

Be a folklorist: Tell the story of your community

Introduction

Local folklore—the traditions, folktales, and legends of a particular community passed down through generations—plays an important role in shaping a community’s identity. There are truths in folklore, but there are also superstitions and supernatural beings. The legends of Johnny Appleseed and Paul Bunyon are two well-known examples of American folklore. In New Jersey, we have the Jersey Devil.

This lesson will give your students the opportunity to research and retell the folklore of their own communities. Students might live near a place that has ties to the Jersey Devil, the house down the block might be haunted, or there might be a historic shipwreck off the local coast. Students will work collaboratively to explore the local history, either by researching a well-known local story or by uncovering a forgotten one, and will explore what that story can tell us about the community and its residents.

Essential Questions

1. What is folklore? What can it tell us about our history and ourselves?
2. Why do people hold these stories dear, and why do they keep retelling them?

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

Complete project-based learning through collaboration, planning, and follow through.

Interact with members of their community to learn more about the history of their community.

Lesson Activities

Activity 1: Oral History Project

1. Introduce folklore and oral history and ask students to read some or all of the following resources:

- “What is Folklore?” provided by the American Folklore Society: <http://www.afsnet.org/?page=WhatIsFolklore>
 - “Oral History Interviews” provided by The American Folklife Center: <https://www.loc.gov/folklife/familyfolklife/oralhistory.html>
 - “Possible Questions” provided by the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage: <http://www.folklife.si.edu/the-smithsonian-folklife-and-oral-history-interviewing-guide/some-possible-questions/smithsonian>
 - “Junior Folklorist Interview Guide” provided by the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage: http://folklifechallenge.s3.amazonaws.com/folklife/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Junior-Folklorist-Interview-Guide_FINAL.pdf
2. Review and execute the following steps for planning an oral history (adapted from the Library of Congress):
 - Determine goal of the project.
 - Conduct primary research.
 - Do background work.
 - Find subjects to interview. To increase depth and breadth of information, seek out a people of a range of ages and life experiences.
 - Create questions.
 - Determine who will work on the project: assign roles.
 - Determine what equipment, supplies, and other resources are needed.
 - Develop a timeline for the project.
 3. Students will complete the interview using audio or video recording equipment.
 4. Additional Activities:
 - Students will create a documentary.
 - Use moviemaker or other program to make a documentary based on the oral history recording.
 - Create publicity for the documentary: create a poster, plan a screening, and make flyers.
 - Students will write up the oral history in narrative form.

Activity 2: Folklore Analysis

Students play their audio or video oral history recordings for the class and provide a 10-minute presentation in which they reflect upon and analyze their oral history. Have students address some or all the following questions in their presentations:

- What did you learn from completing this project? What was the most surprising or interesting thing you learned?
- Why should we be interested in the stories addressed in your project?
- What to these stories tell us about the local community?

Resources for New Jersey Folklore and Legends

8 *Creepy, But Incredible, Myths Everyone From New Jersey Should Know About* by Tim Unkenholz, March 18, 2015.

<http://www.viralnova.com/new-jersey-myths/>

Creepy New Jersey: The Stuff of Legends by Lisa Rouse, April 13, 2012.

http://www.nj.com/entertainment/index.ssf/2012/04/creepy_new_jersey_the_stuff_of.html

New Jersey Folklore from American Folklore

<http://americanfolklore.net/folklore/united-states-folklore/new-jersey-folklore/>

Weird N.J. Your Travel Guide to New Jersey's Local Legends and Best Kept Secrets

<http://weirdnj.com/>

Common Core State Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.4

Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.5

Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.