



Fables and Folktales: *Discussion Guide*

Overview

Fables and folktales have steeped generation after generation in cultural traditions and moral teachings. The first two videos reintroduce students to Aesop, the ancient Greek writer who became the best-known fabulist of all time. The second two invite students into the rich world of African and African-American folktales.

Use this discussion guide and related videos in your classroom to whet students' appetites for humankind's rich tradition of fables and folktale.

Classroom Activities

1. Show the segment "The Story of Aesop's Fables" from the *Aesop's Fables* video.
 - **Vocabulary:** Before showing the segment, ask if anyone can tell what a fable is. Explain that fables are stories. They're generally told to convey a particular lesson or moral. Animals are often, though not always, key characters in fables.
 - **Discussion:** "Times may change," says the narrator, "but people (and what happens to them when they behave in certain ways) remain very much the same." Remind students of that observation and tell them that Aesop died about 2,500 years ago. Ask the class how life has changed since Aesop's day. Then encourage students to identify similarities between people then and people now.
2. Show the segment "The Grasshopper and the Ants" from the *Aesop's Fables* video. (Access to *unitedstreaming* is required.)
 - **Research:** Stress that this was just one of Aesop's many fables. Direct student groups to look for collections of Aesop's famous fables. Have each group select another tale to share with the class. When sharing these other fables, pause after each tale to see if listeners can discern the moral before it is stated explicitly.
 - **Writing:** Invite students to create fables of their own. Following Aesop's model, each fable should first exemplify and then state a lesson that its author considers important.

3. Show the segment “An Introduction from the Storyteller, Donna Washington” from the *African and African-American Folktales* video. (Access to *unitedstreaming* is required.)
 - **Vocabulary:** Tell the class that “folktale” is a compound word and ask students to identify its two parts (folk + tale). Help students define “folk” (pertaining to a human group and its traditions) and “tale” (a story). Then challenge them to define “folktale” (a story that is part of a group’s traditions).
 - **Graphic Organizer:** Invite students to make Venn diagrams that convey the similarities and differences between traditional African folktales and modern American movies.
4. Show the segment “How Anansi Obtained the Sky God’s Stories” from the *African and African-American Folktales* video. (Access to *unitedstreaming* is required.)
 - **Discussion:** Explain to the class that Anansi is a trickster, a character whose cunning makes it possible to outwit those who are bigger or stronger. Add that tricksters appear in folktales from many different cultures. (Notable folktale tricksters include Brer Rabbit, Coyote, Kokopelli, and Raven.) Prod students to brainstorm about why Anansi and other wily characters are so popular.
 - **Writing:** Many folktales are unabashedly outlandish. In that tradition, challenge students to create stories in which an eccentric tycoon offers a billion dollars to the first kid who shows up with a bowl of ice cream made from yak’s milk, a pair of the president’s shoes, and a live skunk.

Academic Standards

This discussion guide addresses the following national standards.

National Council for the Social Studies

<http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>

- Culture
- Individual Development and Identity
- Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

- Language Arts
 - Writing: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process, Gathers and uses information for research purposes



- Listening and Speaking: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes
- Viewing: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media
- Behavioral Studies
 - Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity, and behavior