Teachers can help their young students build a strong foundation for multicultural understanding by introducing them to stories from many cultures and teaching them to use the cognitive strategies that enable them to comprehend and experience cultures different from their own. Multicultural literature can become a powerful tool that illustrates for children the similarities that exist between cultures and begins to ease cultural prejudice and intolerance. In particular, folktales can help children connect to their past and to other cultures. In this article, folktales that deal with the main character Cinderella are used as examples for implementing literacy activities in the classroom. The article discusses how to use a folktale variant with children and presents general literature response activities and literature response activities dealing with character, setting, problem, plot and events, ending, and the motif of magic. Contains a bibliography of 18 "Cinderella" stories representing different cultures, and recommended professional resources and Web pages. (NKA)
Using Multicultural Cinderella Books To Engage Students in Comprehension Strategies.
Classroom Connections.

by Rebecca Kaminiski
Classroom Connections

Using Multicultural Cinderella Books To Engage Students In Comprehension Strategies

Rebecca Kaminiski, Assistant Professor, Clemson University

A note from Joe Yukish, Editor, Classroom Connections:

In their popular book, Mosaic of Thought, Keen and Zimmerman (1997) list the following cognitive strategies that good readers employ while reading:

1. Activate relevant, prior knowledge (schema) before, during, and after reading.
2. Determine the most important ideas and themes in a text.
3. Ask questions of themselves, the authors, and the texts they read.
4. Create images from text during and after reading. These images may include visual, auditory, and other sensory connections to text.
5. Draw inferences from text using prior knowledge (schema) and textual information to make conclusions, critical judgments, and form unique interpretations from text.
6. Retell or synthesize what they have read.
7. Utilize a variety of fix up strategies to repair comprehension when it breaks down.

Too often classroom reading instruction overemphasizes the 7th grade strategy by treating "fix-up strategies" focusing primarily on "deciphering words." Good readers are able to deal with the graphophonic features in difficult words by orchestrating word analysis with balanced attention to other sources of information in text. In this Classroom Connections column, Rebecca Kaminiski describes how to highlight all seven cognitive strategies listed above while allowing children to study various cultural differences through folktale variants.

By introducing children to stories from many cultures, teachers can help them build a strong foundation for multicultural understanding by teaching them to use the cognitive strategies that enable them to comprehend and experience cultures different from their own. Lukens (1995) states that we are now fortunate as a result of scholarly collecting, folktales that once flourished only in communities where people did not read or write have become the property of all people. She found that "hundreds of versions of the same story occur in countless cultures and show almost infinite variations, but are similar in their focus on human yearning for social acceptance and material comfort." (p. 22).

Therefore, multicultural literature can become a powerful tool that illustrates for children the similarities that exist between cultures and begins to ease cultural prejudice and intolerance (Pate, 1988). In particular, folk tales can help children connect to their past and other cultures.

Using Folktales to Teach How Comprehension Works in Narrative Text

In order to interpret folktales, the student must participate in effective comprehension of these stories. Keene and Zimmerman (1997) state that readers must make three types of connections with text to comprehend effectively:

1. Text-to-text connections involve comparing and contrasting elements within the story itself as well as comparing and contrasting the current story with another story experienced previously.
2. Text-to-self connections involve relating aspects of the story to feelings the students hold within their own knowledge base (schemas), feelings and emotions.
3. Text-to-world connections require students to relate aspects of the story to life and surroundings in their own culture.

Smagorinsky (1992) cites Escholz's observation that readers, "see the printed word; they develop an eye — and ear — for language, the shape and order of sentences, and the texture of paragraphs." Smagorinsky goes on to support the practice of exposing writers to models of text forms through reading and analysis, before expecting them to write in those forms.

If reading model passages enables writers to focus in on particular aspects of the reading material as Escholz suggests, students should be allowed to practice comprehension strategies while reading less complex, more manageable text that enables them to observe their use of a cognitive strategy, before they are expected to use similar strategies to comprehend more difficult stories. In form, the genre of folktales is less complex than other forms of narrative literature and can provide an opportunity for this "strategic observation."

Lukens (1995) lists the following characteristics of folktales that enable them to be used to highlight important narrative literature characteristics such as plot, characterization, setting, mood, style, and tone in a less complex story format.

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In form, the folktale relies on flat characters, bad ones and good ones, who are easily recognized. Since folktales were heard by the teller and then retold in the teller's own words, there was hardly time for subtle character development. A brief phrase, which may be repeated often, serves to draw characters, since the teller cannot risk losing the audience by departing from the fast paced narration of action to describe thoughts and feelings.

Person vs. person conflict between characters or personified animals often characterizes folktales. Plots are progressive and easy to follow. A climax comes very near the end of the story. The closing is as brief as they lived happily ever after. The “fast and lively” action is the heart of the folktale.

Point of view is rarely first person since tales are told about flat characters in fantastic situations.

Themes are explicit, stated in a straightforward manner, but they are not didactic or preachy.

Justice is absolute and is never sentimentalized. Good is rewarded, evil punished and the wicked often meet violent ends.

Theme and tone of the folktale varies, but all comment on human needs and wishes (pp. 23-24).

In this article, folktales that deal with the main character Cinderella are used as examples for implementing literacy activities in the classroom. (A list of 18 “Cinderella” stories representing numerous cultures can be found at the end of this article.) These “Cinderella” stories provide an excellent source of content for guiding students to draw comparisons among common literary elements (e.g. characters, setting, problems, plot, story sequence and magical features). In addition, they are simple enough to allow students to observe their own use of important cognitive strategies in comprehending the stories.

In addition to the characteristics listed by Lukens, these particular books have a similar length (32 page average), a complex yet familiar story line, appeal to a variety of age levels (8-13 years), and are structurally representative of the folktale genre.

How to Use a Folktale Variant with Children

Teachers can employ the following sequence of using a variant of the Cinderella story as a model for presenting any folktale variant to children.

1. Begin with a teacher-led book introduction activity (Clay, 1991). During this time, the teacher can probe the student’s background knowledge about “Cinderella” tales and add new information about the particular multicultural “Cinderella” book that would be read during the day’s lesson.

2. Read the selected multicultural “Cinderella” book aloud to the students. While reading the book, the teacher can model effective reading skills and expose the children to the comparative content of the literature.

3. Begin the after-reading discussion by leading a grand conversation (Eeds & Wells, 1989) of the students’ responses to the book. Engage students in a discussion that focuses on the reading experience and the reader’s aesthetic reaction to the book. Cecil (1995) feels that these conversations should be designed by teachers to “model provocative, open-ended questions and help children learn to ask their own critical questions about content” in selections they read.

4. Develop a Book Comparison Chart (Yopp & Yopp, 1992) with the entire group (see figure 1). This graphic organizer serves as a visual comparison of the literary elements in different multicultural “Cinderella” books. The students brainstorm and classify literary elements of the book such as characters, setting, problem, plot and events, ending, and magical features.

5. Once the Book Comparison Chart (Figure 1) is completed, the students respond with various literature response activities for comparing the different literary elements (characters, setting, problem, plot and events, ending, and magical features) using the examples that follow.

Literature Response Activities

Teachers can use the following activities with the multicultural “Cinderella” books listed in the Recommended Children’s Books section to help their students develop an understanding of literature types and their characteristics. Only a few examples are listed in each

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**Figure 1. Book Comparison Chart (BCC) Example**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BOOK</th>
<th>CINDERELLA</th>
<th>ROUGH FACED GIRL</th>
<th>RAINBOW COLORED HORSE</th>
<th>TALKING EGGS</th>
<th>MUFARO’S BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTERS</th>
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Using Multicultural Cinderella Books

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Characteristics of the living arrangements and behaviors of a different group of people.

1. Use the setting in The Rough-Face Girl (Martin, 1992) as a comparison for the setting in The Egyptian Cinderella (Climo, 1989), because both books take place near a natural water source and yet have very different geographic locations.

2. Conduct research to find out if the illustrations from a multicultural "Cinderella" tale are an authentic match with the actual geographic region and time represented.

3. Write a transformation of the tale changing the setting to something completely different. How would a change in setting change the outcome of the tale? (You could use Cinder-Ellq, Minters, 1994 as a model.)

Literature Response Activities
Dealing with Plot and Events

The plot of the story consists of the events of the story and the sequence in which they are told. The plot in a folk tale is usually fast-moving and has a sudden resolution.

1. A good choice for a lesson on plot is Baba Yaga & Vasilissa the Brave (Mayer, 1994), because it contains events that are very well developed. Students could draw comparisons between this book and the plot of another multicultural "Cinderella" book. Likewise students could compare events from The Egyptian Cinderella (Egypt) and Yeh-Shen (China).

Literature Response Activities
Dealing with Ending

Generally, the ending in a folk tale is "and they lived happily ever after." Exactly what those words mean may vary from culture to culture.

1. Responding to the ending in The Talking Eggs (San Souci, 1989) is a good choice for the comparison of ending with endings the child has experienced with other stories of this type. Blanche (the Cinderella character) never meets a 'prince'.
Using Multicultural Cinderella Books

Character and she goes off to the city to find happiness on her own. Therefore, she lives happily ever after, but her happiness does not fit the stereotyped ending of other stories. (TEXT-TO-TEXT and TEXT-TO-SELF connections.)

2. Write a sequel to one of the multicultural “Cinderella” books. Require students to support the sequel with the ending of the original tale. (TEXT-TO-STORY and TEXT-TO-SELF connection.)

3. Perform a TV skit in which you conduct a follow up interview with one of the characters from the multicultural “Cinderella” tale. Be sure to ask questions that relate to the original tale and can be answered logically by the character. (TEXT-TO-STORY connection.)

Literature Response Activities
Dealing with the Motif of Magic

Folktales often contain elements of enchantment and magic. All of the multicultural “Cinderella” stories listed contain an interesting variety of such magical elements relating to characters, plot, or setting. Teachers could use the comparison of the magical features to illustrate the important characteristic of the folklore genre: unrealistic events.

1. Use Princess Furball (Huck, 1989) as a study of magical features. Students identify the small items that are enchanted and how the Cinderella character must use them properly to achieve their magical qualities. (TEXT-TO-STORY connection.)

2. Perform an infomercial to sell a magical item. Develop a prototype of your item. Prepare your script and videotape the infomercial. (TEXT-TO-STORY and TEXT-TO-WORLD connection.)

3. Collect data from a variety of multicultural “Cinderella” books and make a bar graph of the number of magical features found in each of the multicultural “Cinderella” books. (TEXT-TO-STORY connection.)

Conclusion

Children’s multicultural literature can become a powerful tool to help children recognize the commonalities within cultures. In addition, such books are rich in literary examples from which students can develop cognitive strategies for comprehending more complex text and explore the all genres of literature.

References


Recommended Children’s Books

Multicultural Cinderella Books


Haviland, V. (1996). Favorite fairy tales told in Italy. NY: Beech Tree. (Italy)


Recommended Professional Resources

Books


Web pages

Circle of Friends

http://www.cofbooks.com/index.html

Multicultural Literature Everyday

http://people.clemson.edu/~mlarson

Shen’s Book and Supplies

http://www.shens.com

Happily Ever After

http://www.hehd.clemson.edu/currinst/Kaminski/indexK.htm
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<td>Corporate Source:</td>
<td>Reading Recovery Council of North America</td>
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