Fables and Folktales Around the World

Summary
Students will become familiar with fables and folktales from different cultural traditions. They will see how stories change when transferred orally between generations and cultures. This lesson will introduce students to world folklore by exploring how folktales convey the perspectives of different world cultures.

Main Core Tie
Social Studies - 3rd Grade
Standard 2 Objective 1

Time Frame
5 class periods of 60 minutes each

Group Size
Small Groups

Life Skills
Communication, Character

Materials
Computers
Internet Access

Background for Teachers
In this unit, students will become familiar with fables and folktales from different cultural traditions and will see how stories change when transferred orally between generations and cultures. They will learn how folktales employ various animals in different ways to portray human strengths and weaknesses and to pass down wisdom from one generation to the next. Use the following activities to introduce students to world folklore and to explore how folktales convey the perspectives of different world cultures.

Student Prior Knowledge
Build on student's prior knowledge of the story The Grasshopper and The Ants or The Tortoise and The Hare. Ask the students to provide as many details as they can remember and help fill in the blanks. Emphasize the moral or lesson presented in the story.

Essential Question: What can we learn about culture and the world from stories (ie. folktales, fables, trickster tales, fairy tales, and poetry)?

Intended Learning Outcomes
After completing the lessons in this unit, students will be able to:
*Identify the definition and understand elements of fables and trickster stories
*Recognize Aesop's fables and Ananse spider stories
*Identify the specific narrative and thematic patterns that occur in fables and trickster tales across cultures
*Compare and contrast themes of fables and trickster tales from different cultures
Differentiate between the cautionary lessons and morals of fables and the celebration of the wiles and wit of the underdog in trickster stories.

Instructional Procedures
DAY ONE: Introduce Folktales by defining them as stories from an oral tradition that may be a blend of history and legend. Read to the class the Asante tale from West Africa, "Ananse's Stories," which tells how a certain type of story came to be called Ananse Stories. Point out the last two lines of the story as a piece of folk wisdom, a typical ending element of Ananse tales: "And from that day the stories of the Ashante people and their descendants in the West Indies have been called Ananse Stories."
"And that is why Old People say: If yu follow trouble, trouble follow yu."
Have students identify characteristics of this story and use this list of elements to collaboratively devise a definition of a fable or trickster tale as a short narrative that uses animal characters with human features to convey some universal truth about human nature and human behavior and to pass down wisdom from earlier generations in ways that can be used for present-day situations. Point out to students that, while fables tend to end in moral or cautionary lessons, trickster tales often celebrate values or actions that are disapproved of by society but that may be necessary for the survival and success of the small and weak; together, fables and trickster stories allow us to see the complexities of the human character. Ask students what they think about the Spider character in the story, whether they like him and his actions, and why? Why is Spider called a "trickster"?
View video of Anansi from eMedia.
Discuss with students the notion of "the talking drum," a story that is passed orally through generations and cultures, and that changes as it moves from person to person and from place to place. Discuss with students the differences between telling and writing stories, and ask them what the advantages and disadvantages are of the oral and written forms. Have students retell the tale from "Ananse's Stories" and note how the story changes in the retelling.
View To Beat a Drum story by Evelyn Coleman read by James Earl Jones on Storyline Online. To illustrate to students how stories change when passed down orally, have them play the Operator game: Have students sit in a circle and tell one student a secret message. The students then repeat the message by whispering it in another student's ear. Ask the last student hearing the message to say it out loud, and see how it has changed from the original message.
After playing the Operator game, you can ask students to retell the Ananse tale and note how the story has changed in the retelling, or have them write or draw the story to see how it becomes fixed after being committed to paper.
DAY TWO: Fables and trickster tales are short narratives that use animal characters with human features to convey folk wisdom and to help us understand human nature and human behavior. These stories were originally passed down through oral tradition and were eventually written down. The legendary figure Aesop was reported to have orally passed on his animal fables, which have been linked to earlier beast tales from India and were later written down by the Greeks and Romans. Ananse trickster tales derive from the Asante people of Ghana and were brought by African slaves to the Caribbean and parts of the U.S. These tales developed into Brer Rabbit stories and were written down in the 19th century in the American South.
Elements of Folktales:
Folktales...
...are very old stories
...have special beginnings (such as "Once upon a time..." or There once was...") and endings
...often repeat words or sentences
...have characters, settings, problems, and solution
Guided Practice
The following stories involve cases where the less powerful of two animals (including one human) who are natural enemies frees the more powerful animal. The divergent responses of the animals freed lead to different lessons about human behavior and values. Using the chart below, have students identify the characters, problem and solution, and moral of these fables.

"The Lion and the Mouse" (Aesop)
"The Fox and The Crow" (Aesop)
"The Ungrateful Tiger" (Korean)

Have students fill in the Story Structure Chart:

Ask students to compare the characters, plot, and lessons of these stories. Which characters did they like best? Which did they like least? Which story had the best ending? The best moral? To see how fables teach universal lessons about human nature and behavior, ask students to think of a real-life situation that applies to one of the stories.

DAY THREE: Group Work

Divide students into small groups and give each group one of the following fables/tales, located through the link below, that offer lessons on the dangers of being too clever:
1. The Fish That Were Too Clever (India, The Panchatantra).
2. The Fox and the Cat (Aesop).
3. The Cat and the Fox (France, Jean de La Fontaine).
4. The Fox and the Cat (Germany, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm).
5. The Seven-Witted Fox and the One-Witted Owl (Romania).
6. The Fox and His Bagful of Wits and the One-Witted Hedgehog (Romania).
7. The Fox and the Hedgehog (South Slavonic).
8. The Tiger Finds a Teacher (China).

Have each group fill out the Story Structure Chart for their particular fable or tale. Ask students to compare the animals and their behavior in each story: Why do the types of animals change or not from one culture's fable to the next? How does the behavior change according to the type of animal? What types of behaviors lead to what types of endings in these stories?

Have students locate the country of origin in Google Earth. Use Culture Grams web site to explore the country of origin.

DAY FOUR: As a culminating activity, students create their own fable with a moral/lesson which will be graded based on the 6 Traits of Writing.

DAY FIVE: Prepare to tell their fable to their first grade buddies.

Rubrics

6+1 Trait ® Writing Rubric Fable/Folktale

Bibliography


Authors

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