

The proposed American Folklife Center will have a tremendous impact upon the course of folklore and folklife studies in this country. National support for folklife is an old story in many countries throughout the world. For too long we have merely looked enviously at the government-financed backing of studies in Ireland, Sweden, and a host of other nations. With the passing of the bills now in the legislature, we may finally bring about the sort of federal support that will felicitously affect us all. The responsibility for realizing that support and for determining its exact shape rests with all of us.

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"MY GRANDMOTHER TOLD ME THE STORY ABOUT..."
FOLKLORE IN A SECONDARY SHORT STORY UNIT

The short story has in recent years been given a major role in secondary school literature. No longer is it supplementary to the novel; "the twentieth century has seen the maturing of the short story as a literary genre of the first order."¹ In light of this, the current challenge to secondary English teachers is in large measure to find stimulating sources of new materials for use in short story units that will further deepen and broaden student perspectives.

Because the class has been traditionally bound to the book as the primary source of American stories, the typical unit has involved successive reading of the text with emphasis on plot, character, setting, etc. Although any creative teacher has been able to draw from outside references to enhance study, there has remained the chronic problem of limited supplementary sources and the resultant lack of active student response in outside classwork, particularly their own writing.

In the search for greater excellence in the American short story unit there is no ready solution to the need for easily accessible/ appropriate materials and increased student involvement/participation. Recently, however, there has arisen in a few scattered classrooms across the country a new field of study which has proven exciting and workable. The field is folklore. The purpose of this paper is to discuss in some depth the use of folklore in secondary school English classes with particular emphasis on a unit which has proven effective with seventh, eighth, and tenth graders.

Generally and erroneously, folklore in public school has consisted of an elementary grade treatment of Paul Bunyan, Pecos Bill and the other so-called tall-tale heroes. The truth is, however, that:

American folklore does not consist mainly of stories about Paul Bunyan, southern mountain ballads, protest songs, and

fairy tales; nor is American folklore confined to rural regions or to past history. Instead, American folklore comprises a dazzling variety of types--including verbal, customary, and material aspects--and it continues to flourish in the present as it did in the past.²

Educators cannot be totally blamed for their lack of understanding of the real nature of folklore. Until recently few American universities offered any courses in the subject and still only a small number of these institutions give any kind of degree in folklore.³ A good proportion of journal publications encouraging greater inclusion of folklore in the schools are only lauding John Henry and his fellows as tradition so rich and significant to America that no child should miss them.⁴

While ignorance on the part of teachers and the public at large is responsible for the current status of authentic folklore in public education, it is essential that a working definition for the purpose of this summary correct the popular misconception. Folklore, then, encompasses all facets of a culture that are orally transmitted,

That is to say, authentic folklore is passed on by word of mouth or example in traditional forms that are constantly shifting and changing within some group of people who share one or more common traits, such as occupation, age, ethnic background, religion, or place of residence.⁵

Reports from instructors who have utilized folklore as defined have indicated several interesting results:

1. One of the tasks that takes up so much of our time is to compose or find suitable examples for a point we wish to present in a lesson. Some of us have found that there is a wealth of excellent material for this purpose in a nation's folklore.⁶
2. Folklore already is demonstrating that it sheds new light upon the intricate pattern of native experience and that it can and does enrich units in many areas. One of the characteristics of folk literature is that it provides an active response. One of the advantages of using folk material in the classroom is that the pupil identifies himself with the subject matter because he participates. Folklore, skillfully handled, thus not only aids in making the child's cultural heritage more immediate and personal, but also adds color and tang of life to impersonal interpretations found in textual references.⁷
3. Because many teachers do not fully understand folklore, they are unable to recognize or to make the most profitable use of its potential values for education.⁸

The implications of this sampling for a unit on the American short story are basically twofold. First, the fact that this field is a Johnny-come-lately to curriculum is no indication that it is not a unique and pertinent source of material. On the contrary, folklore of the geographic region is easily obtainable and at present virtually untapped. It offers one of the most significant indigenous supplies of information in contemporary education. Secondly, student involvement can be an integral part of folklore in ways virtually impossible for most other disciplines. In an educational era when "relevancy" and "accountability" are laid on the table for every curricular meal, any field that actively integrates pupils in study must be given a serious chance. Folklore lends itself naturally to oral presentation on the part of the student as well as to fieldwork which can become a vital part of classwork. Furthermore, if John Dewey was correct in his enunciation of the principle that we teach individuals rather than subject fields, it follows that scholarly consideration of the lore of the people themselves will attain a personal significance that study of setting, plot, etc. could hardly match.

While folklore has many obvious advantages in this context, it must be mentioned that many English teachers are reluctant to include in the curriculum stories which are notorious for bad grammar, poor plotline, weak characters, and questionable morals. With more quality literature than could possibly be covered in a story unit, why introduce obscure tales by unknown authors? The question is a valid one. The answer best lies in the nature of the folklore itself. The spontaneity of the folktale, the uninhibited sharing of ideas often teach more, help students "begin to realize what literature is"⁹ in ways published material never can. The value of personal experience with oral narrative in a communication-oriented society certainly goes without saying.¹⁰ There are situations where the use of folklore may be most inappropriate. For example, even though many dirty jokes are genuine folklore, telling them in the classroom would be hard to justify. For the purposes of the American short story, however, folktales which grew out of the same cultural milieu can be a genuine aid to teacher/student learning.

The following is a summary of a comprehensive unit introducing folklore of the American West into a unit on the American short story. The objectives are:

1. Active student involvement in the storytelling process. Students are to learn the elements of the short story through their collection of oral narratives from friends, relatives. They will also be introduced to fieldwork through tapes and records (such as The Badmen) where they will be able to hear oral telling of various short stories. Students will also be required to relate a story themselves so they will have the personal experience.
2. Student writing in various forms. Although a culminating assignment will be the creation of a short story, students will be devising conclusions to other narratives, editing the stories they tell to one another, and reporting often various types of accounts they hear daily.

This unit can be used with a variety of professional short stories as available in the text or through other sources. The purpose of this folklore material

is not as comparative study but as a supplementary source to this text literature. It is used as the basis of student participation whereby the elements of short stories, e.g., plot, characters, voice, etc., can be experienced for the most effective learning. Delineating differences and similarities between written and oral stories could help answer such important questions as: What makes a good story, a good storyteller? What rhetorical devices do the oral and written stories have in common? Why do performance and feedback from the audience affect the oral story more than the written? What rhetorical devices are only those of the oral storyteller? What devices are only part of written stories.

Fieldwork

Students will be immediately immersed in fieldwork from the inception of this unit. Their initial assignment will be the relating of stories they have heard from their peers. This will involve a lot of jokes and narratives of this nature. With the discussion of oral narrative and some basic concrete definitions of folklore, the class will hear recorded stories and begin to analyze the traditional elements of short stories as they are evidenced in this material. It should be noted that a conscientious effort is made to keep folklore out of the popularly conceived models. All stories to be used, contemporary and past, have a common bond in their Western origin.

With this background, individual members of the class will begin to collect stories from their friends and relatives. A comprehensive notebook is to be kept so all a student's work is together and accessible to the class. Particular emphasis will be given to stories told by people of at least their parents' age or older. The students will understand that each narrative is to be rendered as accurately as possible from the oral text. They are to punctuate as appropriate and use the wording verbatim. This will require increasing writing skill particularly since these will then be used in class for some actual work in sequence and voice. Students will be required to punctuate and correct the grammar, etc., in some stories to see the drastic contrasts between edited versions, which are often limpid, and the original text with its originality and even its false starts.

The last step will be the actual recording and in-class use of student narratives. This technique has proven to be effective already. Trying to tell something makes the students realize how important placement of words is and how easy it is to jumble the details. Two examples follow. The first is from a seventh grade boy, the second an eighth grade girl.

My grandmother told me the story about when she was a young girl. Her father had died and they were in very bad financial trouble. They lived next to some railroad tracks and bums kept tramping through. They also had a field right next to their house that they owned, and they wondered if they should sell it or plant something in the field. So she was deciding and they would feed these bums as they came by. One day a bum came by and he had bad clothes on, but they were clean. He had a white beard and white hair. She asked him if he was hungry and he said yes. He came and he

ate. On the way out he said, "Plant your field in strawberries," and he left. She ran after him, but he had disappeared somewhere so she planted the field in strawberries and they made a lot of money off it.¹¹

My grandmother lived on the outskirts of Moroni and her mother, my greatgrandmother, had to travel to Mt. Pleasant to go to Relief Society and it took all day to get there and back. So she was left alone with the children each time they went to Relief Society. Many times the Indians would come by and ask for food from the people there in Moroni and she was very scared of the Indians and especially when her mother was gone. And one time she saw two Indians coming down the road and she got all the kids under a big bed and she got under too. When they came and knocked on the door, they just kept knocking, and at last she stuck her head out and said, "Sorry, nobody home."

Writing

A very important aspect of this unit is student writing. Throughout the classwork pupils will be working regularly with their own written material. Because the folklore used lends itself so well to written work, for purposes of stimulation and class exercise with grammar, punctuation, setting and the other elements of the story, students will take an early and active role in recording their own folklore.

Although the quality and quantity of work will vary and has varied from student to student, the entire unit is designed to allow response from pupils at all levels. Since the object is fuller understanding of oral tradition in the local area and development of writing skills, students will naturally be allowed a creativity and range of subject matter beyond the scope of most fields.

Conclusions

The major result is that folklore works. It is effective, pervasive and fun. It is expandable and flexible, while being available everywhere. Students can and do find it rewarding and worth their time whether they exhibit interest in the oral history of their area or not. Since folklore is today, yesterday, and tomorrow in scope, it provides excellent and endless material for use in a unit dealing with the American short story.

Notes

1. Sister Alberta Rohrkemper, "Teaching the Short Story," Ohio English Bulletin 12:2 (May, 1971):5.
2. Jan Harold Brunvand, A Guide for Collectors of Folklore in Utah: (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press), p. 3.
3. Ronald L. Baker, "Folklore Courses and Programs in American Colleges and Universities," Journal of American Folklore 84 (April-June, 1971): 221-229
4. Fannie B. Leps, "Our American Heritage: A Reading-Centered Language-Arts Unit," English Journal 43 (April, 1954): 187-190. This is but one example.

5. Brunvand, p. 4.
6. Elvira Adorno, "The Use of Folklore and Other Materials in the Motivation or Presentation of a Lesson," Italica 28 (June, 1951): 138.
7. Philip D. Jordan, "Folklore for the School," Social Education 15 (February, 1951): 59-63.
8. John F. Putnam, "Folklore: A Key to Cultural Understanding," Educational Leadership 21 (March, 1964): 364.
9. Elsa R. Berner and Julia Eriksen, "American Folklore: Good Reading in Lake Junior High," Clearing House 23 (October, 1948): 98.
10. Gerald Haslam, "America's Oral Literature: Our Forgotten Heritage," English Journal 60 (September, 1971): 709-723. Haslam's discussion of the value of oral narrative is excellent.
11. Note: A verbatim text from the tape would read like this: Ah, ah, my grandmother, ah, told us-er me the story about, etc. All the slips and false starts, etc. would be included. This has been cleaned up for the sake of clarity.

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ON SUGG'S REVIEW OF BIRDWHISTELL'S KINESICS AND CONTEXT

Richard P. Sugg (Vol. VI, p. 55-56) does Folklore Forum readers a service by outlining the major, and certainly obvious, faults of Kinesics and Context as a book of Birdwhistell as a writer. Mr. Sugg also correctly surmises that the book does not provide a blueprint for the novice who would study body motion. He even demonstrates this point by inaccurately, and irrelevantly, criticizing Birdwhistell's "Sample Conversation with Description." Birdwhistell could describe a message such as 'this is pretending' in an exhaustive analysis. But the example cited by Mr. Sugg was written in 1952 prior to the kinesic frame-by-frame analysis of film, before the discovery of parakinesic markers, and was not intended to be complete. In kinesics, as in structural linguistics, one carefully specifies and maintains a level of analysis; appropriately, Birdwhistell did not consider every level in his illustration. Mr. Sugg's conclusions thus show his unfamiliarity with kinesics assumptions about metatyping and the hierarchical structure of messages. He completely overlooks the kinesics approach to the question "why." But surely the essentials of discriminational meaning, free variation, and exhaustive analysis may sound like meaningless jargon to a reader fresh from Fast's Body Language. Others would do well to read Kinesics and Context chapters 26, 27, and 2--in that order--while remembering the lesson urged by Dorson in 1961: "Because the word 'folklore' is used so widely, all kinds of people pass judgment on folklore, when they would not dream of commenting on more recondited fields of learning." The same holds true for "body motion" and kinesics.

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