

Celebrating Cultures of the World Through Reading and Writing Folktales  
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**Abstract**

This unit is designed for the 7<sup>th</sup> grade English/Language Arts class. The purpose of this unit is to introduce students to the genre of storytelling and help them explore the purposes and functions of storytelling traditions. Embedded in this unit is cultural exploration and celebration through storytelling. Students will read, discuss and analyze folktales from several cultures. Then students will write their own folktales.

**Content Objectives**

This unit is designed for students in 7th grade English/Language Arts (ELA) classrooms in a diverse Philadelphia public K-8 school. There are three classes, with each class cycling into this ELA room for 90 minutes daily.

**Rational**

This is my tenth year teaching seventh grade English/Language Arts at Greenberg Elementary School. Greenberg's Ethnic make-up for the 2018-19 year was 48% White, 27% Asian, 11% Black/African American, 8% Hispanic/Latino, 5% Multi Racial/Other. There are dozens of languages spoken at Greenberg. The most spoken languages at Greenberg, from greatest to least, are Malayalam, Uzbek, Russian, Mandarin, Arabic, and Ukrainian. (School District of Philadelphia 2018)

Since I started teaching, I have heeded the advice of the progressive education books, magazines, and professional developments I seek out, and strove to make the literature in my classroom diverse. The novels I chose for shared reading, literature circles, and summer reading include protagonists who are African-American, Native American, Japanese American, and Jewish European. We barely read any books where the protagonist is a young American white male, as most of the books I remember reading in middle school were. I achieved my goal of making sure that, at least in my class, "white" does not equal "normal" and "male" does not equal "normal." This is an important lesson I want to instill in all my students, especially my students who identify as white. It is an important first step in working to dismantle the underlying implicit structures of white supremacy in American Society.

My book selections always bothered me because the diversity in the characters of my books did not represent the diversity in my school. My discomfort mirrors that of teacher Jim Hiller, who wrote about his own struggle in *Teaching Tolerance*: "I realized in that moment that my actions didn't support my beliefs. Daily, I professed equality to my kids, how important it was that we respect and honor people's races and cultures. That message was unintentionally negated by my read-aloud selections" (Hiller, 2019).

Greenberg Elementary does not look like most of Philadelphia, which is primarily African American and Latinex. Though many teachers in Greenberg try to choose diverse literature for our classrooms, we usually choose books that are well known and easily available. I do not think that in eight years of schooling, my Malayali students (speakers of the language Malayalam, usually from Kerala, a southern state of India) have ever read anything in school that reflected their culture. Malayali students are the second largest ethnic group represented in Greenberg, so their culture needs to be a part of my curriculum. However, I primarily teach reading by using novels. I have found just two middle school novels where the protagonist was Indian, and neither seemed like a good fit for guided reading. Even if I found a "good fit" novel, what about the other students in my classes? There are Chinese, Vietnamese, Palestinian, Egyptian, Libyan, Puerto Rican, Uzbek,

Ukrainian, Polish, Russian, and more. How can I find texts so that they each see themselves in literature? How will we have the time to read that many texts?

When I began this Storytelling Traditions of South Asia and the Middle East course, I realized that not only did the content of literature in my class not celebrate the diverse culture of my school, the structures or genres of literatures did not celebrate them either. I remembered what I had learned when taking Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) courses about the importance of capitalizing on multiple literacies. "In limiting the discourse in official school contexts to monolingual, written, literary texts from the majority culture, the richness of multilingual, oral discourse, vernacular writing and literary texts from minority cultures is left outside of the school walls," according to Hornberger & E. Skilton-Sylvester (2000, p. 105). Storytelling – broadly understood – is a genre my class is lacking. Every culture has important literary forms such as oral storytelling or story-telling through dance, song or skits. These literacies are often not valued in Western schools because they are not considered "formal" written literature. In my opinion, however, oral literacies should be brought into the classroom as a strength, not just to further goals of diversity. Teaching orality as mode of learning builds on the strengths and knowledge that students already come to school with. My class does not capitalize on the multiple literacies students may possess by just using twentieth-century novels, contemporary poetry, and retellings of Greek Mythology to teach reading and writing. This world storytelling unit will be a start towards this goal.

In the Teacher Institute of Philadelphia course I participated in, Storytelling Traditions of South Asia and the Middle East, we started off by reading excerpts from the *Kathasaritsagara*, "Oceans of Rivers of Stories," which is a very long, complicated, mythological frame story involving the origin of the "Big Story," the education of princes, and the intervention of Hindu divinities in the process of storytelling. This work includes many mature subjects. My Indian students are Christian, and many come from very religious families. They speak Malayalam, not Hindi, the national language of India. I realized that India is a vast web of cultures and traditions and I needed to develop some cultural competency in this area. I did some background reading on the history of the Malayali language, Malayalam literature, and the history of the state of Kerala. Then I decided to ask the experts themselves. I held a short focus group with all students of Indian descent in one of my three classes. There were five to seven students in the group. I told them about my class and asked them if they learned any myths or folktales when they were young. They were very excited at being asked and my interest in their culture. However, they said no, they were not familiar with some of the stories I was telling them. They mostly learned Bible stories in their families. Then two of them remembered that there is festival in the Fall, known as the Onam Festival, that all the people of Kerala celebrate, which has a legend associated with it. I immediately started doing research on this festival.

The Onam Festival is a harvest festival that takes place over ten days in the beginning of the first month of the Malayalam calendar, which falls in August or September. In 2019, Onam will start on September 11<sup>th</sup>. The legend behind Onam is the story of King Mahabali. It is a Hindu myth, involving the god Vishnu that explains how Kerala came to be. The story ends with King Mahabali having to leave earth, but he gets to return to Kerala one day a year known as Onam. To celebrate Onam there are sports competitions, traditional dance, reenactment of folktales, a snake boat race, the weaving and presentation of intricate floral carpets called Pookalam, an Elephant procession, and a nine-course feast called Onasadya, with eleven to thirteen essential dishes. Though the legend of King Mahabali is a Hindu myth, Onam is a secular holiday that brings together people of different religions and castes to celebrate Kerala. This festival really excites me. It will fall right when I am teaching this unit. I plan to start with a one-day mini Onam festival ("Onam Festival," 2015).

After starting my research on Onam, I have been corresponding weekly about the Onam festival with one of my students in her journal. She has given me more information about how it is celebrated by Indian communities in American and has given me ideas about how we could celebrate it in the classroom. She is excited to come back to my class next year to help me celebrate the festival. The student told me about the

traditional dance that is performed at the Onam festival. Several of my students study a type of Indian dance. I hope to have these students perform the dance next year. I hope this can start a trend of having mini celebrations for different holidays celebrated by the different cultures in Greenberg such as Eid and Chinese New Year.

During our mini Onam Festival, I will do a first telling of the legend of King Mahabali to kick off the unit. Though the story of King Mahabali is considered a myth (and I did find books of Indian and Chinese myths for children), I decided that it would be way too complicated to read the mythologies of several different cultures in a short unit. I decided that, with the exception of the King Mahabali myth for Onam, the texts for the unit would be folktales. According to Merriam-Webster's dictionary, a folktale is, "a characteristically anonymous, timeless, and placeless tale circulated orally among a people" (2019). In the article, "Using Folktales for Language Teaching," Soe Marlar Lwin defines folktales as, "a traditional story that has been passed on by word of mouth before writing systems were developed" (Lwin, 2015, 75). Oral stories, such as folktales, are a unique form of literature and offer an interesting way to learn about a culture. Because folktales were told and retold before being transcribed, always changing slightly, they, "express the wishes, hopes, and fears of many people, rather than the concerns of just one writer" (Cole, 1982, xvii). Also, folktales served and continue to serve as not only entertainment, but also cultural transmissions to pass on important values and wisdom to the next generation. The idea of stories as a form of cultural transmission seems to be so central to the art of storytelling, and so universal, that I decided it needed to be a key understanding objective in this unit.

I learned from researching folktales that the Brothers Grimm were one of the first to dedicate themselves to transcribing tales of native storytellers. Their work spread to scholars in other countries in Europe, and then throughout the world, transcribing and preserving folktales and other folk literature. Comparisons of folktales began to be made and it was obvious that there were great similarities in stories from around the world. Two theories emerged as to why there are such similar themes in folktales of different cultures. One is that plots originated in India and gradually spread and adopted throughout the world through trade and travel. The other theory was that the folktales all developed separately, but the themes of the stories are all universal, and so it is natural for many different cultures to have stories on these same themes. Most folklorists today believe these two theories are both true. After discussing the cross cultural themes and motifs of storytelling in the TIP course and researching more about this phenomenon specifically in folktales, I decided that identifying the common themes and motifs should be another objective of the unit. This blends with my previous objective because often these themes are a part of the cultural transmission (Cole, 1982).

Based on my research, I identified two major unit objectives for this unit:

1. Students will be able to identify common tropes in and purposes of classic stories in order to compare stories of another cultural tradition.
2. Students will be able to analyze the cultural transmission of a story in order to create a story as a form of cultural transmission.

When speaking with Professor Deven Patel about these objectives, Dr. Patel asked what the purpose of finding the similarities in the story would be. He was urging me to have students look for the why. Why do cultures develop and tell stories? What function do different types of stories play? We thought about these questions often in class as we analyzed stories. Deven suggested modeling different analyses of a story for the students, such as a surface analysis, which would couple linguistic analysis with a study of patterns and repetitions, and a deep-structure analysis that would look for how the various surface meanings feed into a broader system of significance. In other words, we were encouraged to move from the "what" to pull out the "why" of the story.

In class we often talked about the purposes of stories. Many stories are told as means of dealing with moral, political, and psychological issues. For example, the Indian Epic *Mahabharata*, from the time of approximately 1000-200 BCE, breaks all social norms. It has characters behaving the opposite of what is

considered socially acceptable and chronicles a war started because of the breakdown of social norms. This text is thought to show anxieties people held in their time and region. However, the epic contains the theme of revenge, which is a common theme among cultures, showing that peoples of different cultures and geographic regions are often wrestling with the same problems (Satyamurti, 2016).

Storytellers can work out issues in stories and often use animal characters to do things that people feel uneasy about. An example of this is the *Panchatantra* (*The Five Strategems*), which was written in 200 BCE, but is composed of tales developed orally in India from 1500 to 500 BCE. It is a frame story, in which a man turns his three dull-witted sons over to a scholar who promises to make them wise in one year. He does this by telling them twenty-two stories, most of which have animal characters. A frame story has one overarching narrative, but has one or more other stories told within it. While these twenty-two stories may seem like childrens stories, many contain trickery and betrayal that involve the animals killing and eating each other. Scholars have analyzed the animals to show that they symbolize different human traits and are meant to represent different humans behaving differently. In our TIP class, we as a group also discussed the animals and what types of humans they symbolized. This is an exercise that could be done with younger students and animal tales (though not the original version of the *Panchatantra*, as we decided it was not meant for children) (Olivelle, 1997). Another animal-related story we read and discussed in detail was *The Conference of the Birds*. This epic poem from the Persian Sufi poet Fari un-din Attar in the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD, is also a frame story involving animals. Each of the thirty birds represents a moral failing of humans. Each quest is a lesson. This story serves as cultural transmission to teach the most important tenants of Sufism through allegory. However, there is also much hidden commentary on the religious and social politics of the day (Fari un-din Attar, 1984). The *Panchatantra* and *The Conference of the Birds* are just two examples of stories that had dual purposes. They served to deal with the issues of the time and to teach important cultural knowledge from one generation to the next. Through these stories and many others, we learned in class to discuss and determine the purposes of stories by looking at structure and content. Though I do not think either of these texts would be a good fit for my unit, the discussions we had in class surrounding these texts inform the kinds of critical thinking I want my students to be doing about stories in my unit. This led me to add the major content objective:

- Students will be able to compare and contrast similar stories of different cultural traditions in order to analyze and argue the purposes of stories.

When I began planning this unit, I further researched the benefits of specifically using folktales to teach literacy. I found the most robust research in using folktales to teach literacy to English Language Learners (ELLs). I have several ELLs in each class, and being trained in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), I find that TESOL strategies often greatly aid students who have difficulty reading in comprehension and in accessing the curriculum. Oral tales usually have simple forms of language and straightforward beginnings, middles, and ends, which appeal to children. However, the psychological and moral themes and issues dealt with in folktales are important to all ages and cultures. According to Lwin in “Using Folktales for Language Teaching”, Folktales from across the world have a similarity in event sequences, which make them an excellent tool for language learning. I believe this conclusion can be extended, that the structure of folktales will make them an excellent tool for increasing reading comprehension. Lwin also posits that the familiar moral themes as well as the familiar narrative structures are a motivation factor for ELLs, and I believe they can be a motivation factor for all students. Folktales can be a tool to explore language and culture simultaneously. To do this, Lwin suggests using questioning targeted at helping students recognize the relationships between language and culture, so that students will come to the conclusion that, “Language, as a system for organizing the experience of people, emphasizes whatever is prevalent or important to the culture of the people” (Lwin, 2015, p.79). I intend to make this understanding an objective in my unit plan as it furthers my goals of comprehension, analysis, and cultural understanding. Lwin gives examples of asking, “Why do you

think?” questions for the food, animals, and motifs chosen in particular story to make students aware that stories can show what is unique to people of a particular cultural group and geographic region. One example of a question I would like to emulate in my unit is, “What do you think gold and its colour (as in ‘gold feather’ ‘gold ladder’ and ‘gold plate’) symbolize for the people and culture in which this tale originated?” (Lwin, 2015, p.79) I intend to use Lwin’s strategy of targeted questions about the links between language and culture in my close reading lessons and possibly find a way to incorporate it into graphic organizers students will use in cooperative learning when they are all reading different folktales.

Studying different tales with similar themes and subjects, such as trickster tales, can motivate students to develop claims and justify them with text based evidence. Lwin states this is one of the aims of language learning, but is also a very large part of the common core academic standards in English/Language arts. Lwin explains that discussion around the trickster tales bring out the different ideas and beliefs students from different cultures have about trickery, wits, and wisdom. Once students develop a claim based on these ideas and justify them using the texts, first orally and then in writing, they can compare and analyze their responses. I plan to incorporate Lwin’s strategy into this unit by having students read different tales on the same themes, and analyzing them through discussion and writing. The current way the School District of Philadelphia wants middle school students to practice written analysis is through a text dependent analysis. Since this unit will start off the year, I may model writing a text dependent analysis on a theme in the stories, such as trickery.

In “The Power of Story: Using Storytelling to Improve Literacy Learning”, Miller and Pennycuff explore the benefits of oral storytelling to reading and writing development. Research shows that the active engagement achieved through storytelling as a teaching strategy helps students develop a sense of story. Having a sense of story is having an awareness of the components of a story. It is important for developing reading comprehension because it helps students makes sense of the text and extract meaning from a story. The article cites several comprehension skills, such as prediction making and awareness of cause and effect, and literary elements, such as point of view, plot, characters, setting, and theme, that developing a sense of story aids in developing. When students watch storytelling techniques such as intonation and facial expressions being used, they will often try to practice these techniques when it is their turn to retell stories. Relating stories with expression will aid in their development in comprehension. This made me realize that I need to be sure to use storytelling techniques when reading the folktales to my students as short reading. I should draw the students’ attention to these techniques beforehand and ask them about the techniques and their purpose afterwards. Then, oral story telling should be a task students are required to accomplish. Students should practice telling folktales they have read with intonation and facial expression (2008).

In writing, Miller and Pennycuff show having students focus on the telling of the story first can aid in their writing because they most likely have much more experience telling stories than writing them, thereby engaging them them by allowing them to do something they are already good at. It also shifts the power from the teacher to the student, making the learning, “inherently more meaningful for students because the stories belong to them (Miller & Pennycuff, 2008, p. 40) Using storytelling as prewriting also helps students organize their stories. Researchers found that, not only does having middle school students use storytelling as prewriting improve their narrative writing, but also students can transfer these narrative writing skills to more analytical forms of writing. Therefore, in the final part of the unit, when students write their own folktale, there needs to be an oral storytelling component of the prewriting process.

The unit will start with celebration of the festival of Onam. On this day, the class will start with a write-pair share of the journal entry, “Tell a story you know that is associated with a holiday you celebrate.” I will give a brief overview of what the holiday is and then how it is celebrated in Kerela. I will show pictures of the parades, flower art, and feasts. I will show Kerela on a map of India. My former students will dance and talk about how they celebrate Onam in America with their families and friends. We will eat popular Indian snack

foods for our “feast”. Then I will ask students about stories behind holidays and pull out that most holidays whether, religious, cultural, or national have stories behind them. I will end with telling the King Mahabali myth, modeling the story-telling techniques of intonation and gesture. I will conclude with having students turn and talk to summarize the myth and answer what they think the purpose of the story was.

The next lesson will be a whole class overview of different types of storytelling, its history, and purposes. On this day, the class will start with a write-pair share of the journal entry, “Why do people tell stories? Why do people like stories? Who has told stories to you in your life?” I will talk about the history of oral storytelling, their travel around the world, and how the brothers Grimm started transcribing and comparing stories. We will talk about different types of stories such as myths, legends, fables, and fairy tales. I will also have to go over some terminology such as symbol, motif, trope, theme, and frame story.

In the next one to three lessons, we will do a close-reading and annotation of the King Mahabali myth and two other Indian folktales. With the King Mahabali myth I will be employing a think-aloud to analyze the myth for language, structure, purposes, motifs, themes, and cultural transmission. With the other two stories, I will get more and more ideas from the students, making the analyzing process more of a class discussion. We will fill out the Reading Folktales Graphic Organizer after we read each tale.

In the next two to three classes, students will work in cooperative learning groups. Each group will do close readings of three folktales from a different geographic location. There will be a trickster tale, a quest tale, and a magic tale in each group. Students will discuss the folktales and fill out the Reading Folktales Graphic Organizer after they read each tale. Each student will pick one of the folktales to become an expert on. They will practice telling a folktale aloud and discussing their finding on this tale.

Students will Jigsaw in the next one to two lessons. Students will now be grouped by the type of tale they chose to be the expert on (trickster tales, quest tales, and magic tales). Each student will take turns telling their story to the group and sharing a summary of their analysis on it. Then each group will fill out the Comparing Folktales graphic organizer in order to think about and discuss the similarities and differences. Final questions on the graphic organizer will guide students to think about and discuss the purposes of stories and about the similarities and differences between life in these different places.

Before moving on, we will have a whole class discussion of what we learned from the reading and jigsaw experience. We will discuss the common motifs and themes we found and propose reasons for these commonalities. We will expand on this to discuss what the language and themes teach us about the uniqueness and universality of the cultures.

Students will write a short folktale as a culminating performance assessment. On the first day of the performance assessment, the class will start with a write-pair share of the journal entry, “What is a life lesson that you would want to teach your children? How could you tell that in a story?” We will discuss this at length for students to get ideas. Then I will model filling out the prewriting graphic organizer using think aloud techniques.

The next day students will get into cooperative learning groups. Students will use oral storytelling as a prewriting technique, using their prewriting graphic organizers as guides. Students will elicit feedback from their group members using the questions on the back of the prewriting graphic organizer and write the feedback on the back of the prewriting graphic organizer.

Students will take two to three days to draft their stories, proofread their stories, and write a final copy of their stories.

In the final lesson of the unit, students present their finished folktale orally to others. Then students will complete self-reflections and group assessments. I will compile the students’ folktales into a book to be kept in my classroom library.

Major Unit Objectives:

- Students will be able to identify common tropes in and purposes of classic stories in order to compare stories of another cultural tradition.
- Students will be able to analyze the cultural transmission of a story in order to create a story as a form of cultural transmission.
- Students will be able to compare and contrast similar stories of different cultural traditions in order to analyze and argue the purposes of stories.

### **Teaching Strategies**

**Close reading:** Close reading is a deep dive into a text. It usually involves at least three readings. I teach my students that the first reading is for enjoyment and to get the main idea of the text. The second reading is for deeper meaning. In this reading, we pause often to discuss and annotate the text. We look at structure, word choice, and figurative language, and determine how these effect the meaning. The third reading is with a specific purpose, usually analysis, comparison, or reflection. This is often done in pairs and with the aid of a graphic organizer to help students focus their thoughts on the specific purpose and record their learnings and realizations.

**Shared Reading:** Shared reading is when the teacher reads a text aloud while the students read along silently. This models reading fluency for students. I believe this is a particularly important first step in shared reading, because in homogenous classrooms, the texts will almost always be above some students' independent reading levels. Teachers need to ensure that all students are able to access the content.

**Annotating:** Annotating is the act of marking up a text as you read to bring attention to certain elements in order to help the reader create meaning from the text. These elements could be structure, word choice, and figurative language. Students may also mark down their own thoughts and questions, including connections, inferences, and confusions.

**Think-aloud:** A think-aloud is when a teacher is explicitly verbalizing their thought process to students as they perform a task as a form of modeling for students.

**Discussion:** This unit employs various configurations for students to discuss the texts and their reaction to it. Different types of discussion models used include whole group discussion, turn and talk, and think or write-pair-share. Turn and talk is when a teacher poses an open-ended question for students to discuss with an assigned partner sitting close to them. Think or write-pair-share is when students think or write independently about a questions or topic Then students discuss with their partner. Finally, students can volunteer to share out in a whole class discussion.

**Graphic organizers:** This unit uses several teacher-made graphic organizers to scaffold students' learning and achieve the content objective.

**Cooperative Learning:** Cooperative learning is form of scaffolding in which students work in groups on specific tasks. Each member has a responsibility to learn and accomplish, but also he the responsibility of group success. Cooperative learning projects can be short or long term. They aid students in practicing communication skills, problem solving, and critical thinking. This unit employs both short-term and long-term cooperative learning. Students will work in short-term cooperative learning groups in order to do the final read of the stories with graphic organizers. Students will work in a longer-term cooperative learning group to complete the final project.

**Jigsaw:** The jigsaw technique is a form of cooperative learning. Students are broken up into small groups and each group becomes an expert in a different part of a topic. Then students are configured into different small groups that consist of one member of each of the previous groups. Then each member of the new group teaches that other members what they learned during their study in their previous group. I intend to use this to have students study and compare folktales. In the first grouping, each group will do close reading of several tales from the same geographic region. In the second grouping, each student will have read different tales from different regions. Each will orally tell one of the tales they read. Then the second group will compare the tales.

**Group Reflection and Self Assessment:** These are valuable learning tools for both the students and the teacher that should be done during and at the end of the unit. During the unit, I dedicate some of the class's daily journal entry topics to answering reflective questions about what they are learning and discovering, how their group is working together, what they and their group is planning and achieving, and what they are struggling with. This helps both me and the students have a clearer picture of their progress and needs. At the end of a unit, I give students a teacher made "Group Reflection/Self Assessment" to rate and explain their achievement, effort, organization, and team work. I use this as a small part of their grade.

**Modeling Writing:** Modeled writing is a scaffold that helps students move toward writing independently using targeted skills. The students watch and listen while the teacher creates a written piece in front of them, sharing her thinking and decision making process aloud. This unit will be taught in the beginning of the year, so this will be a critical step in helping some students get over their fears and confusion in translating their thoughts on to paper.

**Gradual Release of Responsibility Model (Gradual Release):** Gradual release is a style of teaching in which activity moves slowly from being completely teacher centered to completely students centered as students becomes more confident and competent at the task. The lesson usually starts with the teacher modeling a task. Then the teacher models, but gets help from the class as a whole. Then, the students do the task in groups, with the teacher circulating to help those who are struggling. Finally, the students completely the task independently.

## **Classroom Activities**

### **Lesson 3:**

**Time:** 60-90 Minutes

#### **Materials:**

1. Copies of a written version of the King Mahabali myth for the entire class (I will use the version in *The Puffin book of Magical Indian Myths* p. 24-77. A shorter and easier to obtain version is at <http://www.onamfestival.org/the-legend-of-king-mahabali.html>.) (This counts in this unit as trickster tale.)
2. Copies of an Indian folktale that falls into the quest category.
3. Copies of an Indian folktales that falls into the magic category.
4. Three copies for each student of the Reading Folktales Graphic Organizer (Appendix B)
5. A copy for each student of the Folktales informational handout (given out in the previous lesson). (Appendix A)
6. A document camera



7. An overhead projector

**Objective:**

Students will be able to analyze the structure and language of folktales in order to identify elements of folktales and speculate on the folktales' purposes.

**Standard:**

- CC.1.3.7.B Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences, conclusions, and/or generalizations drawn from the text.
- CC.1.3.7.C Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact and how setting shapes the characters or plot.
- CC.1.3.7.E Analyze how the structure or form of a text contributes to its meaning.
- CC.1.3.7.F Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in grade-level reading and content, including interpretation of figurative, connotative meanings.

**Procedure:**

**Introduction/Accessing background knowledge**

Review the Onam festival from the first lesson. Do think-pair-shares to have students volunteer what they remember about the holiday and to summarize the myth.

Have students take out the Folktales information sheet from the second lesson and review the key elements of a folktale.

Tell students that they will be doing a close reading of the King Mahabali myth and then two other Indian folktales. Review the column on myths on the Folktale information sheet with the students and tell them we will be looking for these elements as we do our close read of the King Mahabali myth.

**Lesson (Gradual Release)**

Pass out student copies of three Indian folktales and three copies of Reading Folktales Graphic Organizer.

**Modeling**

Remind students that in close reading, you read a text more than once. First you read the text as a reader, for enjoyment and to get the main idea. The second time you slow down and read as a writer, to try to see what the writer was trying to do and how she did it.

Read the story as shared reading without stopping.

Have students reflect and summarize the story through turn and talk.

Tell students that now we are going to do our second reading and we are going to annotate. Remind students that when we annotate we have a conversation with the text and we write down on the text what we think, wonder, and discover as we read.

Project the King Mahabali myth using the document camera and projector.

Read the text aloud, stopping often to do think-alouds and make annotations. Instruct students to copy your annotations on their papers. Model using context clues to figure out vocabulary. Model looking up vocabulary and writing down synonyms when context clues are not enough. Focus on what the author is trying to convey about the geography and culture of Kerala through the word choice. Point out the protagonist and antagonist and

their character traits. Infer that the protagonists' character traits must be seen as important to the storytellers. Point out how this is a trickster tale and how it also explains how something came to be.

When finished, go back to the Folktales information sheet and think aloud how the King Mahabali myth compared to common elements of a myth on the sheet.

Fill out the Reading Folktales Graphic Organizer using think aloud. Model going back into the text to find answers. Have students copy what you write down.

#### Guided Practice

For the second folktale, follow the same procedure as the first of shared reading, annotating, and then filling out the Reading Folktales Graphic Organizer. This time, instead of think aloud, try to get most of the information you write by eliciting it from the students.

For the third folktale, follow the same procedure as the first of shared reading, annotating, and then filling out the Reading Folktales Graphic Organizer. This time, try to make the procedure more like a class discussion. Try to get the students to start offering comparisons of the folktales and drawing conclusion. You may also want the students to fill out some or all of the graphic organizer in pairs and then go over as a class.

#### Conclude

Through questioning, have a whole class discussion about the structure of the folktales, what we can infer about the culture of the people who made up and passed on these stories, and the purposes of these stories. (You may want to jot down notes of what the students say on the document camera or chart paper to refer back to later.)

Tell students that all cultures around the world had and have stories they pass down. There are similarities and differences between stories from different places. In the next lesson you are going to be able to choose stories from different cultures, to read, study and retell.

### Lesson 3:

**Time:** 90-120 Minutes

#### Materials:

1. Student reading journals
2. Packets of folktales to give out to cooperative learning groups. My groups will be of three to six students and each group will get three tales: one trickster tale, one quest tale, and one magic tale. Each student in the group will get their own copy of the tales. The different groupings will be: East Asia, Middle East, Africa, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, Ireland, and Latin America. Two good resources to find folktales to use are:
  - a. Cole, J. (1982) *The Best-Loved Folktales of the World*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday.
  - b. Multilingual Folk Tale Database. <http://www.mftd.org/index.php?action=home>. Accessed March 23, 2019.
3. Three new copies for each student of the Reading Folktales Graphic Organizer (Appendix B)
4. A copy for each student of the Folktales informational handout (given out in the second lesson) to use as a resource (Appendix A)
5. Three copies of the Reading Folktales Graphic Organizer (Appendix B) students filled out about for the Indian folktales from the previous lesson to use as a resource.

#### Objective:

Students will be able to identify common tropes in and purposes of classic stories in order to compare stories of another cultural tradition.

**Standard:**

CC.1.3.7.A Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

CC.1.3.7.C Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact and how setting shapes the characters or plot.

CC.1.5.7.A Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions, on grade-level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

**Procedure:**

**Introduction/Accessing background knowledge**

Give students ten minutes to write a journal entry answering the following questions:

What were the three Indian folktales we read yesterday about? What were some similarities and differences among the folktales? What was your favorite of the three stories? Why? Use your Reading Folktales Graphic Organizers from yesterday to help you.

Have students pair-share their journal writing.

Remind students about the conclusions they drew in the previous lesson about the structure of the folktales, what we can infer about the culture of the people who made up and passed on these stories, and the purposes of these stories. If you took notes on what they said, show those notes.

**Lesson**

Remind students of their task today: You will be working in cooperative learning groups to read folktales from a specific region.

Pass out the new Reading Folktales Graphic Organizers for today's lesson. Review how to fill out the graphic organizer with the students and tell them to refer back to their organizers from yesterday to help them.

Have the different regions of the myths on the board and show them on a map. Encourage students to pick a geographic region that they or their ancestors are from, but remind them that we need relatively even groups and three to six students in each group. Help students figure out which geographic region their family is from and help guide them into picking out groups.

Seat students in groups.

Give out each groups' stories.

Go over the tasks and show them where they are listed on the board.

Review rules, norms, procedures, and consequences for group work.

**Cooperative Learning**

Students work in cooperative learning groups to read and annotate each story and then discuss and fill out Reading Folktales Graphic Organizer for each story.

The teacher circulates to monitor and assist students.

As student groups get close to finishing the Reading Folktales Graphic Organizers, remind students of the next task.

Each student will pick one of the myths to be the expert on. They need to practice telling the story orally and explaining the conclusions they drew about the myth from filling out the Reading Folktales Graphic Organizer.

With the class, make a list of good storytelling techniques (e.g. Looking at your audience, using inflection in your voice, using gestures) and keep it on the board for students to look at.

Students continue working in cooperative learning groups to pick, reread, and practice telling the myth they will be an expert in for the next class.

The teacher circulates to monitor and assist students.

## Conclude

Before students leave their groups, ask students questions to get them to discuss the same concluding themes as in the previous lesson: the structure of the folktale, what we can infer about the culture of the people who made up and passed on these stories, and the purposes of these stories.

Encourage students to go home and tell their folktale to their family members in order to practice for the next lesson.

## Resources

### Background Information:

Attar, F. U. D. (1984) *The Conference of the Birds* (A. Darbandi & D. Davis, Trans.) London: Penguin, (Original work written approximately 1177)

We read and discussed this epic in my TIP class. I used it in the rationale of my unit to explain how we learned in class to discuss and determine the purposes of stories by looking at structure and content.

Hiller, J. (2013.10.17) *Seeing Themselves in Books*. Retrieved from <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/seeing-themselves-in-books>

This article expresses the importance of diverse books in the classroom.

Hornberger, N., & Skilton-Sylvester, E. (2000). Revisiting the continua of biliteracy: International and critical perspectives. *Language and Education*, 14, 96-122.

This article gives information about the importance of and strategies for using multiple literacies in the classroom.

Folktale. (2019) Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/folktale>

I used an online dictionary for definitions my research.

McNeil, Lynne S. (2013) *Folklore Rules: A Fun, Quick, and Useful Introduction to the Field of Academic Folklore Studies*. Bolder, CO: Utah State University Press.

This book gives important background information on what folktales are and how they function in different societal groups.

School District of Philadelphia (2018) Students by Primary Home Language [Table]. Retrieved from <https://dashboards.philasd.org/extensions/philadelphia/index.html#/enrollment>

This chart gave me information on the ethnic makeup of my school for my rationale.

School District of Philadelphia (2018) Students by Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Age [Table]. Retrieved from <https://dashboards.philasd.org/extensions/philadelphia/index.html#/enrollment>

This chart gave me information on the ethnic makeup of my school for my rationale.

Satyamurti, C. (2016) *Mahabharata: A Modern Retelling*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

We read and discussed this epic in my TIP class. I used it in the rationale of my unit to explain how we learned in class to discuss and determine the purposes of stories by looking at structure and content.

### Teacher Resources:

Cole, J. (1982) *The Best-Loved Folktales of the World*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday.  
The introduction gives important background information about Folktales including the definition, history, and importance as cultural transmission.

Liptak, S. K. (2013, April 29) Folktales, Fairytales, and Fables, Oh My!. [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://lessonsbysandy.com/2013/04/folktales-fairytales-and-fables-oh-my.html>  
This blog post gave me information and ideas for the second lesson, which was an introduction to folktales and Folktales background information sheet used in that lesson.

Lwin, S.M. (2015) Using Folktales for Language Teaching. *The English Teacher*, XLIV(2), 74-83.  
This article gave me background information on my rationale for using Folktales and gave me strategies for teaching using folktales.

Miller, S. & Pennycuff, L. (2008) The Power of Story: Using Storytelling to Improve Literacy Learning. *Journal of Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives in Education*, 1(1), 36-43.  
This article gave me background information on my rationale for using Folktales and gave me strategies for teaching using folktales

Onam Festival, The Society for Confluence of Festivals of India (2015) Retrieved from <http://www.onamfestival.org/king-mahabali-onam.html>  
This article and linked articles explain traditions of the Onam festival. It also has recipes for the important dishes for the traditional feast and tells the King Mahaballi myth of the Onam festival in a kid-friendly version.

#### Student Resources:

Cole, J. (1982) *The Best-Loved Folktales of the World*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday.  
This book contains 200 folktales from every part of the world organized by region. This will be a source for folktales students will read in this unit.

Fairtalez. <https://fairytalez.com/>. Accessed June 10, 2019.  
This website has a more than 3,800 fairytales, folktales and fables organized by country. Each story also is categorized by reading time and reading difficulty. This will be a source for folktales students will read in this unit.

MocomiKids. "The Story of Onam Festival." *Youtube*, 14, Sept. 2014, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZsnO7Zpf\\_c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZsnO7Zpf_c)  
This video is a cartoon reenactment of the King Mahaballi myth of the Onam festival with a narrator telling a kid-friendly version of the story.

Multilingual Folk Tale Database. <http://www.mftd.org/index.php?action=home>. Accessed March 23, 2019.  
This database has thousands of Folktales organized by topic, country, and language. This will be a source for folktales students will read in this unit.

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Nair, A. *The Puffin Book of Magical Indian Myths*. (2007) Panchshel Park, New Delhi: Puffin Books.

This book has Indian myths written on an upper elementary reading level with vivid illustrations. It has the King Bali story of how Kerala was created, which the Onam festival celebrates. I plan to read this story to start the unit.

Appendix

## Folktales

- Oral Stories
- Anonymous (unknown author)
- Found in all cultures
- “Timeless” and “Placeless” stories
- Different versions of same story
- Passed down

### *Types of Folktale*

Fairytale	Fables	Myths	Legends	Tall Tales
<p>characters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• royalty</li> <li>• animals</li> <li>• people in disguise</li> </ul> <p>setting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• castles</li> <li>• forests</li> </ul> <p>problem:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• struggle of good vs. evil</li> </ul> <p>solution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• quests</li> <li>• magic</li> <li>• bravery</li> </ul> <p>tropes/motifs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• numbers (such 3 &amp; 7)</li> </ul>	<p>characters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• animals acting like people</li> <li>• usually three or less characters</li> </ul> <p>problem:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• only one problem</li> <li>• usually involves trickery</li> </ul> <p>solution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• wise character wins over unwise</li> <li>• ends with a moral</li> </ul>	<p>characters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• gods and goddesses</li> <li>• humans</li> <li>• unusual creatures</li> </ul> <p>problem &amp; solution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• involves magic and the supernatural</li> <li>• can explain something that happens in nature using gods and goddesses.</li> <li>• can teach a lesson</li> </ul> <p>tropes/motifs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• numbers (such as three and seven)</li> </ul>	<p>characters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• everyday people</li> <li>• royalty</li> <li>• animals</li> </ul> <p>problem &amp; solution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• can explain how something in nature came to be</li> <li>• can teach a lesson</li> <li>• quests</li> <li>• magic</li> <li>• bravery</li> </ul>	<p>characters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• based on the life of a real person</li> <li>• everyday people with superhuman abilities</li> </ul> <p>setting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linked to a real historical time period</li> </ul> <p>problem &amp; solution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• problem solved in humorous ways</li> <li>• exaggerated details</li> <li>• tells about a person’s accomplishments</li> </ul>

## What will we find in folktales?

Motif: element with symbolic meaning that repeats throughout a text. It can be reoccurring imagery, language, structure, numbers, or contrasts. It often contributes to mood and/or theme.

Trope: a motif repeated throughout works in a genre of writing. Often these tropes help to define a genre.

Symbol: to give objects a certain meaning that is different from their original meaning or function. Authors use symbolism to tie certain things that may initially seem unimportant to the the themes of the story.

Theme: the central topic or idea explored in a text. It can be stated in one word, such as “love” or “solitude.” A work of literature can, and often does, have more than one theme. It is usually not stated explicitly in the text.

Moral: a lesson, especially one concerning what is right, that can be learned from reading a story

Frame story: a story with one main story, and one or more smaller stories told within the main story

Protagonist: the main (usually good) character of a work of literature, theater, or cinema

Antagonist: character, group of characters, or other force that presents an obstacle or is in direct conflict with the protagonist. The antagonist is most often one character who has a goal that opposes the protagonist’s goal and will try to stop the protagonist from getting what he or she wants

Character trait: an adjective that describes a person’s personality over a long period of time



Reading Folktales Graphic Organizer

Title of Tale: \_\_\_\_\_

Place of Origin: \_\_\_\_\_

Character	Character Traits

Setting: \_\_\_\_\_

Beginning: \_\_\_\_\_

Middle: \_\_\_\_\_

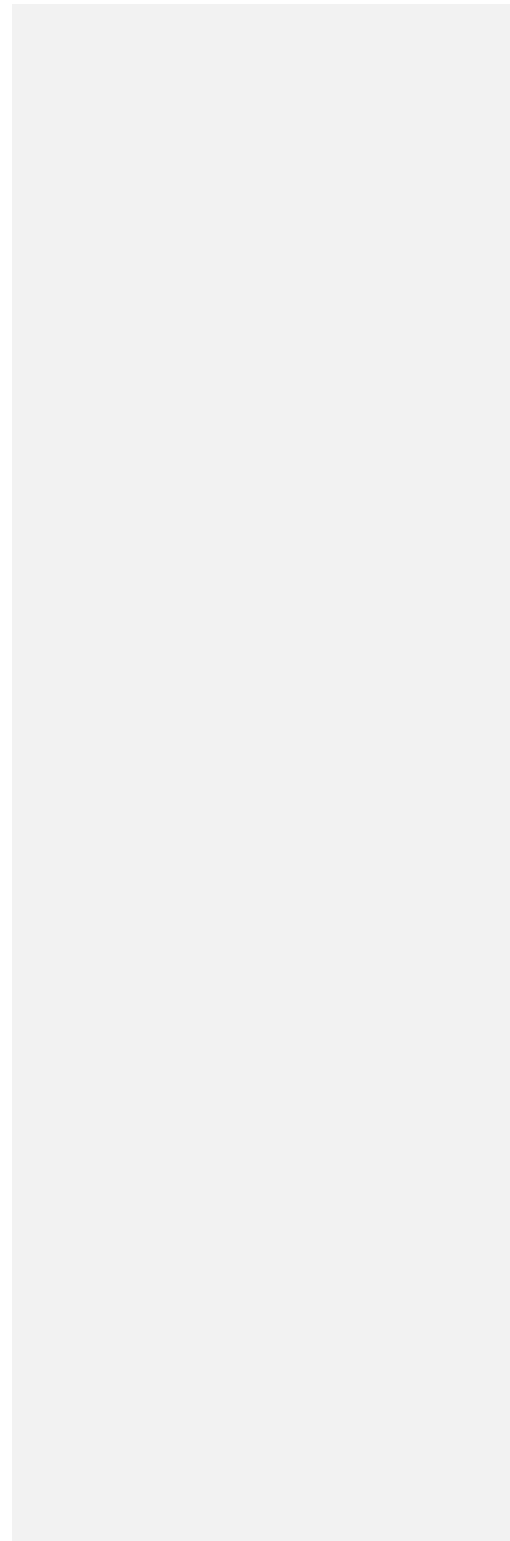
End: \_\_\_\_\_

Problem: \_\_\_\_\_

Solution: \_\_\_\_\_

Folktale elements: Is there ...

a motif?
a symbol?
magic?
talking animals?
a moral?
a quest?
a trickster?



### Comparing Folktales Graphic Organizer

Common theme among tales: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Folktales

Title of Tale	Place of Origin	Storyteller
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

List some similarities between the tales	List some differences among the tales

What could be the common purposes for these stories?	What could be some reasons for the differences among these stories?

Why do you think these stories were told from one generation to the next?

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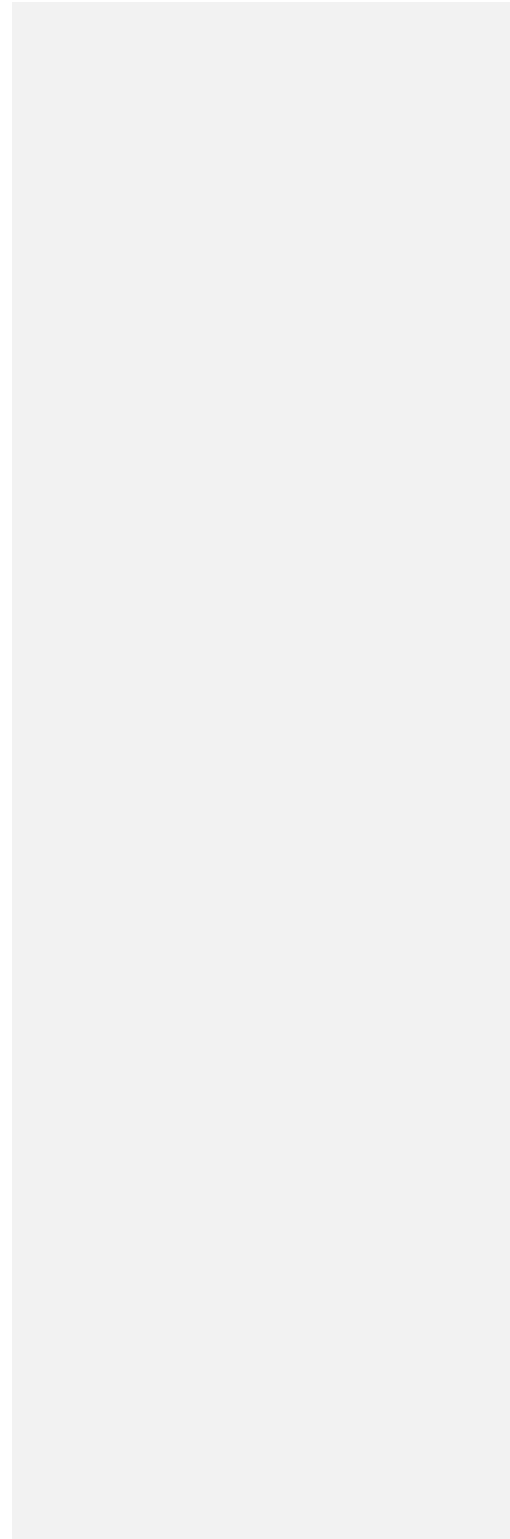
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Write your own folktale prewriting graphic organizer

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

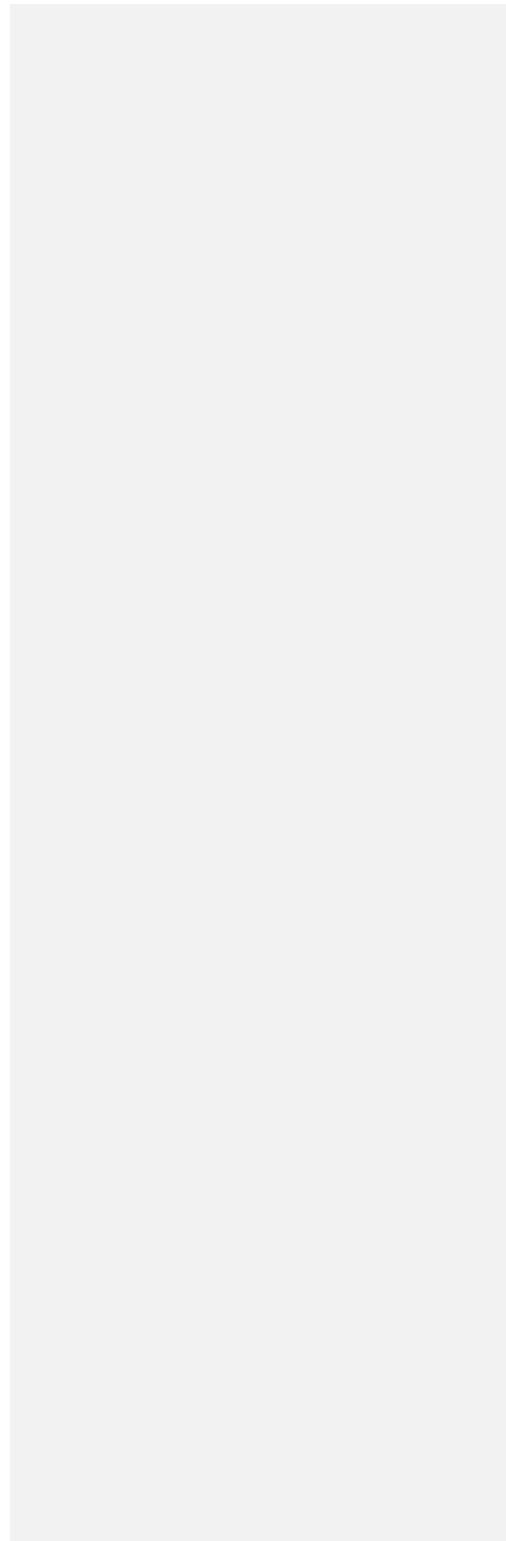
What elements from the folktales we read will be in your story?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Characters	Setting	Moral

Problem	Solution

Beginning:
Middle:



End:

---

Peer Feedback: *Ask these questions to your cooperative learning group after you tell them your story. Write the down the answers they give you.*

What is the moral in my story?

---

---

What is the problem and the solution in my story?

---

---

What was confusing about my story? What could I do to make my story clearer?

---

---

What was something you liked about my story?

---

---

What is something I could add, take out, or change to make my story more interesting?

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Appendix F Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Group Evaluation – Student

Group Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Members: \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Circle a choice for each statement. One means you do not agree at all. Four means you completely agree.

1. Our group worked cooperatively. 1 2 3 4
2. We stayed on task. 1 2 3 4
3. We followed directions carefully. 1 2 3 4
4. Our group worked quietly and followed classroom rules. 1 2 3 4
5. We listened to each other's ideas. 1 2 3 4
6. Each member contributed. 1 2 3 4
7. All parts of the assignment were done to the best of our abilities. 1 2 3 4

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



### Self-Assessment

Directions: Circle a choice for each statement. One is means you do not agree at all. Four means you completely agree.

1. I enjoyed this activity. 1 2 3 4
2. What was your favorite part of the activity? Why?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. I got to work immediately. 1 2 3 4
4. I worked cooperatively. 1 2 3 4
5. I stayed on task. 1 2 3 4
6. I worked quietly and followed classroom rules. 1 2 3 4
7. I listened to each other's ideas. 1 2 3 4
8. I treated everyone in my group with respect and kindness. 1 2 3 4
9. I worked to the best of my abilities. 1 2 3 4
10. I encouraged my partners. 1 2 3 4

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_



Appendix F: Folktales for Unit

Standards:

**Reading Literature**

**CC.1.3.7.A Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.**

CC.1.3.7.B Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences, conclusions, and/or generalizations drawn from the text.

CC.1.3.7.C Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact and how setting shapes the characters or plot.

CC.1.3.7.E Analyze how the structure or form of a text contributes to its meaning.

CC.1.3.7.F Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in grade-level reading and content, including interpretation of figurative, connotative meanings.

**Speaking and Listening**

CC.1.5.7.A Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions, on grade-level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.