motivating Options

Activating Prior Knowledge Before students begin to read a legend, myth, or work of folklore, ask them what they know about the culture from which it comes. Help them locate the area on a map, and write any information students offer about the customs and traditions of the culture on the chalkboard. If students' knowledge is limited, provide them with additional information that will help them understand the tale's cultural context.

III. Teaching Strategies

Myths, legends, and folklore have their roots in the oral tradition of storytelling. These tales were often handed down for generations before they appeared in written form. Many of them are attempts to explain the world and the behavior of its inhabitants, and most contain a moral, message, or theme that may apply to everyone.

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A. Analyzing

1. *Elements of Legends, Myths, and Folklore*

a. **Hero** Explain that the hero of a legend, myth, or work of folklore may be human, god, animal, plant, or force of nature. Often, the hero possesses special powers, and sometimes during the course of the tale the hero will learn a lesson that is also meant to teach the reader.

b. **Conflict** Remind students that a conflict is a struggle between opposing forces. Most legends, myths, and works of folklore feature a conflict of some sort, often between the hero and another force. When the hero wins the conflict, the work teaches that the hero's virtues are traits to be emulated. When the hero loses, the work's lesson is that the hero's flaws are traits to be avoided.

Have students think about familiar legends such as the King Arthur or Robin Hood stories. Ask them what conflicts the characters face and how the outcome of the conflicts affects the culture.

c. **Theme** Many legends, myths, and works of folklore focus on a theme that is universal and can be applied to many different cultures. A fable's theme, for example, is expressed in its moral and is often universal. The themes of other works may be implied, requiring the reader to infer the theme from the events of the tale.

2. *Forms of Legend, Myth, and Folklore*

a. **Legends** Remind students that legends are often based in real historical events. Their heroes may be humans, animals, or even forces of nature. Some human heroes of legends may actually have existed, but often the hero's traits have become exaggerated over time.

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Have students think about the heroes of familiar legends such as the King Arthur or Robin Hood stories. Ask them to list the character traits of the heroes that are exaggerated.

- b. Myths** Myths are stories that feature gods, goddesses, or other supernatural beings. The hero of a myth might be a deity or a human. A myth's purpose might be to explain how or why natural events take place, or it might be to show how the gods influence and control human destiny. Greek, Roman, Scandinavian, and Native American myths are well-known, but many other cultures have their own myths.

Have students work in small groups to make up a myth explaining a natural phenomenon such as the way leaves turn color in the autumn. After groups are done, compare the explanations they have created.

- c. Folklore** Remind students that the term "folklore" covers a long list of types of literature, including tall tales, proverbs, songs, fables, and certain speeches. All of these forms had their roots in the oral tradition. The characters and events in a work of folklore often reveal the values and beliefs of the culture that created the work.

Have students think of the hero and events of a tall tale, such as a Paul Bunyan or Pecos Bill story. Discuss with them what the story reveals about the culture of the American West from which the stories came.

- 3. Vocabulary** Point out that many myths, legends, and works of folklore contain words from other cultures and languages. Encourage students to keep a list in their logs of such words. They should try to define these unfamiliar words using context clues, but if they cannot determine the meaning of a word, they can work with a partner to find it out.
- 4. Author's Craft** Explain that since works from the oral tradition are anonymous, they have a whole culture as their author. These

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legends, myths, and folk stories can tell readers about the culture's values, ideals, and beliefs. They can also teach lessons that go beyond a single culture and echo universally. Students should be alert to the aspects of these works that are culturally determined and the aspects that are universal.

B. Responding

1. **Literature Groups** After reading the tale, have students work in groups to discuss their reactions and opinions. Encourage them to talk about whether the tale provides a message that is universal. (For more suggestions on using Literature Groups, see *Literature Groups Sourcebook: Strategies and Activities*.)
2. **Writing a Fable** Invite students to write a fable of their own using a moral from an existing fable. Encourage them to make their fables as different as possible from the existing fable, but have them ensure that their fable truly expresses the moral

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