Traditional Literature

Grades 3-5

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What is Traditional Literature?

- Traditional literature includes the rhymes and stories that were originally told out loud in huts, tents, or around a fire, and passed down through the years.
- Also called folklore, these stories have no known authors.
- Told by people in all lands to explain their lives and their world.
- Tell us how people thought and what they valued as a society through their themes.
- Includes: rhymes, folktales, fables, legends, and myths.
Types of Traditional Literature

- Rhymes
- Folktales
- Fables
- Legends
- Myths
Folk Rhymes

- Folk rhymes are a type of traditional literature
- Mother Goose collections are best-known
- Includes: counting rhymes, finger play, riddles, games, alphabets, time verses, songs, tongue twisters, nonsense rhymes, superstitions, and memorable characters
- Mention of these rhymes still found in modern literature
Other Folk Rhyme Books

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Folktales are the most common and familiar type of traditional literature.
Simple stories with talking beasts, kings and princesses, witches and wishes.
Used for entertainment and education.
Show values, beliefs and traditions of different groups of people.

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Folktale Characteristics

- Set in distant past
- Characters all good or all bad
- Often start with “Once upon a time…”
- Share lesson or belief
- Explore common themes: kindness, bravery and cunning are rewarded; evil, cruelty or laziness are punished
- Usually have happy endings
- Have special repeated details called “motifs” (See slides 8-16)
Motifs

- A motif is a detail in a folktale that is repeated in the story
- Found in folktales around the world
- Give folktales their special flavor
Common Motifs

Common motifs include:

- Special numbers 3 & 7
- Magical creatures
- Magical objects
- Going on a quest
- Chants
- Enchantments
- Transformation

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Special Number Motif

- Number 3 appears frequently in folktales
- Number of main characters: 3 little pigs, 3 Billy Goats Gruff, 3 bears
- Repeated actions or events: making 3 wishes, crossing bridge 3 times, building 3 houses,
- Repetition builds interest or suspense in story
- Number 7 is less frequent special number: 7 Chinese brothers, 7 dwarves

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Magical Creatures Motif

- Magical creatures with special abilities in folktales include: fairies, elves, trolls, genies, giants, ogres, magical hens, witches and wizards
- Magical creatures can be bad or good
- Often serve as “magical helpers” to the main character: e.g., the fairy godmother helps Cinderella
Magical Objects Motif

- Magical objects in folktales include: pasta or porridge pot, wand, ring, beanstalk, harp, doll, flying carpet and genie’s lamp, and talking eggs
- Used by the main character for help, e.g., Jack climbs the magic beanstalk
Enchantment Motif

- Magical creatures often place other characters under enchantment, or spell
- Snow White and Sleeping Beauty were under spells
- Spells broken by acts of kindness, bravery or love
Chants Motif

- Chants are short rhymes, or refrains, repeated in story
- Examples include:
  
  "Mirror Mirror on the Wall..."
  "Fee, Fo, Fum..."
  "Then I’ll huff and I’ll puff..."
Quest Motif

- Quest is a special journey to obtain something of value: stories from the Sky God, great riches, princess bride.
- Quest involves completing 3 tasks despite danger.
Transformation Motif

- Magical creatures transform themselves or another into different person, animal or object
- Examples include: Prince changed into Beast; Snow White’s stepmother changing into old woman selling apples
- Transformation spell broken by act of love or kindness
Types of Folktales

- Special kinds of folktales include: fairy tales, trickster tales, and tall tales
Fairy Tales

- Fairy tales are a type of folktale
- Magic is key element
- Magical creatures are characters: fairies, giants, elves, witches and ogres
- Perform magical deeds of enchantment or transformation
- Have “happily ever after” ending
Other Fairy Tale Books
Trickster Tales

- Trickster tales are a type of folktale
- Smaller or weaker character uses cunning to outwit stronger, more powerful character
- Animal or human characters
- Tricksters can be selfish or generous
- Show culture’s wisdom about human nature
Other Trickster Tale Books

- Ananse and the Lizard
  - A West African Tale
  - Retold and illustrated by Pat Cummings
- Please, Malese!
  - A Trickster Tale from Haiti
- Love and Roast Chicken
  - A Trickster Tale from the Andes Mountains
Tall Tales

- Tall tales are a type of folktale
- Key element of exaggeration (hyperbole) includes character’s physical traits and actions
- Exaggeration provides humor and exciting adventure
- Many American tall tales
Other Tall Tale Books

- Pecos Bill by Steven Kellogg
- Master Man: A Tall Tale of Nigeria by Aaron Shepard
- American Tall Tales by Mary Pope Osborne

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Fables

- Fables are a type of traditional literature
- Very brief stories
- Characters are usually animals with human characteristics – good or bad
- Teach obvious moral lesson for behavior
- Often end with a *proverb*, which is the stated moral of the fable; e.g., the fable “The Tortoise and the Hare” ends with the proverb “*Slow and steady wins the race.*”
- Aesop’s fables are best-known examples
Other Fable Books

- The Tortoise and the Hare
- Seven Blind Mice
- The Ant and the Grasshopper

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Legends

- Legends are a type of traditional literature
- Stories about famous heroes and their mighty deeds
- May be based on real person, but stories exaggerate hero’s actions (hyperbole)
- Heroes represent ideas and values of a nation or people
Other Legend Books

1. Young Lancelot
2. The Legend of William Tell
3. The Memoirs of Robin Hood

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Myths are a type of traditional literature
- Explain natural phenomena: meanings of constellations, earthquakes, storms
- Explain origins of earth, fire or evil
- Often tell of gods and goddesses, heroes and monsters and their relationships with humans, and how humans came to be
- Best known myths are Greek, Roman, and Norse, but myths were told all over the world

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Other Myth Books
Traditional Literature Flowchart

- Traditional Literature
  - Rhymes
  - Folktales
  - Fables
  - Legends
  - Myths
    - Fairy Tales
    - Trickster Tales
    - Tall Tales
Remember –

- **Traditional literature** includes the rhymes and stories of different groups of people all over the world that have been passed down orally through the years.
- Have no known authors.
- Used for education and entertainment.
- Show values, beliefs and traditions of people.
- Traditional literature includes: **rhymes, folktales, fables, legends and myths**.
- Folktales are most common type of traditional literature. They include: **fairy tales, trickster tales, and tall tales**.
Acknowledgements

- Follett Library Resources [http://www.titlewave.com](http://www.titlewave.com)