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# Tell Me a Story! Tales from Africa & other Cultures [4th grade]

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# Unit: Tell Me a Story! Tales from Africa & other Cultures

Grade: 4

Carrie Susong

Hardy Oak Elementary, N.E.I.S.D.

"Come and I'll tell you something," tickles the ear. ~ African Proverb

## Stage 1: Desired Results

### Understandings

*Students will understand that...*

- A people's culture includes their daily activities, food, clothing, family group, and religious beliefs.
- oral traditions exist across regions and cultures.
- storytelling is a way to preserve the cultural history of a community.
- distinctive and common characteristics of cultures can be discovered through wide reading.

### Essential Questions

- Why do communities tell folk tales?
- What do folk tales tell us about the culture of the community?
- How can inferences about the culture of a community help us to understand its folk tales?

### Knowledge & Skill

*(NEISD scope & sequence; TEKS; Core; etc.)*

Core Knowledge standards:

Stories – Folk tales (Grades 1-4). Grade 1: The Frog Prince, How Anansi Got Stories from the Sky God (folktale from West Africa), Tales of Br'er Rabbit (Br'er Rabbit and the Tar Baby), Aesop's Fables. p. 25. Different Lands, Similar Stories. Lon Po Po (China) and Little Red Riding Hood. p. 26. Grade 2: American Folk Heroes and Tall Tales - Paul Bunyan, Johnny Appleseed, John Henry, Pecos Bill. p. 46. Literary Terms - Myth, Tall Tale. p. 46. Grade 3: The People Who Could Fly (an African American folk tale). p. 67. Grade 4: I. A. Writing and Research. Grade 4: IV. Early and Medieval African Kingdoms. C. Geography of Africa. p. 93.

Content standards (TEKS):

4.4 B compare oral traditions across regions and cultures.  
4.4 C identify how language use such as labels and sayings reflects regions and cultures.  
4.8 C read for varied purposes such as to...discover models for his/her own writing.  
4.10 H draw inferences and support them with text evidence and experience.  
4.10 L represent text information in different ways (graphic organizer).  
4.11 D connect, compare, and contrast ideas, themes, and issues across text.  
4.14 B determine distinctive and common characteristics of cultures through wide reading.  
4.12 G understand literary forms by recognizing and distinguishing among such types of text as stories, poems, myths, tall tales, fables.  
4.12 I recognize and analyze story plot, setting, and problem resolution.  
4.15 D write to entertain such as to compose short stories.

## Stage 2: Assessment Evidence

In this culminating project, students will demonstrate their understanding of the role of culture in oral tradition, as well as their mastery of folktale writing skills and storytelling skills.

Step 1: Students will create a time capsule in the year 2006 to help a futuristic society understand the culture of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The time capsule will include different cultural artifacts from the current time period. Students will decide what cultural artifacts to include in the time capsule. They must include at least one of each of the following items: photograph of their geographic location, record of human communication (email, IM, text message, or voice mail message), food packaging (a wrapper, fast food package, bottle, can, etc.), and a movie or song.

Step 2: Students will write a folktale so that future societies can learn about their culture from its oral tradition. The folktale should mention the cultural artifacts included in their time capsule. The tale should also include a moral or belief that tells about today's American culture. It should include basic story elements (characters, setting, problem, climax, resolution, moral/lesson learned). Students should use the writing process to create and perfect their folktale.

Step 3: Students will share their folktale with their peers, so that they can help pass the oral tradition on to future generations. They should present the tale as a true storyteller, using proper volume, rate, clear speech, and voice inflection to show the different characters and their personalities.

Students may also share their folktale with younger students, to demonstrate that oral tradition must be passed on to younger generations.

Other evidence:

- Folktale types chart with text evidence
- Dialectical journals with text evidence
- Graphic organizers- plot diagrams and Venn-diagrams
- Folktale assessment- folktale summaries with multiple-choice questions and short-answer questions
- Rewrite a folktale commonly found in many cultures (to reflect American culture)
- Storytelling (retell a folktale to reflect present day culture)

## Stage 3: Learning Activities

*(Steps taken to get students to answer Stage 1 questions and complete performance task)*

### Lesson 1: Why Do People Tell Stories? An Introduction to Storytelling

1. Hook: Read-aloud "Where Stories Come From" (A Traditional Zulu Story).

<http://www.canteach.ca/elementary/africa2.html>. Begin a discussion of the story by introducing the essential questions for the unit: Why do communities tell stories? What can these stories tell us about the culture of the community? Introduce the vocabulary **oral tradition, culture, cultural artifact, geographic history, and folk tale**. Students will fill out Alphabox sheet and add important terms to it throughout the unit. Discuss the question "What is culture?" giving examples of today's American culture. Show PowerPoint slides of cultural artifacts and discuss what they tell us about American culture. Introduce African tribes/geographic map (add tribal regions to map throughout the unit). Discuss performance task.

### Lesson 2: Why do People Tell Stories? A Review of Folk Tale Types

2. Introduce five folk tale types and their definitions: *myth*, *fable*, *tall tale*, *fairy tale*, and *trickster tale*. Each have different characteristics and purposes but all are written to entertain and all tell us about the culture of the region/time. Put students into groups for an inductive sorting activity. Students read short summaries of different folk tale types from different cultures, identify each folk tale type, and use text evidence to explain their thinking.

### **Lesson 3: What Do Folk Tales Tell Us About Our Culture? Pecos Bill, Paul Bunyan, John Henry, and Johnny Appleseed**

3. Review definition of a tall tale. Discuss students' prior knowledge of American tall tale heroes. Divide students into small groups to read Pecos Bill, Paul Bunyan, Johnny Appleseed, and John Henry stories. Students read and make text connections in dialectical journal entry format (quotation/text evidence in one column with thought/explanation in second column).

On chart paper, develop a list of values, resources, events, and activities represented in American culture. Post the chart paper in the classroom and use it as a basis for comparison when discussing folk tales from Africa throughout the rest of the unit.

### **Lesson 4: What Do Folk Tales Tell Us About Other Cultures? Little Red & Lon Po Po**

4. Play telephone (read a shortened version of a well-known fairy tale with some goofy alterations). Discuss why the story changed as it went around the room. How does the person telling the story affect the listener's interpretation?

5. Read European version of Little Red Riding Hood followed by Chinese version, Lon Po Po. Students will compare the two fairy tale versions and record text similarities and differences on a Venn-diagram (or Venn-diagram flip book). Discuss as a class the following questions: What moral or lesson from the fairy tale is similar in both Western-European and Chinese cultures? Why is the moral the same regardless of the culture or the geographic origin of the fairy tale? Show a brief excerpt from the beginning of the 2005 film Hoodwinked! Discuss elements of American culture in the film. Ask students: Why is the story of Little Red Riding Hood still popular today?

### **Lesson Five: What Do Folk Tales Tell Us About Other Cultures? Frog Prince & Fairy Frog**

6. Locate the Swazi tribal area on the African Countries overhead transparency. Read background information on Swazi tribes (Appendix I). Ask students what text evidence they would expect to find in Swazi folk tales to support the Swazi culture's lifestyle, geographic location, and beliefs.

7. Read (American) "Frog Prince" and African "The Fairy Frog" (Swazi tale). Create class venn-diagram to compare characteristics of two folk tales. Ask students: What parts of the fairy tale are similar in both versions? Why is the ending or moral of the tale the same even though the geographic and cultural origins of the stories are so different? How would an author retell this story to reflect today's American culture?

### **Lesson Six: How Does the Story Change as the Culture Changes?**

(3-5 days, in writing workshop block).

8. Together with students, create a story plot diagram for the European *Frog Prince* fairy tale. Review basic story elements (setting, characters, plot, problem, climax, resolution) and fairy tale elements (magic, fantasy creatures- i.e., talking animals, happy ending). Place students in pairs to rewrite the story of the Frog Prince to reflect present-day American culture. Focus especially on setting and character development.

9. Read-aloud Mike Thaler's Schmoe White and the Seven Dorfs as an example of a fairy tale retold to reflect American culture.

10. When partners finish their stories, they will share in storytelling format. Stress the importance of introducing characters, setting them apart with different voices (voice inflection), and following storytelling format (problem climax resolution with lesson).

### **Lesson Seven: How Does the Story Change as the Culture Changes?**

11. Introduce background on Ituri Pygmies and locate on African tribes map. Play excerpt from Track 1 of Traditional Music of Burundi (fnac website). Then play "Songbird" from Deep Forest: Deep in the

Jungle (music inspired by Ituri Rainforest Pygmies). Compare the two songs with the class. Ask students: How can you tell the difference between the two versions? What is the Western-culture influence in the second version? What traces of Ituri culture remain in the second version? What might people in the modern Western culture like about this type of musical sound? (beat/rhythm, repetition, novelty).

12. Give a brief definition of the term Creole. Read “The Three Little Eggs” (Creole story?) and “The Talking Eggs” (A Swazi tale). Have students draw a split-picture representation to show the cultural differences between the two stories (large construction paper divided in half). Discuss the following: In what ways are the two folk tales similar? In what ways are the two folk tales different? Why do you think the folk tales are similar? How did the original Swazi story change as it traveled to the Caribbean and the United States? What moral or lesson do the cultures share? Do the folk tales remind you of any Western-European folk tales (connections can be made to Cinderella)?

### **Lesson Eight: Creation Myths from Africa**

13. Introduce background information on the Yoruba and peoples of Tanganyika. Label the Yoruba and Tanganyika tribes on map. Ask students to look for clues about the tribes’ geographic locations in the readings. Students will read two African myths, “A Home for Sun and Moon: A Myth from the Tanganyika” and “The Quarrel Between Earth and Sky: A Myth from the Yoruba”. Tell students that both explain about why Earth is separate from Sky. As they read, students look for similarities and differences in the reasoning for each myth.

14. When students finish reading, have them do a think-ink-pair-share on the following questions: What reasons do the myths give for droughts and floods? Why might one myth focus on droughts, and the other myth focus on floods? How can Earth and Sky’s behavior toward each other help us to understand how the African people interacted with their neighbors and friends?

15. Students draw split-picture representations to show similarities and differences between the two stories.

### **Lesson Nine: Fables- The Same Stories Around the World**

16. Review the term fable. Remind students that fables have a moral, or lesson, and often use animals as characters who show one specific character trait (greed, laziness, gluttony). Their actions contribute to the moral of the fable.

17. Read background information on the Zulus and the Ashanti. Locate and label these peoples on African tribe maps. Ask students to look for geographic clues in the texts they will read today.

18. Pass out copies of two fables, “The Curse of the Chameleon” (Zulu) and “How the World Got Wisdom” (Ashanti). Explain that even though these folk tales do not explicitly state a moral, like Aesop’s fables, they are still fable-like in nature. They both use animals to teach lessons about greed and stubbornness. Spider is usually a trickster in most Anansi tales, but in this tale he serves more as an example of selfishness and stubbornness.

19. Have students read the two tales in pairs or independently. Then have students fill out the Chameleon & Spider Checklist Comparison. Discuss the checklist with the class. Ask students: What do Chameleon and Spider have in common? What important missions were they given? How did their actions hurt or help others? Why did they behave as they did? How do these characters symbolize the way humans act sometimes?

20. Together with the class, write a one-sentence moral for each fable.

### **Lesson Ten: Trickster Tales – Spider Meets Br’er Rabbit**

21. Review the term trickster tale. Review character traits of Anansi Spider. Introduce information about Uncle Remus tales and Brer Rabbit. Read the two tales in pairs and do venn diagram to compare “How Spider Got a Thin Waist” and “How Spider Got a Bald Head.” Discuss Spider’s character traits in both tales. How do these traits help us to understand about African culture and how the West African tribes thought about life and morals/values/treating others? What stories to we read today that have similar themes (stories from other cultures)? Read Brer Rabbit tale (African-American)

22. Discuss and fill out checklist to compare the two tricksters. What would Anansi and Brer Rabbit talk about if they met on a talk show? Extension: Have students pair up and write a talk show interview with

the two characters (would they boast about their tricks? Compete with each other on stage?)

**Lesson Eleven: Folk Tale Assessment**

23. Before students take the unit assessment, review the major vocabulary terms from their Alphabox list with the vocabulary memory game. Students will complete Unit Test.

**Lesson Twelve: Performance Task (3-5 days)**

24. Review performance task and rubrics for folk tale and storytelling performance. Students will need 3-5 days to complete the writing process and practice storytelling presentation. Allow for 2 or more class periods to present folk tales.

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