

Middle Eastern Folk Tales Lesson Plan

Overview:

In this lesson plan, elementary students will take a magic carpet journey into a different time and place through folk tales, legends, and fables from the Middle East. By studying the theme of folk tales, students will encounter folk tales from different cultural traditions, asking what these tales say about cultural traditions and values. The goal is to deepening student knowledge of the Middle East and its connection to their own worldview.

Objectives:

Students will:

1. Consider what a folk tale is.
2. Read folk tales from the Middle East. (Available to loan from the CSAMES library.)
3. Analyze the plot, characters, morals and cultural values demonstrated in folk stories from the Middle East.
4. List the different moral lessons found in the tales and discuss what these morals reveal about the cultures from which they emerge.
5. Write a folk tale based around a moral lesson.

Activity:

1. Ask students if they know what a folk tale is. Make a list on the board of folk tales that they know about. Explain to students that folk tales are stories that are passed down from generation to generation to teach a moral lesson. The characters in folk tales are usually common people or animals who speak and act like people. Folk tales often reveal the understandings cultures have about their world and the values that they pride themselves in.

Folk Tales Available from CSAMES

- a. Johnson-Davies, Denys. *Aladdin and the Lamp*. Cairo, Egypt: Hoopoe Books, 1995.

The famous tale from *The Thousand and One Nights* is told here in six chapters. Aladdin's exciting adventure contains a wicked sorcerer, whom Aladdin must defeat, as well as a magic genie, who aids in Aladdin's attempt to marry the Sultan's daughter. (Available to loan from the CSAMES library.)

- b. Johnson-Davies, Denys. *Animal Tales of the Arab World*. Cairo, Egypt: Hoopoe Books, 1995.

The fourteen short tales in this book enumerate wise, foolish, sad, and funny stories about an array of animals, including donkeys, dogs, lions, turtles, elephants, rabbits, and crows. Similar to Aesop's fables, these tales provide moral lessons. (Available to loan from the PSAMES library.)

- c. Johnson-Davis, Denys. *Folk Tales of Egypt*. Cairo, Egypt: Hoopoe Books, 1993.
Seven stories adapted from Egyptian folk tales are presented in this book for Middle-school readers. These entertaining tales are in the fantastic vein of the Arabian Nights. (Available to loan from the CSAMES library.)
- d. Johnson-Davis, Denys. *Goha*. Cairo, Egypt: Hoopoe Books, 1993.
Goha, the beloved character of Middle Eastern folklore, is represented in this book of stories for young readers. Goha is a wise fool who rides a donkey and together the pair encounters many funny adventures. (Available to loan from the CSAMES library.)
- e. Johnson-Davis, Denys. *Stories from the Arab Past*. Cairo, Egypt: Hoopoe Books, 1997.
Twenty-one stories adapted from works of classical Arabic literature provide young readers with pictures of life in the Arab world. Sultans, princes, merchants, pilgrims, husbands and wives populate these entertaining tales. (Available to loan from the CSAMES library.)
- f. Johnson-Davis, Denys. *Stories of the Caliphs: The Early Rulers of Islam*. Cairo, Egypt: Hoopoe Books, 1997.
After the death of the Prophet Muhammad, there followed a list of successors who lead the areas of the Muslim world. This book relates twenty-seven stories about nine of these Caliphs whose empires spread over a large part of the world. (Available to loan from the CSAMES library.)
- g. Johnson-Davis, Denys. *Tales from Morocco*. Cairo, Egypt: Hoopoe Books, 1995.
This book for middle-school readers contains six Moroccan stories involving animals. These cultural tales offer wisdom and provide insight into human nature. (Available to loan from the CSAMES library.)
- h. Johnson-Davis, Denys. *Tales from the Sudan*. Cairo, Egypt: Hoopoe Books, 1998.
Six Sudanese folk tales about love, friendship, good and evil, and honesty are found in this book for middle-school readers. (Available to loan from the CSAMES library.)
- i. Johnson-Davis, Denys. *The Voyages of Sinbad*. Cairo, Egypt: Hoopoe Books, 1994.
This entertaining book relates the four voyages of Sinbad, the sailor from Baghdad. The book is filled with adventure and danger, as Sinbad encounters dangerous creatures and must contend with being stranded on an island. (Available to loan from the CSAMES library.)

2. Chose an assortment of short tales from the bibliography above and assign a group of students to one tale. Have the group read the story and then analyze the plot, characters, morals and cultural values demonstrated in folk stories from the Middle East by focusing on the following questions. These questions are available in a worksheet format, titled Folk Tales Worksheet, on the Magic Carpet Lesson Plans page.
 - a. Who is the main character in your story?
 - b. What characteristics does the main character have?
 - c. Where does the story take place?
 - d. What struggle must the main character deal with?
 - e. Are there other characters in the story besides the main character? What relationship do they have to the main character?
 - f. Is there any magic in your story?
 - g. Do any of the characters learn a lesson in the story? What kind of lesson?
3. Ask each group to present their findings to the class and list the different moral lessons found in each of the tales on the board. Discuss what these morals reveal about the cultures from which they emerge.
4. Assign each student to writes a folk tale based on one of the moral lessons listed on the board. Encourage students not to simply state the moral of their story, but to allude to it through the plot and how the characters interact. Have students read their folk tales to each other and/or create a book of the class' folk tales for each student.

Additional Resources

McCarthy, Justin and Carolyn McCarthy. *Who Are the Turks? A Manual for Teachers*. New York, NY: The American Forum for Global Education, 2003.

This teacher's manual is a rich resource for teaching students about Turkey and the Turkish people. Materials include lessons, photos, illustrations, recipes, poetry and stories. In particular, there is a curriculum section on folk tales in Turkey. (Available to loan from the CSAMES library.)

Rodseth, Lars (et. al). *Arab World Mosaic: A Curriculum Supplement for Elementary Teachers*. Dearborn, MI: The ACCESS Cultural Arts Program.

This resource book for elementary school teachers is comprised of six lesson units for teaching about the Arab world. Students will learn about both ancient and modern Arab culture in these lessons. Topics broadly discussed include holidays, plants and animals, family, and community, all in an Arabic context. There are also several stories adapted from Arabic folktales which students will read and analyze, thereby developing their cultural awareness and critical skills. Particularly helpful is Unit Six on Folktales and Stories. (Available to loan from the CSAMES library.)