Kids Love Stories

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Listen, little Elia: draw your chair up close to the edge of the precipice and I'll tell you a story.

-- F. Scott Fitzgerald

Overview

If, as Emily Dickenson wrote, "There is no frigate like a book," surely there is no vessel like a story. Since time out of mind, stories have been vessels for transmitting culture, preserving memories and making sense of the world. From the lips of skillful storytellers to the attentive ears and open hearts of their listeners, tales have fostered social identity, communicated values, and provided education and entertainment. In this unit I will examine storytelling through folktales, the stories told within communities that model and reflect on shared experience, both ordinary and extraordinary. Transmitted from one generation to the next and conveyed across countries and continents, stories persist as cultural necessities and, therefore, equipment for living.

Folktales continually draw vitality from social and geographic contexts that change over time. Examining the land and language, people and places, customs and changes associated with folktales, we can appreciate the origins of particular tales and their adaptations as they migrate through time and space. At the same time, studying the tales themselves can yield a great deal of cultural information and insight. The fluid character of a folktale is a key to its survival. Different tellers and listeners can be attracted to the same story for a wide variety of reasons. There is a rich, fertile legacy of folklore from Africa, where folk tales are one means of initiating young people into a community's traditions and customs. The many lessons articulated through folk tales prepare young people for life. West Africans who were captured and sold into slavery brought traditional tales with them to the Americas, tales that resembled those known to the present generation of immigrants from West Africa and the West Indies. Although the verbal arts performed in West Philadelphia's African American communities have evolved in relation to the American experience, there is a shared respect for verbal

artistry and the ability to revise and revitalize the world through words. I intend to use this unit of study during the month of February as part of our school's celebration of Black History Month. The unit will be a partnership of language arts, social studies and technology. This four-week curriculum is designed for kindergarten students but can certainly be expanded upon for students in grades first through third. The class consists of 30, 5 and 6 year old inner-city students.

The reading and studying of African and African-American folktales will help students make connections to their cultural heritage. They will gain an appreciation of the rich traditions that Africans carried to America during their time of slavery, their efforts to manage relationships in their new environment, and their ability to find humor and humanity in the midst of constant struggle and sorrow.

Demographics

The Andrew Hamilton School is located at 5640 Spruce Street. It is a K – 8 school with a total population of 719 students. Of that population 99% are African American, .3% are White and .7% are Latino. 79% of the students receive free lunch. On any given day approximately 93% of the students come to school. The population is transient, in 2006, 168 students entered during the school year and 125 withdrew. There were 32 serious incidents reported in 2006. This unit is being written for a Kindergarten class, age range 5-6 years old.

Rationale

Reflecting on the varieties of ways in which children already organize social life through language provides a strong foundation for literacy. In "Helping Children Understand Literary Genres," Carl Smith argues that folktales in particular make an excellent and effective starting point for children because they are a clear and uncomplicated form of literature. By reading and analyzing several sample folktales, young children can quickly develop a schema for this literary genre and later apply these thinking skills to other literary engagements.

In spite of Smith's point that they are uncomplicated, folktales as they are performed are far more complex than many of the genres that children already recognize and engage in their dailty lives. These forms are often modeled in folktales in ways that allow children to reflect on the power of words and the interactional routines set in motion through the performance of verbal arts. Identifying and collecting their own folklore and interactional routines can lead children into greater awareness of the social consequences of language, and prepare them to relate the lessons of folktales to their own lives.

Folktales appeal to children. The introduction is uncomplicated, the plot is action-packed and the conclusion is satisfying. While enjoying the humor, the rhythm and the repetition of these stories, children can relate to the dramatization of struggles and antics familiar to them in everyday life. Folktales invite children to journey to other

places and join hands with heroes and heroines who inspire them to be creative, confident and courageous. When good triumphs over evil, a child's world becomes, for the moment, safe, secure and satisfying.

To explore how a community's culture is expressed in part through its stories, students will respond to selected folktales. They will come to terms with *values* by asking what the characters learned in the story, and relating it to their lives. They will evaluate why it was important to keep retelling the story. They will develop a sense of *culture* by identifying the country and language of origin, considering what experiences would lead to a story like this. They will also determine whether the story reveals information about the community's verbal interactional routines, games, celebrations, heroes and attitudes toward old/young people. They will look into what the *relationships* in the story reveal by asking how problems were solved, who contributed to the solution, and if this strategy can be useful to us. They will determine whether the *time* and *place* of the story give information about local settings and landscapes and reflect on parts of the story that transcend time and place.

As Jane Yolen points out in *Favorite Folktales From Around The World*, stories are powerful, fostering compassion and humanness. They are both history and mystery. As they carry the joys and sorrows, bruises and embraces of the societies in which they dwelt, they give us clues to open the doors to our self.

Modern technologies continue to extend the way folktales are told and retold, and these same technologies also offer new opportunities to collect, organize, and share information about the origins and diffusion of folktales.

Technology and Literacy

In today's classrooms, technology is the bridge between instruction and production. Technology fosters creative and critical thinking for students and provides tools that support their learning across the curriculum. With the right tool for the task, technology helps students reinforce essential learning skills. In this unit I plan for students to use Internet resources to research and read and/or listen to specific folktales, to use technology to record their retellings of a tale for other classrooms.

Multimedia projects are an engaging way for students to express their knowledge in any subject area. Software applications are now easy to use, providing students with powerful features. Students master basic skills, such as researching, reading, writing, speaking and listening. The use of technology brings us full circle in coming to terms with purpose. Just as folktales were entertaining stories with lessons to be learned, technology can be used to entertain as learning is engaged.

Background Information

Folktales should be understood as one of many forms of folklore. However, folklore is easier to experience than define. In general terms, folklore stands for the oral

transmission of cultural materials. The word *folklore* was coined in 1846 by the English antiquary William John Thoms to replace "popular antiquities," the phrase commonly used to describe folk traditions. His recommendation found fertile ground and within a year *folklore* became a household word in England. Although some might be tempted to dismiss folklore as old-fashioned or uneducated, folklore is a central part of life in the present, connecting us to the past and guiding us to the future. On its website *The American Folklore Society* lists several definitions and descriptions of folklore that communicate the range of materials that come under this heading. I choose this one for its breadth and depth:

Folklore is traditional. Its center holds. Changes are slow and steady. Folklore is variable.

The tradition remains wholly within the control of its practitioners. It is theirs to remember

change,or forget. Answering the needs of the collective for continuity and of the individual

for active participation, folklore…is that which is at once traditional and variable.

{Henry Glassie. *The Spirit of Folk Art*. New York: Abrams, 1989}

Folklore includes the related literary genres of myth, fairy tales, folktales, tall tales, fables, and legends. The boundaries between them are fluid and oftentimes folklore narratives are mixed genres. In his book *Folk and Fairy Tales,* D.L. Ashliman points out that scholars of folk narratives divide their stories into three main categories or genres: myths, legends, and folktales with possible subdivisions under each group. He offers these explanations for each type.

At the beginning of the unit, I will have students explore the everyday folklore they experience in schoolyard games and linguistic inter-actional routines, including, for example, taunts, jump-rope rhymes, counting out rhymes, blessings, greetings, forms of divination, invocations, nicknames, jokes, and a great many other forms that we will discover through shared inquiry. We will relate the children's stylized routines to the process of transmission of oral traditions and customs from one group of people to another, including intergenerational customs and lore, such as holiday traditions, food preparation, sayings and stories. We will also explore the role of these customs and lore in social life.

 I will then focus on the more complex forms of oral narrative, using the following definitions and explanations in my introductory PowerPoint presentation. I will invite students to think of examples as we progress.

Myths

Myths are sacred stories set in the remote past that establishes a context for humans within the cosmos. They deal with the great issues of life. They define our relationship with supernatural powers as they tell the beginnings of things or how things came into being. The characters in myths, humans, supernatural beings and animals, are believed to be real. The issues of myths are also those of religion: origin and purpose, good and evil, life and death. Because they express beliefs, myths are often told during sacred occasions and ceremonies. Prometheus and Pandora are well known examples from classical mythology, but all religions are anchored in narratives that account for the origins and order of the cosmos and the interrelations of natural and supernatural worlds and beings. The story by Benjamin Kpangbah, "How all the animals of the world became different" is an example of a West African creation myth.

Legends

Legends, like myths, are explanatory stories presented as truth. However, they are human-centered and set in places that are recognizable. Legends may be wholly imaginary or relate accounts of historical people. They are typically told in everyday language. Robin Hood and King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table are well-known examples of legends associated with the British Isles. In the United States, the Robin Hood legend became attached to Jesse James, an outlaw who is celebrated for stealing from the rich and giving to the poor. *Fables*

Fables are stories known for their brevity and didactic nature. Told in prose or verse, they convey a moral truth. The characters of a fable are often animals whose interactions highlight a recurring principle. Aesop's Fables are the most famous in this category, yielding sayings that give meaning to recurrent human situations. For example, the saying "sour grapes" can be used to identify someone who is being a poor loser.   The story by Peter Sirleaf, "Why Foot and Hand must work for Belly," has the character of a fable, as does Benjamin Kpangbah's cautionary tale "The Hard-Headed Boy and the Dragon."

Folktales

Whereas myths and legends are considered to be true by their originators and tellers, folktales are, for the most part, fictitious and not tied to particular locations They are less profound and less authoritative than myths, but they, too, offer answers to life's questions and provide a venue for reflecting on issues of concern.

Fairytales

Folktales and fairytales are often treated as two different types of narrative prose. Some folklorists consider fairytales to be a subcategory of folktales and prefer to call them magic tales, wonder tales, or "marchen." These tales contain a consistent schema of separation, initiation and return. Fairy tale characters give their readers access to a

parallel world where magic is natural and expected. They are timeless tales representing the viewpoint of only one leading character. Hans Christian Anderson and the Grimm brothers are the names most associated with fairy tales. The tales of Hans Christian Anderson's are mostly pure invention while the Grimm brothers used material from other sources. Ansumane Passawee's story, "Which Brother Should Marry the King's Daughter," combines the genre of the wonder tale with the African dilemma story, which ends as a question for the audience: Which brother should marry the King's daughter ? There is not necessarily a right or wrong answer. The challenge is for children to be able to defend the answer they give.

Students would find it interesting to look for the structure of separation, initiation and return in familiar fairytales. They can certainly recall how Hansel and Gretel were left in the woods to fend for themselves. The initiation stage in many fairytales is full of conflict and, interestingly, holds different paths for male and female characters. The heroines endure overwhelming domestic tasks like Cinderella or passive captivity like Rapunzel. On the other hand, heroes must exhibit strength and valor in responding to daunting challenges during the initiation stage. Upon return to a new community, the heroes and heroines assume a position of power. Students will be encouraged to look for occurrences of these elements in the folktales we read.

Tall Tales

Tall tales are narratives that mix fantasy and exaggeration with fact. The hero or heroine is often a larger-than-life character with a daunting task to accomplish. Characters use everyday language and may be based on actual people or a composite of people. They are always bigger or stronger than real people even when the character is based on a real person. *John Henry* and *Pecos Bill* are examples of tall tales, and there are recurrent situations that invite exaggeration in the telling, such as stories told by fishermen of the fish that got away. In some communities these kinds of stories are known as "lies," and are sanctioned for their entertainment value, even though lying is not. Tall Tales establish a framework within which lying becomes temporarily permissible. Children can be encouraged to think about the difference between when it is not okay to lie, and when it is expected!

Approaches to Studying Folktales

The elements and structure of folktales appear in cultures throughout the world. The recognition of these similarities by scholars brought forth attempts to organize comparative folktale research and to trace tales back to their most likely beginnings.

Classification by Type

In 1928 American folklorist Stith Thompson expanded the pioneering work of a Finnish scholar Antti Aarne, and published *The Types of the Folktale*. Using numbers 1 through

2.499, the Aarne-Thompson index defines traditional plots and assigns a type number to each. The type is categorized as a traditional tale that has an independent existence. It does not depend on any other tale for its meaning. These are referred to as A-T types and provide great assistance to scholars in their investigations of folktales.

Animal Tales are the first category of the A-T classification containing 299 types. In these non-mythical stories, wild or domestic animals speak, reason and behave like humans. The animal characters usually correspond to stereotypes, such as a clever fox, an industrious ant, a faithful dog, and a stupid bear. Humor usually accompanies the deception and the absurd predicaments that result from stupidity.

Ordinary Tales are the second category of the A-T classification and contain types 300-1199. The name "ordinary" is misleading. These include but are not limited to magic{fairy}, supernatural, superhuman, religious, and romantic tales. Their main features are formalized language, supernatural motifs and sympathy for the underdog. Although the plots of these tales may contain royal characters and magical transportation, the language remains folksy.

Jokes and Anecdotes are the third and final category of the A-T classifications and contain types 1200-2499. These include numskull, formula tales, tales of lying, and stories about girls, boys and married couples. This section contains humorous stories characterized by short and simple plots in realistic settings.

In this unit we will deal mostly with animal tales. However, according to the A-T classifications, many animal tales are considered fables. Consequently we will discuss this in the introductory lesson when students are sorting types of folklore. The trickster tales according to A-T classification belong to the Joke and Anecdotes category. This will provide a good example of overlapping genres in folklore.

Classification by Motif and Function

Besides the classification of type, Stith Thompson has also described, categorized and numbered about 40,000 motifs in folk literature. A motif is the smallest element of a story that persists in the oral tradition because of its unusual or striking power. Most motifs fall into three classes: Actors{gods, unusual animals, or marvelous creatures}, items in the background of the action{magic objects, unusual customs, strange beliefs}, and single incidents{a ballroom in a palace, a journey, tricking an opponent}.

Another important contribution comes from Vladimir Propp, a renowned Russian folklorist. In his *Morphology of the Folktale*, Propp provided an analytical tool for examining folktales. Rather than focusing on that which differentiates one tale from another, he concentrates on the similarities of story structure and story grammar. He theorized that folktales follow a specific formula, with as many as thirty-one narrative functions, used in each story occurring in sequence. Functions are stable elements{plots}in the story that never change. By comparing the relationship of these components to each other and to the whole, he concludes that, ultimately, there is only

one tale in its structure.

Since folktales are short pieces of literature, the students will gain experience in recognizing motifs and elements. In the tales we read they can look for such motifs as trickery, consequences of greed, helper characters, foolishness, repetitive tasks, and importance of threes. They can also find some of these elements, such as departure, guidance, struggle, victory, return, and recognition. In recognizing these motifs and story elements, students can apply them to other types of literature, movies, and video games.

Theories and Approaches

There are a number of theories about the origins of folktales. These theories attempt to account for widespread similarities and differences in folktales.

The Monogenesis {single origin} Theory claims that all folktales were descended from the myths of Indo-Europeans or Aryans. The Polygenesis {many Origins} Theory argues that folktales emerge in response to experiences shared by people everywhere, who shape tales to fit them to local circummstances. In the field of psychology, Sigmund Freud believed that folktales came from unconscious needs and frustrations that best expressed themselves through a person's dreams. Symbolic images that disguise painful material make the dream more acceptable even to the sleeping person. On the other hand, Carl Jung proposed that folktales grew from "collective unconscious" experiences embedded in the human psyche. The stories that grew out of those experiences are found among all people. Using the psychological approach, the interpreter can analyze the psychology behind the storyteller's creative process, including the recollection of old tales, or analyze the motivation of the characters in the story.

The sociological interest in folktales is twofold. First there is the sociology "of" storytelling itself: the gathering of an audience for the purpose of hearing stories, the distribution of roles in the telling of a story, the process of collecting stories for publication, and the creative choices made by tellers that change the way stories are told by others. Secondly, there is the sociology "in" folktales, focused when we use these texts for studying social relationships. Although the folktales feature individual characters rather than groups of people, social organizations are implied in the background. Religion also permeates folktales in which storytellers are quick to ridicule unworthy priests and target hypocrisy. An early anthropological approach known as evolutionism claims that folktales are remnants of ancient narratives that explained and accompanied fertility rites, and were used as moral lessons that society wanted its people to learn. The aesthetic approach is interested in the story's impact on today's audience. What makes the folktales pleasing? Scholars study the rhythmical language, vivid images, and observations of human behavior. For them our emotional involvement with the characters in the story becomes more important than the origins, diffusions, and classifications of the tales.

Each of the above theories represents an approach to folktales, and can be used selectively or in combination, but always with a critical eye toward what the theory does not account for. Theory should not be used to invalidate the narratives of a community. On the contrary, the narratives that students will bring to this unit can be used to ground truth and correct theories that may not apply at all. Although students will not have to deal with the terminology of the above approaches, they will learn that folktales exist all over the world and have migrated from place to place with many generations of tellers and hearers.

Folktales for Curriculum Unit

African Folktales

Stories from Africa are traditionally transmitted by word of mouth. Often the stories teach a lesson, and frequently a person learns the lesson the hard way. Many African folktales depict the antics of a trickster figure endowed with human qualities, whose mischievous ways are to be laughed at and learned from. The trickster figure in many "Asante" tales from Ghana is Anansi, the spider. Storytellers treat these characters as familiar family or friends and their names change one moment to the next. For example, the trickster, Spider, may be called Anansi, Nancy, Aunt Nancy, and Buh Nancy. Interestingly, word play brings the name close to" nasty" and "nonsense," which can both be used to describe the trickster's behavior.

In the African folk tales, the stories reflect the culture where animals abound; consequently, the monkey, elephant, giraffe, lion, zebra, crocodile, and rhinoceros appear frequently along with a wide variety of birds such as the ostrich, the secretary bird, and the eagle. The animals and birds take on human characteristics of greed, jealousy, honesty, loneliness, etc. Through their behavior, many valuable lessons are learned. Also, the surroundings in which the tales take place reveal the great diversity of the landscapes and educate the reader about the climate, such as the dry season when it hasn't rained for several years, or the rainy season when the hills are slick with mud. The acacia trees swaying in a gentle breeze, muddy streams with moss-covered rocks that are home to fish, hippos and crocodiles, as well as water spirits known as "genies" who may take the form of snakes, and giant ant hills that serve as a "back scratcher" for huge elephants convey a sense of the variety of life in African landscapes both parched and lush.

These stories hold a place of honor, but not merely because they present "strategies for survival." More importantly, they present the world as a stage for the great and ongoing contest between strength and wit. They remind us all to be on the alert for tricksters in all guises in our midst. They also invite us to admire the politically and physically powerless who are able to outwit their oppressors. The message of the trickster's tale resonates with the African belief that life is celebrated more fully through the dramatizing of opposites, which trickster identifies and brings into dialogue. Vitality and inventiveness are values modeled and learned through African storytelling.

African-American Folktales

The slaves brought their time-honored verbal arts to the Americas, where the telling of tales not only helped them pass their time or entertain the master's children, but kept alive a symbolic system for communicating their experiences, hopes, and fears. Although the masters tried to expunge African tribal language and customs, they accepted storytelling, especially animal tales, as harmless. Consequently, the African animals were transformed into American counterparts. The jackal survived as the American fox, the pygmy antelope and the monkey as the American rabbit, and the African tortoise as the American turtle. The American wolf replaced the hyena, the African villain. Lions, leopards, tigers, and alligators retained their identity.

John Henry

The legend of John Henry, a railroad worker of superhuman strength is thought to be based on an incident that occurred during the construction of the Big Bend Tunnel in southern West Virginia. More recent research suggests that the incident occurred in Alabama. Regardless of where he beat the steam drill, researchers believe that John Henry was born a slave in the 1840's or 1850's. According to the legend he grew to stand 6 feet tall, 200 ponds – a giant in that day. (Stories and songs about John Henry have been recorded in the West Indies as well as in the United States. Some of these recordings are available at the Folklore Archive of the University of Pennsylvania.)

In order to construct the railroads, companies hired thousands of men to cut through obstacles that stood in the way of the proposed tracks. One such task was the blasting of the Big Bend Tunnel – more than a mile straight through a mountain in West Virginia – to shorten the length of the railroad along the Greenbrier River.

Men like John Henry used large hammers and stakes to pound holes into the rock for explosives that would blast a hole deeper and deeper into the mountain. Some tunnel engineers started using steam drills to power their way into the rock. John Henry challenged the steam drill to a contest. He won, but died of exhaustion, his life cut short by his own superhuman effort. John Henry became a hero of working men, because of his effort to prevail against the displacement of workers through technological innovation. The legend, as it is told in story and song (bluegrass bands often incorporate the sound of the hammer driving steel), celebrate the ways in which work is the measure of a human being, whose worth is diminished by "progress" that deprives him of the opportunity to work.

During our celebration of Black History Month, the story of John Henry will help students make connections to their rich cultural heritage. Students can compare John Henry to other folk heroes, including some who are depicted on walls in West Philadelphia murals, and who are honored during community celebrations around the year.

Objectives

The main objective for this unit is to study folktales as a literary genre facilitated by the tools of technology. In discovering the characteristics and patterns in folktales, students will acquire a schema for reading and responding to literature as well as engaging other forms of story in multimedia texts. Students will be introduced to the main categories of folklore: myths, legends, and folktales{ fairy tales and tall tales}. They will learn specific traits as well as overlapping elements. The students will use African and African-American folktales to explore the oral tradition of storytelling in African culture. They will discern the uniqueness and universality of folktales by looking at three types: animal, trickster and porquoi tales. Students will use the tall tale, John Henry, to initiate discussion of heroes in their heritage. They will learn how folk literature reveals aspects of history, geography and cultural values. Students will use the tools of technology to research background of specific tales and to record retellings of tales.

Strategies

I will be implementing this unit in a kindergarten classroom. The students in this classroom range in age from 5-6 years old. They are experienced at working independently as well as collaboratively. Project-based learning is very much a part of their curriculum. Classroom activities will include whole group, small group, and independent work. The class will have computer access in the classroom.

To familiarize students with animal, trickster and pourquoi tales, we will look at the collections of Virginia Hamilton, Julius Lester, Nelson Mandela, and the stories of Liberian elders living in West Philadelphia, collected and placed online by faculty and students at Penn's Center for Folklore and Ethnography. The students will research information about types of tales, authors and geographic regions. Students will work in small groups to read and practice retelling one of the tales. The children will perform a readers' theater. The children will use the applications KidPix or Kidspiration to illustrate and record their folktale. In their presentations and performances, the children will be instructed to include characteristic elements of folktales: setting, characters, plot, theme, style and motif. I will prepare a checklist to help guide them.

Children will use a variety of graphic organizers, {see Appendix} to help them compare and contrast the characters, plot, theme, style and motif of the various folktales.

Throughout the unit I will ask students to be attentive to opening and closing sentences in folktale. Beginning sentences have patterns such as, "Once upon a time…" "There once was…" "Listen to this story of…", or "In the days when…" These openings establish the setting quickly and refer to a generalized place, such as a hut, forest or palace. The ending of the folktale usually gives listeners a cue to let them know the story is over, ease the transition to normal conversation, or set the stage for the next story. The ego of the storyteller might also be revealed in the ending. A few examples are: "Now that's my tale," "A mouse did run: my story now done," "I go around the

bend, I see a fence to mend, on it is hung my story end," "And that is why, even today…" The list will be a resource for students' writing or retelling of a folktale. Students can collect these beginnings and endings in a story box, in the spirit of Ananse who acquired a box of stories from the Sky God.

For the culminating activity, the students will work on preparing a book and recording to publish their work. Students will work on writing scripts to explain different aspects of the Material presented in the unit. For example, the components might include: an explanation of a folktale, elements of folktales, types of folktales, a book review of a folktale, a commercial about food, music or clothing used in the story, a travel segment about the geographic locations of the tale, and an original or retelling of a favorite tale.

Classroom Activities

Lesson: What is Folklore?

Objectives: Students will learn how folklore reveals cultural values. They will recognize stories as the most common form of folklore.

Procedure:

I will begin this lesson by discussing the terms *folk, folklore*, and *folktales*. I will use an anticipation strategy by asking students to read several phrases posted on chart paper, such as: The Thing About My Folks; come and Meet My Folks; Folks Like Us; City Folks; and Country Folks. We will discuss the meaning of *folks*{people} and students will have an opportunity to add other common phrases and understandings to the list. Folks are a group of people who share a common factor. Some examples are: family members, classmates, church members, or ethnic groups.

To introduce the word *folklore*, I will ask students to think about games they play in the school yard. We will discuss how they learned to play the game, who decided the rules, who taught them jumping rope rhymes, etc. After ascertaining that these activities were learned from parents, older siblings or classmates, we will talk about other forms of oral traditions found in family and community life, such as holiday traditions, songs, sayings and stories. We will then work toward a guiding statement. Folklore consists of the traditions and beliefs of a group of people that have been passed down orally from one generation to the next.

I will then use a Smartboard presentation to distinguish between narrative folklore {stories, oral or written}, customary folklore {family traditions} and material culture{objects}. Students will interact with the presentation by sharing examples of each category. They will be encouraged to make connections for our celebration of Black History Month. I will add their contributions, and continue to do so throughout the unit, so that the original generic presentation will become a tribute to their African-American heritage, and later shared with a wider school audience.

We will then concentrate on narrative folklore as we look at examples and distinguishing characteristics of myth, legend and folktale. Students will work in small groups. Each group will have a basket of books that include myths, legends and folktales. They will sort the books into their respective categories and each group will select a text to represent each type of narrative. As students work on this activity they will discover specific traits as well as overlapping elements. They will use a checklist of characteristics for each type of folklore.

- Type of Folk Narrative: Myth, Legend or Folktale
- Title

Characteristics: fiction or nonfiction, animal characters, superhuman beings, magic elements, humor, setting, and purpose of story{explains why something happens, teaches a lesson, entertains}

Each child will then select a folktale to be read independently. They will use the checklist to respond to the tale.

Lesson: Folktales as a Genre

Objectives: Students will develop a schema for the folktale genre as they read and respond to African and African-American animal folktales.

Procedure:

I will begin this lesson by explaining to the students the genre of folktales. We will then use their responses from the previous activity to create a poster listing the elements of folktales:

- Setting: Time introduced quickly, Place is generalized
- Plot: Swift, Action-packed, Conflict, Cumulative {use of 3's}, Logical { even with magic}
- Characters: Few in number, Flat {one characteristic}, Contrast {good/evil, clever/foolish}
- Problem: Strong character takes advantage of weaker character, Task or Quest
- Solution: Short and to the point, Good and clever wins over evil and foolish
- Style: Use of rhyme and repetition, Rich imagery
- Motifs: Place, Object, Action or Character

As we read/listen to folktales, we will use the chart to help us study the genre of folktales and decide how these elements are used to tell a good story.

I will introduce the story, *The Name of the Tree,* as an example of an animal folktale. This story retold by Celia Barker Lottridge is adapted from a Bantu Folktale called *The*

Bojabi Tree. Due to a drought in the land, the animals haven't eaten for days. As they search for food, they come upon a tall tree with fruit on top. However, they cannot get the fruit down until they learn the name of the tree. One by one the animals try until the turtle finally succeeds by creating a verse to remember the name of the tree, "Bojabi."

Students will be divided into groups. They will use the Readers Theater format to present the story. With copies of the text, students will select parts to retell the story. One student will act as the narrator as the other children engage in the dialogue of the animal characters and action of the story. Retelling the story lends itself to the feeling of triumph within the journey motif.

Lesson: Trickster Tales

Objectives: Students will recognize characteristics of a trickster folktale and identify types of animals that appear in popular trickster tales.

Procedure:

I will begin by reading the story, "The Hare's Revenge" from Nelson Mandela's *Favorite African Folktales* to the class. We will briefly discuss the story. What kind of story is this? Is it a folktale? How do you know? Do you know other trickster stories? Which animal characters play the role of the trickster? We will make a list of the trickster animals that the students mention. The most common African ones are the tortoise, rabbit {or hare} and spider. As we read/listen to African and African-American trickster tales, we will notice how tricksters behave in folktales. They break rules, boast and brag, and play tricks. They can be greedy and nasty as well as clever and wise. Students will work in small groups to enjoy various trickster tales.

One group will read "Little Girl and Bruh Rabby" from Virginia Hamilton's *Her Stories*. Students will discuss how Bruh Rabby outsmarts the wolf, but only after Little Girl and her helpers trick him. Students will also identify the false message and substitution motifs.

Another group will read *A Story, A Story* by Gail Haley, a retelling of the African folktale that explains how all stories came to Earth. They will compare this to an earlier version, "How Spider Obtained the Sky God's Stories" from Jane Yolen's *Folktales from around the World*.

In comparing the two versions, the students will notice the universality of the folktale with variations for audience's listening pleasure. They will use the application, Kidspiration, to create a spider map graphic organizer to depict characteristics of a trickster tale.

Another group will read *Clever Tortoise* by Francesca Martin. This is a traditional

African tale from Nigeria in which the small clever Tortoise wins a tug of war with Elephant and Hippopotamus. In another story "Why the Hippopotamus Lives in the Water," the tortoise uses a clever trick to uncover Hippopotamus' secret name. In responding to the story, students will discuss the motif of size, the lessons learned, and the educational and/or entertainment value of the tale. I will guide them to recall the secret name motif used in our beginning tale, *The Name of the Tree.* They will then participate in a round-robin retelling of the tale. Students can improvise, invite audience participation and add dialogue. This shared activity will engage them in the tradition of African storytelling.

Another story of a trickster is the porquoi story "Why Dog and Rabbit Live in the Town," told by Edith Hill, from Monrovia, Liberia. In this story, a dog outwits Leopard, and saves his own life and that of his assistant, Rabbit, but they have to move to the town in order to provide security for themselves and their descendants. Students can use the storyline on the website of the Center for Folklore and Ethnography to develop dialogues between Dog and Rabbit, Dog and Leopard, Dog and his wife, and Dog, Rabbit, and the Townspeople. Then they can watch the accompanying video to see how a storyteller performs the dialogues.

Lesson: Map It!

Objectives: Students will recognize a map of the world and learn the geographical position of Africa as it relates to America. The students will learn the names of rivers, cities, crops and where various tribes live.

Procedure:

I will enlarge a map of the world to bulletin board size; the continent of Africa will be covered with orange paper. As the students learn the names of the rivers, major cities, crops and where various tribes live they can place this information on the orange continent shape. Students will pinpoint locations of story settings from books we have read. The ABC Book *Ashanti to Zulu* by Margaret Musgrove gives valuable information about the people.

Lesson: Telling the Tales

Objective: Students will identify strategies for performing a tale, including the use of dialogue, different voices for different characters, visualizing the setting, and interacting with the audience.

Procedure:

Using "From West Africa to West Philadelphia: Storytelling Traditions of Philadelphia's Liberian Elders," students will work in groups to develop dialogues between characters mentioned in the storylines. They will then watch the video of a Liberian elder performing the tale. How does the storyteller develop character and

setting, and interact with the audience?

Lesson: Books and Audio-Tapes

Objectives: Students will work collaboratively to create in their own voices, audiotapes of their favorite stories. The students will act as storytellers to leave a part of them in the classroom. The students will create illustrations, that will be bound together to form a book that will go with the stories. These books and tapes will be left at the listening center for future students.

Procedure:

To begin pulling our thoughts together, the students will brainstorm their favorite folktales. I will record and display their responses in the form of a list. The students will work in small groups, using the Reader's Theater strategy, to record their favorite folktale. Each student will have a specific part to play for the recording. They will be given the opportunity to edit the recording to meet their expectations of what a storyteller should sound like. Other groups of children will be drawing the illustrations that go with the particular story. This process will continue until all students have had the opportunity to be recorded. I will then bind together the illustrations that go with each recording. Each book and tape will be placed in bags to be included in the listening center.

Teacher Annotated Bibliography

Abrahams, Roger. *Afro-American Folktales.* New York: Pantheon Books, 1985. The author gives a thorough explanation of the diffusion of tales originating in Africa along with a collection of tales to be to told.

Ashliman, D.L.. *Folk and Fairy Tales.* Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2004. This work is an excellent handbook and starting point for researching folk and fairy tales. It contains examples of story texts. The glossary is cross-referenced. An extensive bibliography is complemented with up-to-date web resources.

Hempel, Carlene. "The Man: Facts, Fiction and Themes" at http://www.ibiblio.org/john-henry accessed on March 12,2008. This website offers wonderful resources for understanding John Henry, the man and the legend.

Hufford, Mary, ed. 2008. *From West Africa to West Philadelphia: Storytelling Traditions of Philadelphia's Liberian Elders*. Philadelphia: Center for Folklore and Ethnography.

Hughes, Langston, and Bontemps, Arna Eds. *The Book of Negro Folklore.* New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, !958. The introduction to this book provides background for understanding the role of tales and the issues of language during times of slavery.

Propp, Vladimir, Wagner< Louis and Scott, Lawrence. *Morphology of the Folk Tale*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968. This work was published for the American Folklore Society. This groundbreaking work examines story structure and story grammar. These functions can be used as starting points or prompts for student writing.

Thompson, Stith. *The Folktale*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977. This work helps the researcher understand the classifications of types and motifs.

Smith, Carl. "Helping Children Understand Literary Genres" at http://www.ericdigests.org/1994/genres.html accessed on March 13,2008. This article suggests that folktales make an excellent starting point providing children with a schema for understanding literary genres.

Yolen, Jane. *Favorite Folktales from around the World.* New York: Pantheon Books, 1986. This volume contains a collection of stories intended for telling orally. It is organized by type with an index of titles and countries of origins.

Web Resources

The American Folklore Society. The link," What is Folklore?" makes a good starting point for studying folklore. At http://www.afsnet.org/aboutfolklore/aboutFL.cfm

TeacherVision.com This is an excellent site for obtaining background information regarding African Folk Tales. At http://www.teachervision.fen.com/folk-tales/resource/

 Student Annotated Bibliography

Hamilton, Virginia**.** *Her Stories***.** New York: Blue Sky Press, 1995.This collection of stories brings together African American folktales, fairytales and true tales with female protagonists. The author's notes after each tale provide information for the origins and diffusions of the tale.

Hufford, Mary, ed. 2008. *From West Africa to West Philadelphia: Storytelling Traditions of Philadelphia's Liberian Elders*. Philadelphia: Center for Folklore and Ethnography. Lester, Julius. *John Henry*. New York: Dial Books, 1995. The gifts of this author and illustrator, Jerry Pinkey make this an engaging story with rich language and beautiful illustrations as a great African American hero comes to life before your eyes and ears.

Lottridge, Celia Barker. *The Name of the Tree: A Bantu Folktale*. New York: Margaret K. Mcelderry Books: April 1990. This lovely book is a retelling of an African folktale, "The Bojabi Tree." The rich language and repetitive patterns unfold as a small animal saves the day for others in obtaining food from the highest part of the tree.

Mandela, Nelson. *Favorite African Folktales*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company,2002. This is a collection of traditional folktales from different parts of

Africa. The stories include some familiar characters, and introduce the reader to some new ones. A map of Africa is included to give the reader a sense of geographic location of the origins of the stories.

Rickert, Edith. *The Bojabi Tree*. New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1958. This African tale tells the story of animal cooperation in obtaining food after a period of drought. This makes a companion piece to the book, *The Name of the Tree*.

Washington, Donna. *A Pride of African Tales*. New York: Harpers Collins Publishers, 2004. This collection of African folktales is organized by the types of tales: trickster, pourquoi and cautionary.

Web Resources

"How Spider Obtained the Sky God's Stories" and folktales at *Tales of People from Sub-Saharan Africa* website. Accessed on February 21, 2008 at http:///enargea.org/tales/black-African/sanidion.html

"Why the Hippopotamus Lives in the Water" at *Folktales from Southern Nigeria* website. Accessed on February 21, 2008 at http://www.sacred-texts.com/afr/fssn/index.htm

From West Africa to West Philadelphia: Resources for Teachers. http://www.sas.upenn.edu/folklore/center/service_learning.html

World on your Street from BBC Radio is a fun interactive sight for background on Countries of the world, including Nigeria. Accessed on February 21, 2008 at http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/worldmusic/index.shtml

Abadjia Rhythm: Music of Ghana. This site allows students to explore African rhythms with percussion instruments. Accessed on February 22, 2008 at http://www.aviarts.com/demos/flash/abadjarhythm/index/html

Learn to Read at Starfall. An interactive website for students to watch and listen to a variety of folktales. Accessed on March 12, 2008 at starfall.com

eTumble Books. A website that reads the story to the students as they are viewing the pictures. Games, puzzles, quizzes an maps are also available. Accessed on March 12, 2008. tumblebooks.com

Appendices/Standards

Storytelling is an engaging way to transmit information, and, as an interactional routine, storytelling also orchestrates social life. From one generation to the next, people have been passing on knowledge through the speaking/listening process of storytelling. In the classroom, the language arts curriculum is the appropriate starting

place for the art of storytelling. However, other subject areas, such as social studies can also benefit when narrative is introduced.

This unit will help students fulfill the Pennsylvania Academic Standards for: Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening; Science and Technology; and Social Studies. They will be listed in the appendix.

Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening

Students will have opportunities to read and understand essential content of informational texts and documents; use, understand and evaluate a variety of media; and use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes.

1.1 Learning to Read Independently

- 1.2 Reading Critically in all Content Areas
- 1.3 Reading, Analyzing and Interpreting Literature
- 1.4 Types of Writing
- 1.5 Quality of Writing
- 1.6 Speaking and Listening
- 1.7 Research

Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Science and Technology

Students will use a variety of technological and information resources to gather and synthesize information, and to create and communicate knowledge.

- 3.6 Technology Education
- 3.7 Technological Devices
- 3.8 Science, Technology and Human Endeavors

Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Geography

The following academic standards will be addressed as students understand other cultures and countries, as they relate to their own lives.

- 7.1 Basic Geography Literacy
- 7.2 The Physical Characteristics of Places and Regions
- 7.3 The Interaction Between People and Places

Pennsylvania Academic Standards for History

Students will understand and explain basic principles and ideas within documents of the United States Government; understand how law protects individual rights; and compare current situations to the promises of the Bill of Rights.

- 8.1 Historical Analysis and Skills Development
- 8.2 United States History

Endnotes

Carl Smith. "Helping Children Understand Literary Genres" at http://www.ericdigests.org/1994/genres.htm accessed on February 21, 2008.

"Culture as Reflected in Folktales" at http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/elemsoc/g3u22ess.html#time accessed on February 21, 2008

Jane Yolen. *Favorite Folktales from around the World.* New York: Pantheon Books, 1986, 8-9.

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D.L. Ashliman. *Folk and Fairy Tales*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press,2004,10.

"What is Folklore?" The American Folklore Society at http://www.afsnet.org/aboutfolklore/aboutFL.cfm accessed on February 22, 2008.

D.L. Ashliman. *Folk and Fairy Tales.* Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2004, 32-41.

Ashliman 77.

Ashliman, 34.

Stith Thompson. *The Folktale*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977, 9.

Thompson, 415.

"Vladimir Propp's Morphology of the Folk Tale." At http://www.bookrags.com/essays/story/2005/11/1/171729/302 accessed on February 21, 2008

Ashliman,139.

Ashliman, 146.

Ashliman, 136, 149.

Roger Abrahams, Afro-American Folktales. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985, 19.

TeacherVision.com, Use of Nature. Homepage accessed on March 3, 2008.

Abrahams, 20.

LangstonHughes, and Arna Bontemps, Eds. *The Book of Negro Folklore*. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1958,viii.

 Carlene Hempel. "The Man: Facts, Fiction and Themes" at http://www.ibiblio.org/john-henry accessed on February 23, 2008.