

Folklore Review

Chapter 5



What is Folklore?

- Comes from the oral tradition of virtually every culture
- Passed down over many years, altering with each new teller
- Eventually written down to be read

Common types of folklore in literature for young readers

- Nursery rhymes
- Folktales (talking animal, noodlehead, fairy tales, tale tales)
- Myths and pourquoi stories
- Hero tales (epics and legends)
- Folksongs

Considering quality in Folklore

- Sounds like spoken language, with rich natural rhythms
- Reflects the cultural integrity of early retellings
- Preserves the simple, straightforward structure of oral stories

Evaluating Folklore

- Explores significant universal themes
- Illustrations
 - serve as examples of artistic excellence
 - compliment and extend the narrative
 - reflect the cultural heritage of the tale

Characteristics

- Short plots (other than hero tales)
- Little character development
- Straightforward moral

Characteristics

- Themes express the values of the people who created them
- Language is direct
 - vivid vernacular
- Setting is often geographically vague
- Time is often vague

Characters

Heroes

- Sometimes unusual births
- Often required to go on a quest
- Sometimes have magical help
- Often must prove themselves through many trials
- Usually rewarded for their heroism
- Triumph because of cleverness, bravery, perseverance, supreme silliness

Literary Conventions

Story frame

- Directly reflects oral origins with markers of beginning and ending
 - *Once upon a time....they lived happily ever after*
 - *Long ago and far away*

Literary Conventions

Western cultures

- Repeated use of the numbers 3 & 7

Native American cultures

- Repeated use of the number 4

Motif

A recurring element, repetition of a word or phrase, objects, ideas, characters.

- and I'll huff and I'll puff
- mirrors
- slippers
- brave prince
- trickery

Motifs

Cinderella stories

- often contain a small shoe
- a flight from a ball
- a young sister who is mistreated
- a prince
- a wicked stepmother

Motifs

Characters

- Gods, witches, fairies, tricksters, stepmothers
- Behave in stereotypical ways so readers can predict how they will behave
- A representative human can be used to stand for a character trait

Themes

- Obvious, universal concerns
- Express the values and philosophy of the people who created them
- Good versus evil
- Hate, fear, greed versus love, security, generosity
- Justice

Themes

Enchantment tales

- The struggle between good and evil appears in the contrast between surface and deep qualities of goodness.

Themes

Quest

- Search for happiness or lost identity
- Hero succeeds only after repeated trials, suffering, separation
- Exhibits courage, sacrifice, gallantry, and cleverness

Types of Folklore

- **Nursery Rhymes**

- Folk verse
- Intended for very young children
- *Baa, Baa, Black Sheep*
- *The Farmer in the Dell*

- **Fables**

- A brief tale that presents a clear moral
- The moral of the story is explicitly stated
- *The Tortoise and the Hare*
- *The Ant and the Grasshopper*

Types of Folklore

- **Folktales**

- Cumulative Tales – each incident grows from a preceding one

- *The House that Jack Built*
 - *There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly*

- Talking Animal Tales – animals talk with each other or with human beings

- Brer Rabbit,
 - Anansi
 - Uncle Remus

Types of Folklore

- **Folktales cont.**

- Noodlehead Tales – characters who are pure hearted but lack
good judgment

- *The Three Sillies*

- Fairy Tales – magical tales with supernatural beings like trolls,
giants, dragons, elves, ogres, fairies

- *Cinderella*

- *Snow White*

Types of Folklore

- **Folktales cont.**

- Tall Tales – indigenous to the United States

- combination of history, myth, and fact
 - *John Henry*
 - *Johnny Appleseed*

Types of Folklore

- **Mythology and pourquoi stories**
 - Myths answer questions about how humans and the world were created
 - Express beliefs and customs of ancient cultures
 - Archetypal themes of life and death
 - Told together form a larger story
 - Pourquoi stories are simple forms of myth, answering questions of why...does the ladybug have spots, the mosquito buzz, etc.

Types of Folklore

- **Hero Tales: Epic and Legends** – stories focus on the courageous deeds of superhuman mortals and their struggles against each other or against gods and monsters

- *Illiad and the Odyssey*
- *King Arthur*
- *Gilgamesh*

– Epics are usually written in verse and consist of a cycle of tales that center on a legendary hero

– Hero tales that are not epics are called legends

- *La Llorona/The Weeping Woman*

- **Folksongs**