

There Is No Box: The Trickster in Literature

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INTRODUCTION

I designed this unit to enhance an already defined area of the curriculum (mythology and folklore), to introduce students to the concept of archetype in literature, and to include characters and stories that are important to various cultures. Mythology/folklore is a brief and very limited element of the sixth grade curriculum, primarily emphasizing the major gods/goddesses in Greek mythology. Prior knowledge of my students in this area ranges from students who know almost nothing about mythology and folklore to students who have, on their own, become young experts. I particularly want to challenge students to investigate a particular type of character, an archetype, a skill that could then transfer to the study of other genres. The “trickster” provides the vehicle to do both and to provide a touch of humor as well.

Understanding and recognizing archetypes in literature is an important skill our children need to learn. Tina Blue states:

In our society many, perhaps most, children grow up with only the most limited contact with the traditional images and motifs that have enriched our artistic and literary culture. Even worse, much of what they do encounter is cheapened and oversimplified by translations into the language of pop culture. Consequently, when they encounter literature that is rich with such resonances, they have no clue what to make of it. (3)

Most middle school students have not heard the word archetype even though the literature they love the most, fantasy, is rich with archetypal characters. My intention is to introduce the trickster as an archetype, give students the opportunity to study the character carefully in order to develop a list of attributes, and then follow this unit with one that looks at a myriad of archetypes in one piece of literature. Including this unit at the beginning of the school year will introduce students to a more sophisticated way of looking at literature than they have experienced. Since middle schools across the district are now participating in PreAP curriculum, and since the district has committed to an AP/ college-ready philosophy, this unit will offer students skills they need to be successful in meeting the district goals.

I have students from many cultures in my classes; while Greek mythology is important to the understanding of Western literary classics, I also want students to recognize that the literature of their home cultures includes character types that are very similar to those most frequently included in our curriculum. I think of this aspect of the unit as a form of cultural literacy. My colleagues and I have noted a decreasing understanding of what used to be familiar children’s literature – from fairy tales to nursery rhymes to children’s stories such as *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. And yet there is the assumption on the part of many adults that children do have this common knowledge. My unit includes recognizable characters, but it will also allow students from different backgrounds to research and enjoy similar characters from their own cultures, thus providing a sense of the universality of themes, characters, and values. Additionally, students who have not had access to literature of other cultures will connect with characters around the world that have the same concerns, interests, and traits of characters from their culture.

Tina Blue talks about the universality of themes and motifs in literature as “represent[ing] patterns common to all human experience” (1). She cites the cycle of life as one traditional motif that is understood and contained in literature around the world while other motifs may be associated with a particular culture. She suggests the apple in the Garden of Eden as an example of a motif that does not necessarily cross cultures and time in the eyes of many people. Blue asserts, however, that when “Snow White is offered a poison apple by the wicked stepmother, we recognize the apple as a symbol of deadly destruction of innocence betrayed” (1). Unfortunately, students unfamiliar with the Garden of Eden story would not be able to make that association. Further, students who have not had the classical literary experience of examining archetypes would not be able to take their analysis to a higher level. While it would be impossible to include all possible motifs in a single unit, students who have learned the skills required to recognize archetypes and motifs in literature would be more likely to notice, and then investigate, these elements in other pieces of literature.

RATIONALE

My students are classified as Gifted and Talented; they must apply to our school and accumulate points to qualify (creativity, Stanford and TAKS scores, teacher recommendations, and so forth). However, we have found that skill level and experience often do not always reflect the G/T classification. I have a wide range of reading abilities and scores on standardized tests. I have ELL students (English Language Learners) and students with learning disabilities. Therefore, I have designed this unit to meet the needs of higher-level students while building the skills of lower achieving students. Furthermore, many students lack motivation to participate enthusiastically because they do not feel connected to the content and because the presentation, assessment, and activities do not address their individual interests, learning styles, and/or skill levels. While it is necessary to provide for a common learning experience, differentiation will be provided through selection of stories, choices of products, and even whether students prefer working alone, with a partner, or in a group. When students “pick their poison,” they seem much more committed to the task at hand. Therefore, while constructing this unit, I provided a variety of learning opportunities for all students.

Another factor in constructing this unit, again, is the college-ready philosophy of our district. The goal of the district is to prepare students for life after high school, and in our district, that means preparing students for the Advanced Placement Exams. One vehicle for doing that is the PreAP program that has been mandated in our middle schools. Laying the Foundations has contracted to train teachers to prepare students for AP tests; in fact, middle school students take the PreAP exams late in the spring of each year. The LTF training is higher level and skill based. The philosophy is to address the skills students need first, and then determine the texts, assignments, and activities (including assessments) that are necessary to develop the skills. Including motifs, symbols, and other elements of literature clearly supports the mandated AP goals and strategies.

Motivating the Students

Students will be immediately drawn to the trickster character; haven't we all had experiences with bullies, whether they be on the school playground or in the corporate boardroom? As John O. West, Ph.D. at the University of Texas noted, “We like to see someone let the air out of the balloons of these bossy folks – in a way feeling that we are helping deflate such types. The trickster does things that we'd love to do ourselves – and usually gets away with them” (Sherman 9). He further contends that people generally want to see the smaller, less powerful, character win. Margaret Atwood characterizes the trickster as a character who acts and thinks “outside the box”:

He's cunning personified, a sleight-of-hand artist and a cheat, yet through his overweening curiosity and his tendency to meddle in things about which he lacks true knowledge, he often makes a fool of himself. He steals fire and burns his fingers. He lives by his wits, yet he falls into traps. He's subversive in that he disrupts conventions, and transgressive because he crosses forbidden boundaries, yet he displays no overtly high and solemn purpose in these activities. (2)

Regardless of their country of origin, students will be able to enjoy and relate to the trickster tales. While this unit focuses on a sampling of tricksters from different parts of the world, tales from other nations may be added to reflect the population of any school or classroom. Hopefully, students will understand the concept that none of the tales they study is essentially pure. "There is so much cross-fertilization going on all the time that it's often difficult to tell whether cognate myths are the result of contact between cultures, or the consequence of separate developments from a single source" (Blue 3). Trickster tales are similar due to the fact that people travel from place to place and carry their culture with them through stories they tell. Additionally, the premise of the trickster tale, teaching powerful beings lessons, is certainly a universal theme. Trickster tales may also vary from culture to culture based on a nation's geography and the animals it supports. One pop culture trickster that will get students' attention immediately is Bugs Bunny.

When I introduce a unit to my students, I begin with a motivating activity before moving them into the essential elements of study. I also choose an activity that will reveal the theme of the unit. For this unit, students will view a cartoon, one featuring either Bugs Bunny or Woody the Woodpecker because both are characterized as modern tricksters. Tina Blue labels Bugs Bunny as "one of the best modern manifestations of the trickster archetype, and the implications of his behavior are not significantly different from those of the traditional Trickster. He represents both the risks and the rewards of the unbridled id and of the chaotic power that underlies existence" (6). J.J. Sutherland labels Bugs as "a uniquely American expression of an ancient archetype – the Trickster" (1). After viewing the film we will discuss the actions and attributes of the main character (defining elements of a trickster), leading to the definition of trickster. Hoping to reveal the universality of this character type in other literature (or other media), I expect students to recall characters in books they have read that might be similarly categorized.

Looking at tricksters from other cultures will allow students to proudly present examples from their own heritage; I hope that parents will become involved in this activity, especially at the beginning of the year. It will allow them to share the knowledge they have about their cultures and appreciate the fact that their culture is a part of the public school system. Hopefully, parents who feel reticent about participating in typical school activities will find that this unit will open the door for them.

Knowledge gained by reading these myths and folktales is not limited to the literary area, however, as Bette Bosma suggests that folktales really symbolize a culture – their values and belief system – and that anthropologists have studied the symbolic representations of the stories, and students may begin to appreciate the cultures they are studying as a whole. "An interest in folk literature can lead to an appreciation of art. At the same time, an interest in the paintings, sculpture, pottery, weavings, and embroidery of various cultures can motivate the viewer to read the traditional stories" (4). She adds that the folktales may also be used as "lessons in character building and social development with humor rather than didactic teaching" (5).

OBJECTIVES

Skills

In Language Arts, particularly in the middle school, the emphasis is on skills. The TEKS are general in that they address specific skills and do not dictate the content to be used in order to teach these skills. Laying the Foundations, again, also focuses on skills. Our school welcomes students from across the district – students who have had different experiences in their elementary school classrooms. This unit provides a vehicle for assimilating students from different levels of elementary experiences into our program. Because my students enter our school with diverse skill levels in both reading and writing, the content of this unit allows for fairly short stories to be read in a communal setting while emphasizing principles of close reading, annotating text, and compare/contrast. Additionally, Bette Bosma praises the use of folktales because “The language of the folk storyteller combines both simple statement and rich, expressive, figurative language” (1) and “Because folktales have many layers of meaning, readers of differing developmental levels can appreciate them” (3). The unit includes basic as well as high-level skills. We will begin by reading short tales from different cultures and comparing the tales and, particularly, the trickster characters. In the research module, students will work independently (on their own folktale) as well as in groups (according to culture), learning to work effectively with classmates from other schools and backgrounds as they investigate even more stories in search of tricksters. Finally, students will create their own trickster stories which will be based either in modern culture or, if students have the desire, in their home culture. Creation is the highest level of Bloom’s taxonomy and one that needs to be included at the beginning of the year in order to emphasize our expectations and stretch the performance of all students – to give them the opportunity to expand their perception of their own capabilities.

TAKS Objectives

- ELA 6.5C: Present dramatic interpretations of experience, stories, poems, or plays.
- ELA 6.10L: Represent information in tables, Frayer models, timelines, webs, Venn diagrams, outlines, fishbone maps and flow charts to demonstrate comprehension of reading selections.
- ELA 6.11A: Offer observations, make connections, react, speculate, interpret, and raise questions in response to texts.
- ELA 6.11D: Compare and contrast theme, ideas, symbols, values, morals, topics, gist, opinions, problems, and solutions across literary and informational text, values, moral, topic, gist, opinions, problems, and solutions across multiple texts.
- ELA 6.12.B: Recognize the distinguishing features of genres including fantasy, folktales, myths, historical fiction, informational texts, and media.
- ELA 6.12F: Analyze character traits, relationships, changes they undergo, motivations, conflicts, and point of view.
- ELA 6.12G: Recognize and analyze plot (exposition, rising; action, climax, falling action, and resolution), setting (time and place) and problem resolution in a text passage and in longer selections.
- ELA 6.14C: Recognize and discuss the influence distinctive cultural mores, values, social conventions, and gender roles have on literary themes using multicultural texts.
- ELA 6:15G: Use literary devices effectively such as suspense, dialogue, and figurative language.
- G/T: The students will define the term archetype and recognize archetypal characters in literature.
- G/T: The students will analyze character traits.
- G/T: The students will create a project that includes and reflects the characteristics of folktales or myths with the main character assuming the traits of a trickster.

UNIT BACKGROUND

Archetypes

Recognizing character types is an important skill students need to learn and apply on their own as they read. Using the trickster to introduce the concept of “archetype” is an important part of this unit. By sixth grade, most students can retell stories they have read; they can also discuss elements of setting and character. Middle school is the ideal time to raise the level of literary discussions and introduce true analysis to the students’ repertoire of skills. The trickster is a fairly straightforward archetype and one that is essential in my students’ favorite genre, fantasy. I anticipate that many of my avid readers will immediately connect our discussion of the trickster archetype to the stories they read on their own.

My unit includes recognizable characters, but it also allows students from all cultures to research and enjoy similar characters, thus providing a sense of the universality of themes. Furthermore, once students understand the concept of the archetype, we will look at other types of literature for additional archetypes such as the damsel in distress, the sidekick, the hero, and so forth.

Content

The literary content of this unit will focus on characters from Hermes to Anansi (often familiar in elementary school) along with tricksters like Coyote, Brer Rabbit, and Raven. By starting with a familiar base, students will be grounded in the attributes of the trickster, have concrete examples of their antics, motivation, behavior and consequences, and then be able to discern similarities in some lesser known works from Asia, Europe, Australia, and Central and South America. Bette Bosma notes, “Through folktales, the reader can enter into another culture and recognize the universality of the wishes, dreams, and problems of people around the world” (1).

Virginia Hamilton notes that tricksters often are small animals who are “gifted with the power of cunning and, sometimes, magic” (*A Ring of Tricksters* 9). We will begin the unit with a focus on the trickster archetype as exemplified by the following characters: Monkey, Raven, Coyote, Hare, and Spider. I have chosen these five characters because they are excellent and pervasive examples of tricksters; once students have studied these models, they will be able to analyze other tricksters on their own or within their groups.

One must realize that there are many stories for these characters, and the stories may vary somewhat. They are available as books for children with illustrations that also contribute to the appreciation of the culture. Because Internet variations are rampant, one must be careful in selecting a version that remains true to the original story and that the presentation is appropriate for the age group. For these reasons, I have included summaries of the basic stories in the “Cultural Tricksters” section of this unit. However, the selections could easily be changed based on the predominant cultures in a particular school or the developmental/skill level of the children. Also, the number of stories included in the initial survey of trickster stories could be changed as well.

It should be noted that there is disagreement among the experts as to a specific characteristic list or clear definition of the trickster. For example, some experts include “buffoon” as a characteristic of the trickster while others disagree. Some experts focus on the trickster’s sexual appetite and its effect on his actions, but the inappropriateness of this issue is obvious for the students I teach. Therefore, I am focusing on more traditional characteristics rather than on the Freudian. Perhaps Jean Hardy provides a definition that encompasses the Jungian influence including the confusion about this archetype:

The archetype of the Trickster...is the existence of the unexpected as it appears in every human society, sometimes fully acknowledged, sometimes feared and hidden. He is the opposite of order – but then he is opposite of everything: he can turn into a she...He is the Green Man, the Jester, the clown, the witch or the wizard, Mercury, a shape shifter ... the Fool with the potential at times for becoming a Savior. He upsets normality and hierarchic order...He can change the expected world, and therefore be an agent of transformation. (1)

Hardy notes that both Philip Pullman and J. K. Rowling incorporate trickster character types in their novels, commenting that “It is interesting that all this literature is presented for children on the edge of adolescence: adults in our society are probably less prepared to truly acknowledge the myths within which we live, and to question them” (5). While the characteristics of a particular trickster may differ somewhat from those of another trickster, the following characteristics are applicable to most:

- Deceitful: The trickster uses trickery to bring about the change that he is targeting.
- Self Serving: The trickster often feels that he has been wronged and is, therefore, justified in taking any actions he deems necessary to bring about change – to defeat the enemy.
- Cultural Hero: The trickster may be idealized as a cultural hero when, as the agent of transformation, he overturns a cruel or unfair leader or political/social system or reverses the fortunes of the more powerful party. Prometheus, Raven, and Maui steal fire from the gods and give it to humans. According to Helen Lock, this characteristic separates the fool from the trickster. “The true trickster’s trickery calls into question fundamental assumptions about the way the world is organized, and reveals the possibility of transforming them (even if for ignoble ends)” (6). Michael J. Carroll includes cultural hero as an attribute as well; he characterizes the trickster as “a transformer who makes the world habitable for humans by ridding it of monsters or who provides those things [such as fire] that make human society possible (“Levi-Strauss, Freud, and the Trickster” 305).
- Shape Shifter: The trickster may change forms, sex, and so forth as an element of surprise to his victim. The change may also be psychological instead of (or in addition to) a visual change.
- Solitary creature – Many tricksters are solitary animals (or humans), working alone rather than with a partner or within a group – to undertake change. Michael P. Carroll notes that “Ravens are usually sighted singly or at most in pairs; coyotes forage independently...; hares have long been noted for their solitariness...Spiders generally associate with members of their own species on only two occasions: when they are born and when they mate” (“Trickster as Selfish Buffoon” 115).
- Physically weak creature: The trickster is often portrayed as a much weaker character than his prey, and yet through cleverness and trickery, he is able to overcome all obstacles and prevail. In some cases the trickster may appear to be weaker physically in order to confuse his prey (false frailty).
- Special tools: The trickster may have special tools or abilities that enable him to perform his acts. Often these tools include magic and/or supernatural powers. An example would be the Chinese Monkey who keeps a needle behind his ear; when he removes the needle and recites a request, the needle may turn into any tool or implement that is required for a particular story.
- Teacher: The trickster is a purveyor of life lessons through the stories, from manners to ethics. The teacher often forces the reader to examine the status quo and often, “to break

out of old stereotypes, whether they've been imposed by ourselves, our families, our culture, or circumstances ("The Trickster" 3).

While he makes an excellent case for the universality of certain sets of myths, Michael J. Carroll also raises the issue of cultural variations, a question that is very applicable to the disparities students will discover about tricksters they study. He admits that he, like most of us, has "assumed that people everywhere will value 'culture' (in the sense of 'orderly human society')" ("Trickster as a Selfish Buffoon" 125). He cites Jay Edwards' argument that people who are in a defeated position in their society, such as African-American slaves, see that destroying the oppressive culture is an "adaptive strategy" (125) regardless of whether or not it destroys or "undermines the cohesion of the society as a whole" (125). The tricksters in tales of these cultures, then, would not fit the label of cultural hero, but, instead, cultural destroyer.

Cultural Trickster Models

Greek

We will begin the unit by looking at three characters from Greek mythology: Hermes, Odysseus, and Penelope. Each has a unique role in mythology and will provide the opportunity to introduce, not only the trickster, but also different forms of the trickster.

Hermes, son of Zeus and Maia, begins his life by playing a trick on his uncle, Apollo. The newborn boy slips past his mother and is fascinated by the discoveries he makes about the world around him; he is particularly engaged with the tortoise and the heavy shield of a shell. He removes the shell and constructs an instrument, the lyre; pleased with himself, he carries it into the field where Apollo maintains a herd of sacred cattle. For no apparent reason, baby Hermes decides to steal the cattle, but he is clever enough to realize that he does not want to be discovered. He herds the cattle backwards and disguises his own baby footprints with large branches, creating the illusion that a giant has stolen the cattle. However, Apollo quickly discovers the thievery when he returns from his daily chariot ride across the heavens and an old man recalls the sighting of a baby leading cattle from the field. Although amused at his son's antics, Zeus, when called upon by Apollo, commands his son to return the cattle immediately. Anxious to exact even more revenge, Apollo demands possession of the lyre (tortoise shell). While the focus of the story will be to examine the trickster in Hermes, other important elements will be included: the relationship between characters in Greek mythology; the explanation for the world around us (how the lyre was created); and, of course, the elements of one type of trickster, the trickster god.

In addition to gods and goddesses being tricksters, students need to examine a human trickster from Greek mythology, and Odysseus represents the archetype very well. On his trip home from the Trojan War, Odysseus encounters tricksters who make his journey long, and almost impossible, at points. However, Odysseus also assumes the role of the trickster when he visits the cave of Cyclops (Polyphemus). When Odysseus and his men find no one in the cave, they steal food, contrary to the Greek philosophy of hospitality. When Cyclops returns and threatens to eat Odysseus and his men, Odysseus quickly grabs a stake, heats it in the fire, and pokes out the Cyclops' eye. Dissatisfied with his mere escape from a cannibal, Odysseus persists and becomes trapped in the cave. He uses a magical wine to decommission Cyclops, but he is still unable to escape the blocked opening of the cave. In the morning, Odysseus executes another trick when his men grasp the undersides of the sheep that Cyclops is herding, and they all escape the now-blind victim of Odysseus's trickery. However, the trickster actually causes further problems for himself by revealing his real name to Cyclops, who, in turn, begs his father, Poseidon for revenge. And Poseidon, god of oceans and earthquakes, is pleased to fulfill his son's wishes by delaying Odysseus's progress to Ithaca where his house was under siege. Not only will students see a human trickster (and hero), but they will also be introduced to the epic as

a literary form, to additional Greek characters, and the possibility of investigating other tricksters in the story.

Finally, students will meet the long-suffering wife of Odysseus, Penelope, who, while her husband has been away fighting in the Trojan War and adventuring his way home, has the responsibility of repelling those who would usurp their home and land: the suitors. Her cleverness is apparent in the fact that she has been able to maintain the household for twenty years; in fact, she is portrayed as a much stronger character than her mother-in-law, Anticlea, who dies of grief over the situation. In fact, even Telemachus, her son, is ready to give up and leave. While the extent of property is somewhat depleted, Penelope, through her cleverness, has preserved enough to maintain the suitors' interest and bids. To ward off their advances, Penelope tricks them by promising her decision after she completes weaving a pall for her father-in-law; unbeknownst to the suitors, she undoes at night much of the weaving progress she has made during the day. Further, when the suitors become even more demanding, and Odysseus is home but in disguise, Penelope devises a contest that will, undoubtedly, eliminate the suitors from competition for her hand. She promises to marry the suitor who is able to string Odysseus' bow and shoot an arrow through twelve axe-heads. Even when the disguised beggar (Odysseus) wins the contest, his wife devises one more test to ascertain his true identity: she asks the servants to move the bed. Only Odysseus knows that feat is impossible since one leg of the bed is actually an olive tree trunk. Penelope finally concedes that the bearded stranger is her husband, and she has successfully, through trickery, maintained her integrity as well as that of Ithaca. Penelope is important because she is one of the few woman tricksters students will meet, her purpose is to preserve the goodness of her life while rejecting the bad (the suitors), and she could be viewed as a type of cultural hero.

African

African folktales feature turtles, spiders, and other animals as tricksters. While trickster tales definitely spotlight the cleverness of the trickster, the tales are not limited to that single characteristic or purpose. As in other cultures, the stories explain the world around the people who tell the stories; creation is probably the most universal motif because it is human nature to need to understand the origin of the universe, the origin of man, and African folklore is no different.

Anansi, probably the most iconic figure in African mythology, is credited with much of the creation work by Virginia Hamilton in a version that she attributes to Toto in West Africa. In her rendition Anansi and Wulbari the Creator are again locked in a struggle of wits. Wulbari, god of the heavens, is disturbed at the short distance between the earth and its peoples and him. As Wulbari notes, "He became the perfect towel for everybody. And the people used Him to wipe their dirty hands...But there it was, pieces of Heaven-He being sniffed by the dogs and eaten by babies" (*In the Beginning* 53). Ananse, his guard, became very arrogant and was overheard by Wulbari boasting that he "had more sense than God" (54). Angered by the remark, Wulbari commands Ananse to get him "something," although he will not tell Ananse what the something is. Desperate to please the God, Ananse disguises himself as a bird and eavesdrops on Wulbari to find out that God wants the sun, moon, and darkness. Somehow Ananse captures these elements and successfully delivers them to God, releasing all three. An aside that Hamilton includes in the story is how some people looked at the sun and became blind...to explain blindness in the world. In the end, the weaker creature, the spider, overpowers the greater character through disguise and clever tricks.

In another tale, Virginia Hamilton recounts "Old Mister Turtle Gets a Whipping," a story that includes the traditional trickster that demonstrates layers of meaning. Feeling under the weather, Turtle wants to travel to the bush for roots to concoct a medicinal tea, but needs assistance to

expedite his journey. Turtle humiliates Leopard by claiming to Leopard's wife that he will ride him like a horse. Goaded by his wife, Leopard seeks Turtle to save face, but Turtle tricks him into carrying him the way a horse would carry a rider, complete with a rope (reins) and a stick (whip). In fact, he carries him back to his house where Leopard's wife ridicules him; he responds by grabbing the stick out of Turtle's hands and whipping him with it. This tale represents the cleverness of the trickster and his dominance over stronger creatures, but it also shows the vulnerability of some of the tricksters. It is also a *pour quoi* tale in that it explains the marks we find on turtle back; these marks remind us that there are consequences for certain actions (*A Ring of Tricksters* 91-96).

Elizabeth Laird traveled to areas of Ethiopia to listen to and record stories that had been passed down for centuries. The stories focus on traditional tricksters such as the fox, the crow, and the rabbit. "The Fox and the Crow" tells the story of a fox that catches a crow who has been stealing his grain; the fox, determined to punish the crow, threatens to kill the crow and eat it. The crow, rather than expressing fear, commends the fox for his plan, pleading that whatever the fox is to do, the worst thing would be to punish the crow by putting him in the bushes. The fox falls for the trick, flings the crow into the bushes, and, of course, the crow flies to safety. In a similar story, a rabbit comes upon a jackal whose foot is trapped under a boulder; the jackal pleads with the rabbit to free him, but when the rabbit saves his life, the jackal prepares to eat the rabbit. An old man happens by, hears the pleas of the rabbit, and the old man tricks the jackal into showing how he was trapped by the boulder; the jackal is once again trapped and the rabbit is saved. The lessons in both stories are clear: don't trust a thief and don't be ungrateful to someone who helps you.

African-American Tricksters

Africans who were transported to the southern United States and the Caribbean West Indies brought trickster characters and tales with them; refusing to be completely broken by their situation and in spite of plantation owners' attempts to eradicate their native language and customs, they preserved stories of their culture by retelling them to their children. However, while maintaining essential elements of their old life, they also created new characters to express their reactions to their new situation and environs. While some of the characters were new, the storytellers during slavery maintained many of the traditional characters and stories; one of these was the African trickster tale: an animal hero uses deceit, and often magic, to outsmart stronger and overpowering animals.

It is apparent that Southern slave trickster tales focus on outwitting the plantation masters; in this way, they deviously attacked the very system to which they were condemned. "They learned what justice was, and they learned, as slaves, they had none. But they were able to make up stories and even laugh in the face of their tragic predicament" (Hamilton, *A Ring of Tricksters* 9). Prior to emancipation, slaves used animal stories to express their intense hatred for their situation and the white landowners and overseers who made each day so miserable. Animals in the stories became the cultural heroes of the slaves, often voicing and representing the issues that were so abhorrent to the plantation workers. "The perceptive storytellers of slavery days thus exploited the naiveté of their supposedly intellectually superior white masters, who duped themselves into falsely believing that these stories merely served as harmless products of a 'childlike' people to amuse illiterate listeners or to entertain the master's children" (Faulkner xiv).

Probably the most famous trickster was the rabbit; a story that is representative of the rabbit stories is "Buh Rabby and Bruh Gator" (Hamilton, *A Ring of Tricksters* 15-24). In this story, the rabbit represents slaves, angry because of their exclusion from everyday activities, trying to outwit their more powerful owner who is represented by the alligator. As Gator shouts just before his tail whips the rabbit, "No bunnies dancing in here. I dance in here. This is a *gator*

house!” (16). Rabby, much as frightened slaves would do, does not complain; in fact he praises gator’s ability to fiddle and dance and offers to take over the fiddling when gator becomes tired, thinking to himself, “I’m a-going to get you, Bruh Gator. You treated me wrong” (19). Bruh Rabby knocks Bruh Gator out cold, causing him to miss the rest of the gator dance; when he awakes the following day, Bruh Rabby appears, transformed into a squirrel, and still fiddling and tricking Bruh Gator – this time causing the gator’s tail to catch fire. In the end, Bruh Rabby “gets even with gators whenever he has a mind to. And forever, gators will try to catch bunnies whenever they can” (22). Again Bruh Rabby clearly represents the desperation slaves felt – unable to challenge and prevail over their owners, and yet never giving up humor and hope in the tales they told to express their frustration.

While slaves continued to use animals to overcome their frustration and imagine besting their owners, the post-slavery period freed them to change their trickster characters from animals to humans, often giving the trickster the name John. In one story, “The Most Useful Slave,” John, the slave, is thought highly of by his owner who believes that John can prophesize; what his owner doesn’t know is that John eavesdrops and then simply repeats what he hears. However, the owner brags to his friends that John has special powers. When other owners challenge this belief, John is put to the test and must guess the contents of a locked box. When John realizes the situation is hopeless and he is about to be found out, he utters, “Well, Mas Tom, this old raccoon, he run a long way, but they caught him at last,” referring to himself as a raccoon. Happily, the master opens the box and a raccoon jumps out; the master is happy that he has saved face (and won money), and John remains a favored slave on the plantation (Hamilton *The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales* 160-165).

Another post-slavery story, “How Nehemiah Got Free,” features a slave named Nehemiah, who is sold from owner to owner because of his cleverness. When one owner realizes Nehemiah has outwitted him, Nehemiah finds himself on the slave block; no owner wants the burden of a smart or clever slave! A Mister Warton, who flatters himself as one of the meanest owners around, offers to buy Nehemiah, claiming he alone can control the verbal cleverness that had so annoyed other owners. In a contest of wits, according to the story, Nehemiah bests even Mister Warton and thus earns his freedom. Again, the slave becomes the trickster, overcoming the more powerful slave owner and, essentially, the entire system (Hamilton *The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales* 147-150).

One of the most poignant tales with a human trickster is “The People Could Fly” as retold by Virginia Hamilton whose version is only one of many about blacks who can fly, one of many well-known stories about slaves. The tale follows Africans who have magical wings that allow them to fly to escape danger. According to the story, they are forced to shed their wings because of crowded conditions on slave ships. Toby, the trickster in the story, saves many of the slaves who were mistreated when he utters magical words that allowed slaves, first one at a time and then whole groups, to renew their wings and escape evil overseers by slowly lifting into the sky and then flying away. While not all the slaves had this power, according to the story, they were able to offer their children hope of a possible escape through this story of flight (Hamilton *The People Could Fly: The Picture Book*).

Central and South American

Although many familiar Mayan trickster tales embrace the rabbit so common in the Br’er Rabbit/Tar Baby stories that came from Spain and Africa, there is also evidence, through paintings on ancient Mayan pottery, that the rabbit was also part of ancient Mayan stories. “In modern Yucatan the trickster is called Juan Tul (Hohn Rabbit), and it has been said that he is a tall thin man with a long moustache and lots of whiskers” (Bierhorst 13). In one story that Bierhorst recounts, Rabbit, the trickster, is captured by a watermelon farmer for eating the fruit. Farmer

leaves to prepare a fire hot brand as a lasting punishment for Rabbit's crime; however, Rabbit entices Coyote into taking his place, and Coyote, not Rabbit, is branded. Determined to retaliate, Coyote confronts Rabbit only to meet his demise in a deep well (72-76).

Many folktales from this area focus on crops, maize in particular, for corn was a staple crop in many areas. John Bierhorst and Juliet Piggott tell essentially the same tale; Bierhorst asserts that his version, "The Bird Bride," "like so many modern stories from the region, shows the influence of European fairy tales" (6). Piggott's version, "The Brothers and the Singing Toad," is more extensive and probably more authentic. In the tale, a farmer with three unmarried sons begins to contemplate the future of his land once he is gone; when he and his sons discover the maize crop ravished, he sees a chance to test the fortitude and ingenuity of his sons, providing some basis for inheriting his holdings. Each son spends a night in the field trying to apprehend the maize destroyer, but because the older two rebuff a singing frog who holds the key to the mystery, they are unsuccessful. The third son accepts the frog's help and ends up with a very pleased father, a beautiful house, a lovely wife, and a long and satisfying life on his father's land. The older sons leave the farm for the city Merida, hoping to find their fortune there (Piggott 107-116).

Finally, in some Peruvian tales, the fox, trickster in some Native American tales, becomes the tricked; Guinea Pig becomes the trickster character. In one tale, "Guinea Pig and Fox," Guinea Pig raids a farmer's kitchen, stealing all of the family's food. Determined to capture and punish the culprit, farmer fashions a tar figure, reminiscent of those found in slave tales, and Guinea Pig becomes stuck to the tar figure. Fox approaches and is duped into removing the tar figure from Guinea Pig, but it attaches to him. Of course, farmer finds and beats him, and Fox, determined to retaliate, searches for Guinea Pig. Unfortunately, Fox is duped several more times, and Guinea Pig escapes, unscathed (Sherman 95-97).

Native American Tricksters: Overview

While researching Native American tricksters, I became aware of special considerations that surround the retelling of these stories when compared with other cultures based on their belief system. "Christianity teaches that only humans have souls. Indians believe that even a stone, a tree, or a lake has a soul, a spirit, and there are strict systems of beliefs about the effects of telling certain stories in certain ways or at specific times" (Erdoes and Ortiz xx). Some Native American tales may be told only at certain times of the day or during particular seasons. Other stories belong to families and should not be told by other than family members. Furthermore, the sexual exploits that are a part of many of the stories should never be considered pornographic; they were not created for that purpose and should be considered as one part of the old traditions. The authors note that Indians have never assigned dirty words to body parts, another indication of the naturalness of the inclusion of sex in their stories. Native American trickster stories were told for the amusement of their listeners, many of whom suffered from hunger, weather disasters, forced movement, and violence of the white man. As quoted by Erdoes and Ortiz, John Fire Lame Deer (Sioux holy man) asserted about the trickster tales, "Coyote, Iktomi, and all their kind are sacred. A people that have so much to weep about as we Indians also need their laughter to survive" (xxii).

Pacific Northwest Trickster

The most famous trickster in the Pacific Northwest is Raven. Although other characters, such as Bluejay and Coyote, also have their share of stories, Raven reigns as the greatest trickster. Raven stories vary, of course, and details change, but the overall effect is the same: Raven is king. A recurring theme in stories about Raven and Coyote, from the Southwest, is their constant search for food, a metaphor for sexual appetite in more sophisticated tales.

In her version of a raven story, Evelyn Wolfson makes it clear that Raven's deeds, although they may have benefited mankind, served primarily to satiate his own needs and desires and that even when he performs one good deed, he also punishes those who don't cater to his wishes. In one tale she recounts, "Raven Steals Daylight from the Sky," Raven is hungry and unable to find fish in the sea due to the overwhelming darkness on an earth that has yet to see daylight. The trickster returns to his home, the sky, turns himself into a cedar leaf and is swallowed by a young maiden whose family possesses the magical box of daylight. The young woman's father, Sky Chief, is ecstatic about her pregnancy, not realizing Raven (the leaf) is the baby. Upon birth, the baby manipulates the family into trusting him with the box of daylight, and, eventually, he returns to earth and transforms himself into the Raven. Here he again meets the Frog People on the river and asks that they give him food; when they refuse, he threatens them, but they do not relent. Resolved that Animal People will have daylight, Raven crashes the box against the rocks, releasing daylight to the delight of the Animal People, but at the same time causing the demise of the Frog People who had denied his request for food. In another version, by Josepha Sherman, the baby is born with a raven's tail, and his relatives tease him unmercifully about it. Angered, Raven steals the ball of light (not the box) and tosses it to his friend Squirrel who helps Raven escape with the ball. According to this version, his grandfather offers to trade him for a smaller ball, but Raven declines in order to provide light for the world and to be able to "show off his feathers" (110). Raven tosses the ball to the sky, and it becomes the sun; the angry grandfather tosses the smaller ball into the sky to become the moon.

The discrepancies in these two tales underscore the variety of stories available to address different age, ability, and cultural groups. Additionally, the topic of sun and moon, lightness and darkness also suggest how specific ideas and themes may be addressed across cultures.

Southwest Trickster: Coyote

In their book *American Indian Trickster Tales*, Erdoes and Ortiz note that Coyote is the most famous trickster in Indian culture and that his escapades occur from Mexico to the far north, and from sea to sea. While Coyote is often associated with stories from the Southwestern United States, he also appears with Raven in stories from the Pacific Northwest, even to the point that there is disagreement about who really provided light for the world (Sherman 111). Erdoes and Ortiz assert that coyote possesses all the attributes, good and bad, that characterize man.

Coyote, part human and part animal, taking whichever shape he pleases, combines in his nature the sacredness and sinfulness, grand gestures and pettiness, strength and weakness, joy and misery, heroism and cowardice that together form the human character...As a cultural hero, Old Man Coyote makes the earth, animals and humans. He is the Indian Prometheus, bringing fire and daylight to the people. He positions the sun, moon, and stars in their proper places. He teaches humans how to live. As Trickster, he is greedy, gluttonous, and thieving. (Erdoes and Ortiz xiv)

When selecting Coyote stories, one must be careful to avoid stories that focus on his sexual appetite. Unlike many tricksters, Coyote is often the trickster who is tricked by other animals. One instance is in Sherman's version of "Coyote Goes Hunting." At the beginning of the story, the trickster Coyote seems to have everything under control. Mere wishes provide him with water transportation to a site where he knows small animals dwell. Although he has the upper hand on these animals, they use their wits to outsmart the predator. Choosing Cottontail first, he attempts to force the rabbit out of his hole by starting a fire and using the pitch to force him out. However, Cottontail has tricks up his sleeves as well and abandons his talking moccasins to fool the coyote. Birds and locusts are Coyote's next targets, but they, too, outwit the trickster. In this tale, Coyote appears as an arrogant and foolish predator who cannot overcome the cleverness of his prey (113-115).

In another tale Coyote is again pitted against a rabbit. Again, Coyote is looking for food and has trapped a rabbit in his hole. Anxious to save himself, the rabbit mentions he is on his way to a family feast; believing that he will be the honored guest at that feast, Coyote agrees to carry rabbit to his family's home, but, at rabbit's insistence, he is saddled and bridled for the ride. When they arrive at the feast, rabbit hurriedly ties him to a post, and Coyote watches, but does not participate in, the party. When he is ready to leave, rabbit again fools Coyote by attaching spurs to his feet, making the trip home miserable for Coyote. But Coyote still sees the silver lining; he decides to take the rabbit home where his wife will help him capture the rabbit for their dinner. Rabbit, however, leaps off and burrows into his home, out of the reach of a bleeding and suffering trickster Coyote (Erdoes and Ortiz 34-36).

Rabbits were not the only tricksters to outsmart Coyote. Even the donkey out tricked the trickster. In an amusing tale, Coyote meets a donkey and asks for assistance in crossing a river, but during the crossing he steals the cheeses that the donkey is delivering to market for his owner. When the cheese buyer looks into the bags, the cheeses are missing, and donkey must return home to an irate owner who admonishes him to bring the coyote to his farm or face terrible consequences. Donkey plays dead in front of the cave where Coyote lives with his family, and the children, ecstatic at the prospect of a big dinner, beg for the heart. Coyote puts his head down donkey's throat to retrieve the heart, donkey closes his teeth on Coyote, and returns him to the farmer successfully. Farmer skins Coyote in retaliation, and the trickster returns home and retreats to the back of his cave, embarrassed by his nakedness.

Asian Trickster

Asian literature includes trickster animal characters similar to those in African and Native American tales, but it also includes human tricksters. In *The Enchanted Tapestry* by Robert D. San Souci, an elderly woman, mother to three sons, is the weaver of tapestries that her sons sell in order to support the family. Enthralled with her finest creation, she insists that she cannot sell her masterpiece – that she must continue working on it. However, a fateful gust of wind carries the tapestry to far off places, and each brother, from oldest to youngest, travels to retrieve and sell her tapestry. However, each encounters a sorceress who tempts them with an immediate reward of gold to deter them from their goal. The oldest and middle brothers succumb to the ruse and proceed to squander the gold on themselves rather than use it to support the family, but the youngest brother refuses the easy road and perseveres to find the tapestry in the hands of a beautiful fairy. When he returns the tapestry safely to his mother, it grows until it becomes real, and mother and son enter the beautiful landscape, the beautiful fairy reappears, and the three live happily every after. The sorceress/trickster, in the meantime, relegates the older brothers to a life of poverty. Compassion, generosity, and filial love prevail.

An entirely different type of trickster becomes a cultural hero in Jon J. Muth's *Stone Soup*. Three Zen monks travel to a village that has suffered adversity due to famines, floods, and war. Facing dire economic problems, the villagers, feeling their circumstances are hopeless, have retreated into their homes, unwilling to socialize, work with or help others in their village. The monks visit the town and begin cooking a pot of soup with only stones and water. Curiosity draws villager after villager to the soup pot to see what is going on, and each offers an ingredient to better the soup. At last, the soup is complete, and the monks remove the stones altogether. Villagers gather to enjoy the soup, and more, the fellowship that working together and sharing has ignited. The monks, cultural hero tricksters, are offered lodging and gratitude, and the villagers vow to work together even after the monks leave. The author notes that the story has many versions, some of which are from Europe; he also notes similar stories in Jamaica, Korea, and the Philippines. While Muth's story uses stones to begin the soup, other versions feature other articles to begin the soup. Further, Muth has also incorporated Asian symbolism into the story, from the three deities to the holy color yellow to examples from Eastern culture.

Finally, the Asian section of the unit would not be complete without a story about Chinese Monkey King. Released by a lightning strike, the magical monkey emerges from an egg embedded in a rock. Obviously the strongest of his species, he becomes the natural leader; when he realizes he is mortal, he begins the search for immortality. After several misadventures, he becomes the student and faithful companion of a monk, Tang Seng. One of the Monkey King tales involves Mr. Gau, a wealthy landowner, who threatens a servant, Tsai, with death unless he finds a way to eliminate a demon, his son-in-law, from the premises. Monkey King accepts the challenge and uses magic to accomplish the deed. After marrying Gau's youngest daughter, the husband (Pigsy) pleased his father-in-law for many years – until he locked the young woman in a shed and turned into a pig. Gau wants his daughter back and Pigsy gone. Monkey King employs every trick in the book, from using his magical powers to changing sex, in order to conquer Pigsy, all the time avoiding real violence. Monkey King is able to satisfy the anger of Gau, rescue the daughter, and remove Pigsy from the premises; in the end, Pigsy is anxious to escape Gau's wrath, and he agrees to assume a much lower position, that of a pack animal, and accompany Monkey King and the monk to India (Chin, Center, and Roos 95-110).

LESSON PLANS

Lesson Plan 1: Defining and Finding Tricksters in Folk Tales and Myths

Objectives

ELA 6.10L: Represent information in tables, Frayer models, timelines, webs, Venn diagrams, outlines, fishbone maps and flow charts to demonstrate comprehension of reading selections.

ELA 6.11A: Offer observations, make connections, react, speculate, interpret, and raise questions in response to texts.

ELA 6.12F: Analyze character traits, relationships, changes they undergo, motivations, conflicts, and point of view.

ELA 6.12G: Recognize and analyze plot (exposition, rising; action, climax, falling action, and resolution), setting (time and place) and problem resolution in a text passage and in longer selections.

G/T: The students will define the term archetype and recognize archetypal characters in literature.

Materials: Videotape: Bugs Bunny Cartoon

Day 1: Bugs Bunny and Trickster Traits

Opening Focus: There are several objectives for the initial lesson for this unit. I will begin by discussing the term archetype with the students. We will talk about stereotypical characters in school, on popular television shows, and in video games: the gossip, the bully, the valley girl, the innocent adventurer, the sidekick, the mentor, and so forth. I want students to recognize that there are character *types* both in real life and on television, and that there is a literary term that can be used to classify these character types: the archetype.

Initial Activity: I will introduce the Bugs Bunny cartoon and ask students to watch the characters carefully for activities and attitudes. We're really going to begin with what I like to call the "apparent" level of literature: plot, setting, and characters. After we watch the cartoon, we will discuss the obvious aspects of the story.

- What was the basic story line in the cartoon?
- Who were the main characters? What was the relationship?
- What was the conflict, the problem, in the story?
- How did the characters deal with the conflict?

I will ask students to watch the cartoon again, this time looking for specific characteristics and attitudes of Bugs Bunny and his prey. After the film, we will brainstorm what we saw Bugs Bunny do (transformation, attacking the status quo, using deceit, and so forth).

- In small groups, the students will construct graphic organizers (a cluster) that include as many adjectives as they can think of along with evidence from the cartoon for each adjective.
- When students have completed the cluster, we will reconvene as a class and list the characteristics on butcher paper; students may add items they did not include. I will steer students to think of characteristics they have missed and add, if necessary, the traits of a trickster they do not have.
- Independent Practice: Students will be given a 5x7 index card. Each student will recall a trickster they have encountered in fantasy, myth, fairy tale, or folk tale; they will draw a picture of the character in cluster format and note the characteristics that their chosen character possesses.

Lesson Plan 2: Compare/Contrast Greek Tricksters and Classify Traits

Objectives:

ELA 6.10L; ELA 6.11A; ELA 6.12F; ELA 6.12G (See Lesson Plan 1)

ELA 6.14C: Recognize and discuss the influence distinctive cultural mores, values, social conventions, and gender roles have on literary themes using multicultural texts.

Days 1, 2 & 3: Examine trickster myths from several cultures; analyze and classify the character traits of the tricksters according to the list students developed in Lesson 1.

Materials: Copies of myths: Hermes, Odysseus and Cyclops, Penelope

Initial Activity: I will distribute Greek stories about Hermes, Odysseus, and Penelope and ask students to read the stories in small groups. After reading the stories, we will discuss the stories and focus on how the three characters were very different types of tricksters, emphasizing that while archetypes may have very similar traits, they may also be very different.

Group Practice Activity: I will distribute a matrix to all students with characteristics of tricksters listed. Students will break into groups to read Greek trickster stories. I will ask students to read the stories aloud, within their groups to understand the general plot, setting, and character information.

Story Analysis: Students will then read the stories again in order to complete their part of the matrix. Each student will be responsible for recording trickster traits for one story; when all students have completed this part of the task, they will work together to combine their information on poster paper. If students have not completed work on their story, they may finish at home.

Matrix Comparison: When the groups have completed their part of the matrix, I will tape the charts together to form one big matrix, which we will then study. Based on the stories I have chosen for this activity, students should notice that all the stories have a trickster who meets *several*, but not necessarily all, of the criteria for the trickster archetype.

Closure:

- Students will summarize what they have learned by creating group definitions of the terms archetype and trickster using the class matrix. They will record their definitions on small posters; we will compare the definitions and come up with the perfect class definition that we can use.

- The class will consider the question, “What’s behind the trickster?” Discussion will center on whether the trickster is good or bad? Do we approve or disapprove of his methods? The outcomes of his tricks? How might we expect tricksters to look? Does the end justify the means?
- What are the purposes of the trickster in various cultures and story types? (Ex: teach behavior, cultural hero, explain the world and science, and so forth)

Lesson Plan 3: Exploring the Trickster across Cultures

Objectives:

ELA 6.10L; ELA 6.11A; ELA 6.12F; ELA 6.12G (See Lesson Plan 1)

ELA 6.14C: (See Lesson Plan 2)

ELA 6.11D: Compare and contrast theme, ideas, symbols, values, morals, topics, gist, opinions, problems, and solutions across literary and informational text, values, moral, topic, gist, opinions, problems, and solutions across multiple texts.

Materials: Copies of myths from different cultures that were summarized in the content area of this unit.

Day 1: After dividing the class into self-selected culture pairs/groups based on their expressed area of interest, students will read, analyze, and present their trickster tales to the class. Students must also present the context for their stories. For example, if they choose the African-American culture, they must explain the context of early trickster tales – a reaction to their enslavement on white plantations. On the first day, they will look at the story for character, plot, setting and context.

Days 2 & 3: The next two days will be spent examining the trickster in the story: what the trickster was trying to accomplish within the context of the story and background information about the culture from which the story came. For example, they will try to find visual representations of the trickster and his prey, the lesson of the story, and how the setting might have looked. They will also decide how they will present the story to the rest of the class. Throughout their analysis, they will be reminded to pay special attention to the characteristics of the trickster.

Days 4 & 5: Students will organize the presentation they will make to the class. It may be in the form of a skit, puppet show, storyboard, or an acceptable product of their choice.

Day 6: Presentations (estimate 10 minutes per group). Ideally, Day 6 will occur on a Tuesday so that students will have had the weekend to gather props, etc, to create their presentation.

Lesson Plan 4: There Is No Box: Creating a Trickster Tale

Objectives:

ELA 6.10L; ELA 6.12F (See Lesson Plan 1)

ELA 6.5C: Present dramatic interpretations of experience, stories, poems, or plays.

ELA 6:15G: Use literary devices effectively such as suspense, dialogue, and figurative language.

G/T: The students will create and present a project that includes and reflects the characteristics of folktales or myths with the main character assuming the traits of a trickster.

G/T: Students will use a story board/graphic organizer to plan their stories.

Materials: Students will determine the materials they will use for this project.

Day 1: Now that students have a clear understanding of the characteristics of the trickster archetype, they will be challenged to create their own trickster tales. They may choose to write a story using the character they have already studied, or they may choose to adopt a new trickster:

one from their home culture or an entirely new (fictitious) character who might represent modern culture. We will, of course, discuss the options in detail so that they understand how a modern trickster might appear, what types of problems that trickster could attack, and how students might portray the character. For example, we will discuss why ordinary people might feel compelled to recognize and correct an injustice they perceive, whether it is a bully in school, school gossip, someone who is polluting the environment, or even someone who does not practice good etiquette. Students will have options for their final product: short story, comic book/graphic novel, children's book, script, PowerPoint, film, or another written option. We will discuss the possibilities for each option, including illustrations, photographs, pop-up characters, and others. The first task is to create the trickster story board to force students to plan each element of the story; without such an exercise, students tend to start a story without a real idea of where the story will go or how it will be resolved.

Days 2-5: Students will have three days to write and illustrate their stories. During this time they will have access to books and a computer to research and/or create their written presentation. The rubric for this project will emphasize that the trickster archetype must be evident.

Day 6: Students will meet in groups to share their trickster stories. Audience members in each group will complete a peer evaluation form to determine if the story meets the criteria for a trickster tale.

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Supplemental Sources

Abrahams, Roger D. *African American Folktales: Stories from Black Traditions in the New World*. New York: Random House, 1985.

An extremely interesting introduction offers insight into the trials of collecting and recording orally told tales while trying to maintain the story-telling elements without burdening the tale with dialect and language of the times. These are obviously tales that other writers have used to create shorter and easier stories for children.

Birch, Cyril. *Tales from China*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1961.

Birch retells many interesting tales, some of which I had not encountered in other volumes; for example, the ghost stories were unique. Unfortunately, Birch does not include an introduction or any historical background for his collection of stories, but many of the stories do provide enough information at the beginning of the stories to provide information the students may need to understand the stories. For example, “Magicians of the Way” begins with a comparison of Buddhist and Taoist priests.

Frobenius, Leo, and Douglas C. Fox. *African Genesis: Folk Tales and Myths of Africa*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1999.

Frobenius is well-known for his explorations through Africa and his belief that cultures are linked, suggesting a transfer of religion and mythology from culture to culture. Douglas Fox provides background and pictures. The myths focus somewhat more on the people stories of Africa (particular areas) and are more detailed than the short tales in other books.

Mora, Pat. *The Race of Toad and Deer*. Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 2001.

Mora and her illustrator Domi retell the tortoise and the hare story using the Mayan version that focuses on a toad and a deer. After reading this story, students might be inclined to search for the same story across cultures.

Radin, Paul. *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*. New York: Schocken Books, 1956.

Radin’s book is a scholarly in-depth look at the Winnebago Trickster Cycle, which is told in its entirety and is not suitable for student consumption. However, it is very useful as a teacher resource, not even simply for the tale, but for the Native American traditions and rules of behavior. For example, Radin discusses in detail how the tale was told and written down, not by himself, a white man, but by an unnamed narrator and Sam Blowsnake, an Indian who acted as go-between and scribe. Radin provides a colorful history of the Winnebago tribe.

Wyatt, Susan, Ph.D. “Awakening the Trickster.” May 5-7, 2005.

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Wyatt focuses her article on Hermes as a trickster, and suggests other characters who might be included, such as Penelope, Loki, and Scheherazade.

The tradition of playing harmless tricks on friends and neighbors goes back hundreds of years, and has been mentioned in literature as far back as 1392 in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Many famous authors have taken their pranking off the page and into real life, as well. Virginia Woolfe participated in the Dreadnought Hoax of 1910, posing with friends as Abyssinian royals. The trickster god of old, Loki has long been associated with pranks and double crosses. In this version, Low Key is a grifter who meets Shadow in prison. The ultimate con-man, his tricks tend more towards running games and schemes rather than straightforward practical jokes. Still, anyone looking for some mythological inspiration for a well-planned prank with a long set up would do worse than to look to Loki.

definition of trickster. Hoping to reveal the universality of this character type in other literature (or other media), I expect students to recall characters in books they have read that might be similarly categorized. Looking at tricksters from other cultures will allow students to proudly present examples from their own heritage; I hope that parents will become involved in this activity, especially at the beginning of the year. It should be noted that there is disagreement among the experts as to a specific characteristic list or clear definition of the trickster. For example, some experts include *buffoon* as a characteristic of the trickster while others disagree. The Trickster or Araskes is a Scorn Baron character in the 2017 multiplayer first-person shooter video game *Destiny 2*.^[5] The *Destiny 2* character, The Trickster, known for deception, has been used as an image macro placed in reaction to a caption involving a cheat or a deceiving action. Origin. On July 15th, 2019, Redditor *ObamalsAGamer* posted the original format to *r/Destiny2*^[1] commenting that "This can be a really good meme format" (shown below). The next day, Redditor *DADDYTIME22* used the Trickster in a *Let See Who This Really Is* image posted to *r/DestinyMemes*^[3] (shown below, center). The post garnered 420 points (96% upvoted) in a month. There are no videos currently available. + Add a Video. Recent Images 13 total. The Trickster Uploaded by Bridget.