

Focus on Animation: My Filmmaking Class Unit Guide for the Theme Folk Tales and Legends

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Overall Objective

Enable students to explore the cultural universe of folk tales and legends by drawing on their own tastes, interests and knowledge.

Grade Level

Students aged 9 to 12

Content Areas

Languages
Social Sciences
Arts and Culture

Films used in this Unit

The Legend of the Flying Canoe (10 min 35 s)

Blackfly (5 min 6 s)

The Owl Who Married a Goose: an Eskimo Legend (7 min 38 s)



NB: The films can be viewed online free of charge at www.nfb.ca/focusonanimation in the My Film Class section.

Materials

Computer, Internet connection, videocassette player, TV set, sheets from a white flip chart, markers, Canadian folk tales and legends.

Summary

Folk tales and legends are an integral part of every society. The characters, places and events they portray are largely drawn from a people's way of life and surroundings. Every folk tale and legend, therefore, has its own cultural universe. For a discussion about the differences between a folk tale and legend, see the teacher's notes.

This unit will help students discover the fascinating universe of folk tales and legends through three NFB animated films. The lesson comprises three activities and a closure activity.

Introduction Activity

Approximate duration: 45 minutes

Begin with a class discussion, using these questions:

- Can you name a folk tale or a legend?
- Did you read it or hear it?

- Do you know who created it?
- Do you know where the story happens?
- Who told you the story? Your grandmother? Your grandfather? Someone else?
- Do you remember how the story ends?

Game: Telephone!

Suggest that the students play Telephone, a well-known child's game, to help them understand the importance of the oral tradition in passing down folk tales and legends. Divide the class into groups of six to eight, and explain the rules.

- The first student whispers the beginning of a folk tale or legend (one he/she knows or one from the list the teacher has suggested) into the ear of the student to the right. In turn, that student repeats what he/she has just heard into the ear of the student on the right, and so on, until all groups have gone around completely once. Then, ask the last student in each group to repeat the story to the whole class.
- What happened to the story along the way? Were the facts accurately transmitted? Were they changed? How do we explain this? What did the students remember about the story?

ACTIVITY 1: The cultural universe of legends

Approximate duration: 1 hour

Step 1: Open up a discussion by asking what characterizes the culture of a particular people. Can students think of examples from modern-day Canadian culture, e.g., from music, literature, food, religious beliefs, and so on. Explain that animated films are frequently based on folk tales and legends, and ask the students to name several films they have seen.

Step 2: Explain that *The Legend of the Flying Canoe* and *The Owl Who Married a Goose* are two well-known legends – the first French Canadian and the second Inuit – that have been made into animated films. Divide the class into groups of four and show the films. Each team should pay close attention to any cultural features that appear in the legends, such as place, clothing, characters, houses, music, images and symbols.

Step 3: After showing the films, ask the teams to compare the cultural universe of the two legends by answering the following questions:

- Where in Canada is each legend set? Could the stories have happened elsewhere? What are the special features of these two parts of Canada?
- In each film, how do the images help the viewer to identify the place?
- What cultural elements can be found in each film?
- What is the impact on viewers of using colour or black-and-white footage?
- What differences do you notice in how the two directors illustrated the two legends? Think about images, music, narration, and so on.
- How does *The Legend of the Flying Canoe* reflect the French-Canadian culture of the era (the late 1800s)? How does *The Owl Who Married a Goose* reflect Inuit culture? Which cultural elements are similar to those we find today? Which are different?

Ask the teams to present their observations in class.

ACTIVITY 2: Sound and image

Approximate duration: 45 minutes

Step 1: Screen *Blackfly* with the sound off. Then, ask the following questions:

- What do you think is happening?

- Who are the characters? Is there a main character?
- What visuals captured your imagination?
- How does the story end? Is it easy to imagine the end without the soundtrack? What impact does making the film silent have on understanding the story?

Step 2: Show the film again, this time with the sound on. Ask:

- What role does music play in *Blackfly*?
- What story was the filmmaker trying to tell?
- How does the animated film add to the song? What images reveal this tale's universe?
- What sets this film apart from a folk tale or a legend?

ACTIVITY 3: The art of the folk tale

Approximate duration: 1 hour

Step 1: Explain that the students are about to discover how the film *The Legend of the Flying Canoe* is constructed. Divide the class into teams of four and answer these preliminary questions:

- Who are the characters in *The Legend of the Flying Canoe*?
- Where and when does the story take place?

Hand out large flip chart sheets for groups to write their answers.

Step 2: Explain that each team's mission is to describe one aspect of the film's structure to the other teams. Assign each team one of the following questions:

- 1) What is the trigger incident?
- 2) What is the disruptive incident?
- 3) How does the story continue after that incident?
- 4) How does the story end?

Step 3: Ask the teams to present their work in any form they wish, for example as a skit or through illustrations, mime, drawings or other means.

Closure Activity

Approximate duration: 1 hour

Ask the students to form small groups based on their areas of interest, in order to invent a legend using the structure of the film they liked best. Once all members of the team have given their ideas, each student can write a part of the script.

Check for Understanding

Make sure that the students have understood each of the above activities by asking questions. Take time to clarify the distinction between a folk tale, a legend and a song. Ask the students in what ways the film scripts succeeded in illustrating the folk tale universe effectively.

Evaluation

You can conduct a formative evaluation throughout the unit, though only the closure activity comprises evaluation sheets, which are appended. One is to be completed by the teacher, and the other by the individual students. If you wish, you can arrange an in-class discussion before having the students complete the self-evaluation sheets.

Web Resources

“Helping Children Understand Literary Genres”: <http://www.ericdigests.org/1994/genres.htm>

“Literary Genres”: http://www.gcms.k12.il.us/gcmsel/lynnet/literary_genres.htm

The Flying Canoe by Roch Carrier (an English picture book inspired by the Quebec folk tale “La chasse galerie” and published by Tundra Books:

<http://www.tundrabooks.com/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9780887766367>

“The Flying Canoe” (full text): <http://www.americanfolklore.net/folktales/quebec2.html>

Collection of Canadian Folktales and Legends:

<http://www.americanfolklore.net/canada.html#3>

Appendix

Teacher’s Notes

Introduction: A folk tale is a story or imaginary adventure. A legend is a traditional story containing fanciful or supernatural elements, occasionally based on historical facts transformed through popular belief or poetic licence. Since both folk tales and legends are part of the oral tradition and are passed down over time and often over great distances, different versions exist. The oral tradition is a significant factor in their transmission. Yet though every country may have its own folk tales, the themes tend to be universal, e.g., life, love, birth, death, wealth, disease and poverty.

Activity 1: Images lend colour and a specific point of view to film version of *The Legend of the Flying Canoe*. We see the story through the filmmaker’s eyes. Black-and-white is still used to highlight certain elements of a film.

Some examples of cultural elements in *The Legend of the Flying Canoe* are a loggers’ camp, a canoe, a church, a cross, the Catholic faith and the devil. Some examples of cultural elements in *The Owl Who Married a Goose* are the Inuit throat singing that paces the film and the symbolism of the owl.

The Owl Who Married a Goose is portrayed using poetic licence, while *The Legend of the Flying Canoe* closely follows the structure of the legend as written by Honoré Beaugrand.

Activity 2: In *Blackfly*, the music is an integral part of the film because it illustrates a song written by Wade Hemsworth in 1949. The song itself underscores the frustrations of the main character, a surveyor.

Activity 3: Most folk tales and legends follow a similar structure: a sort of introduction that sets the scene, with specific characters, the time and place; a trigger incident that gets the story going; another incident that diverts the course of the story; a resolution that usually, but not always, makes for a happy ending.

Closure Activity: This activity should show whether or not students have clearly understood the principles of a folk tale or legend. Each team should be encouraged to demonstrate creativity.

CLOSURE ACTIVITY: Write a sort script for a folk tale or legend.

Teacher's evaluation grid

Name of student: _____ Date: _____

Evaluation criteria for subject-specific competency: Produce written texts in English.

Student:	
Is able to justify his/her judgment of the legend or folk tale used as a model.	
Develops ideas in line with the structure of the folk tale or legend in the writing process.	
Uses a varied and precise vocabulary.	
Is able to introduce fanciful or supernatural elements into the folk tale or legend.	

Evaluation criteria for competency: Cooperate with others

Student:	
Suggests ideas while developing the folk tale or legend.	
Takes the ideas of others into account in developing the folk tale or legend.	
Takes an active part in writing the folk tale or legend.	
Takes an active part in presenting the folk tale or legend.	

Evaluation:

- A Exceeds expectations
- B Meets expectations
- C Experiences some difficulty
- D Experiences great difficulty
- NE Not evaluated

Collective writing of a folk tale or legend

Date: _____

Self-evaluation of the competency: Produces written texts in English: I can write varied texts

Instructions: In the grid below, check the box that corresponds to your self-evaluation.

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
I can justify why I like the folk tale or legend selected as a model.				
I developed ideas in line with the structure of the folk tale or legend in my script.				
I used a varied and precise vocabulary.				
I introduced fanciful or supernatural elements into my folk tale or legend.				

Self-evaluation of the competency: Cooperate with others

Instructions: In the grid below, check the box that corresponds to your self-evaluation.

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
I suggested ideas while developing the folk tale or legend.				
I took the ideas of others into account in developing the folk tale or legend.				
I took an active part in writing the script.				
I took an active part in presenting the folk tale or legend.				

Signature of author: _____ Date: _____