

## LESSON 10

**Museum Connection:** Family and Community

**Lesson Title:** Teaching Values through Fables

**Purpose:** In this lesson students will analyze two fables—one African, the other African American—in order to explain how fables are used to impart cultural values from one generation to the next. Applying what they have learned about the interaction of narrative elements in a fable, students will create a modern fable of their own.

**Grade Level and Content Area:** Middle, Language Arts and Social Studies

**Time Frame:** 3-5 class periods

**Correlation to State Social Studies Standards:**

PNW 7.2 Students understand how individuals, groups, and institutions sustain and influence cultures.

**Social Studies: Maryland College and Career Ready Standards**

2.A.1.a (Grade 7) Apply understandings of the elements of culture to the studies of modern world regions, such as art, music, religion, government, social structure, education, values, beliefs and customs.

2.B.1.a (Grade 8) Describe the effects of cultural exchange and interactions among Europeans, Africans and Native Americans on the development of the United States.

**Correlation to State Reading and English Language Arts Maryland College and Career Ready Standards:**

3.A.3.b (Grades 6 and 7) Analyze the conflict and the events of the plot.

3.A.3.b (Grade 8) Analyze the conflict and its role in advancing the plot.

3.A.3.e (Grades 6, 7, and 8) Analyze relationships between and among characters, setting, and events.

1.E.1.a (Grades 6, 7, and 8) Listen to critically, read, and discuss texts representing diversity in content, culture, authorship, and perspective, including areas such as race, gender, disability, religion, and socio-economic background.

**Objectives:**

- Students will analyze the three narrative elements of a fable (plot, setting, and characters) in order to identify aspects of culture reflected in the tale.
- Students will explain how narrative elements work to convey the theme (moral) of a fable.

- Students will explain how fables are used as a teaching tool to impart cultural values from one generation to the next.

**Vocabulary and Concepts:**

**Character** – A person or animal represented in or acting in a story, poem, or drama is a character.

**Chief** – Often the leader or spokesperson of a group, a chief is a person of highest rank or authority.

**Culture** – Culture refers to the learned behavior of people and includes their belief systems, languages, social relationships, institutions and organizations, and material goods (such as food, clothing, buildings, tools, and machines).

**Fable** – A fable, which is a story meant to teach a useful lesson, often has animals that speak and act like humans.

**Folktale** – A folktale is a traditional story with a moral or lesson that is handed down by a group of people from one generation to the next

**Griot** – Traditionally from western Africa, a griot is a musician-entertainer whose performances include tribal histories and genealogies.

**Guinea fowl** – The guinea fowl, a pheasant-like bird, has black feathers with white spots.

**Millet** – Farmers grow a type of grass called millet for its edible white seeds.

**Moral** – The lesson to be learned from a story or fable is known as the moral and usually involves principles of right and wrong.

**Okra** – Okra is a tall plant whose edible green pods are used as ingredients in stews and soups.

**Personification** – A form of metaphor, personification occurs when animals, ideas, and things are represented with human qualities. “The drums were weeping today” is a good example of personification.

**Plot** – The action or sequence of events in a story is called its plot.

**Setting** – Setting refers to the physical background, time, and location in which the plot of a story takes place.

**Value** – A value is a standard or principle that is regarded as desirable or worthwhile.

## **Materials**

### **For the teacher:**

“Guinea Fowl and Rabbit Get Justice.” In *The Cow-tail Switch and Other West African Stories*, by Harold Courlander and George Herzog. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1947.

“Why Brother Alligator Has a Rough Back.” In *African-American Folktales for Young Readers*, edited by Judy Dockrey Young and Richard Alan Young. Little Rock, Arkansas: August House, Inc. 1993.

### **For the student:**

Student Resource Sheet 1 – “Guinea Fowl and Rabbit Get Justice”  
Student Resource Sheet 2 – “Why Brother Alligator Has a Rough Back”  
Student Resource Sheet 3 – Fable Writing  
Student Resource Sheet 4 – Original Fable (if using modified assessment)

## **Resources**

### **Books:**

Blassingame, John W. *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*. Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.

Levine, Lawrence W. *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Schwartz, Marie Jenkins. *Born in Bondage: Growing Up Enslaved in the Antebellum South*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000.

### **Teacher Background:**

Many cultures use folktales, such as fables and childhood stories, in order to impart their values and teach valuable lessons to their children. According to historian J. W. Blassingame, folktales were “[o]ne of the most important cultural forms in West Africa” (23). Enslaved Africans carried these folktales to America, where they became popular within the slave population. Blassingame argues that:

[o]ne of the African forms most resistant to European culture was the folk tale. An overwhelming majority of the tales of Southern slaves retained the structure and motif of their African prototypes. Anthropologists, Africanists, and folklorists have found so many parallels and identical tales among Africans and Southern slaves that there can be no doubt that many Southern black folk tales were African in origin. In fact, African scholars have traced many of the slave’s *[sic]* folk tales directly to Ghana, Senegal, and Mauritius, and the lore of such African peoples as the Ewe, Wolof, Hausa, Temne, Ashanti, and Ibo. (31-32)

Historian L. W. Levine believes something similar about African folktales, arguing that they:

served the dual purpose of not only preserving communal values and solidarity but also providing occasions for the individual to transcend, at least symbolically, the inevitable restrictions of his environment and his society by permitting him to express deeply held feelings which ordinarily could not be verbalized. (7-8)

Levine also adds that African folktales were modified when African culture met European culture and where similarities in African and European folklore occurred.

Blassingame, Levine, and M. J. Schwartz explain how folktales were used to teach slave children. Folktales, for instance, taught children to avoid mischief. They also reinforced good behavior and taught survival skills. From them children learned not to lie or steal, to restrict their egos, not to be greedy, and other lessons. Furthermore, folktales had real psychological benefits for slaves, who used them not only to escape the harshness of daily existence but also to express their own hopes and dreams. Through folktales, slaves could show anger toward their owners, as well as poke fun at, and even outsmart, Whites. The use of animals as main characters—particularly as trickster figures—was characteristic of African folktales. Usually a spider, rabbit, tortoise, or other weak animal, the trickster figure had the ability to outwit stronger and more powerful animals. Because enslaved Blacks certainly dreamed of turning the tables on their owners, they could readily identify with the trickster.

The two fables featured in this lesson, “Guinea Fowl and Rabbit Get Justice” and “Why Brother Alligator Has a Rough Back,” both use animal characters with human attributes in order to teach a valuable lesson. “Guinea Fowl and Rabbit Get Justice,” an African fable, emphasizes the importance of hard work and honesty. Rabbit is lazy and dishonest and tries to trick Guinea Fowl out of his crop. In the end, Guinea Fowl gets his crop back, and Rabbit realizes that it is much easier to do his work. The African American fable, “Why Brother Alligator Has a Rough Back,” teaches children not to go looking for trouble or they will find it. Brother Alligator brags to Brother Rabbit that he is not bothered by trouble, so Brother Rabbit tricks him into looking for trouble. When Brother Alligator goes to a field in order to look for trouble, Brother Rabbit sets the field on fire. Brother Alligator makes it back to the water, but the flames permanently scar his back.

Both fables are examples of how African culture migrated with enslaved Africans and of how that culture was adapted for the new culture that had developed among slaves in America. These folktales and others like them demonstrate that the institution of slavery did not eliminate the creative energy of those who had been enslaved. Through folktales a slave "could view himself as an object, hold on to fantasies about his status, engender hope and patience, and at least use rebellious language when contemplating his lot in life" (Blassingame 129). Thus folktales helped prevent the crippling psychological damage created by slavery and allowed slaves to educate their children and cope with the harsh conditions of their daily lives.

### Lesson Development:

1. **Motivation:** Discuss the following with students:
  - What is your favorite story and why?
  - Have students focus their discussion on the narrative elements (characters, plot, and setting).
  - Does the story have a lesson or moral?
2. Lead students in a discussion of the definition of a moral. Tell them that they will be examining two fables.
3. Pre-teach vocabulary as necessary.
4. Introduce the fable “Guinea Fowl and Rabbit Get Justice” by asking the following question:
  - How do the three elements of narration work together to create the theme (moral) of a fable?
5. Model the fable analysis by completing **Student Resource Sheet 1**, “Guinea Fowl and Rabbit Get Justice.” Sample responses have been included on the chart. Have students identify the theme (moral) of the story. Record their responses on the chart.
6. As guided practice, have students independently read “Why Brother Alligator Has a Rough Back” and complete **Student Resource Sheet 2**, “Why Brother Alligator Has a Rough Back,” with a partner or in a small group.
7. Have students refer to the information on both charts to discuss the following question:
  - What characteristics of culture are common to both fables?
  - What are the differences between the two fables?
8. Conduct a guided class discussion on the elements of a fable.
  - What three elements of narration work together to create a moral or theme in a fable? (*characters, setting, plot*)
  - Have the students examine the characters, and record their responses on a transparency, chart, or board:
    - What types of characters do fables have? (*animals*)
    - What are the traits of the characters?
    - If you were to write a fable, what type of characters could you create?
  - Have the students examine the setting, and record their responses on a transparency, chart, or board.
    - What time period is used?
    - Describe the geography of the location.
    - What kind of setting could you use if you wrote a fable?

- Have the students examine the plot, and record their responses on a transparency, chart, or board.
    - What was the problem in each of the fables you read?
    - How did the characters overcome their problems?
    - What type of problem or conflict could you use in a fable?
  - Have students examine the moral, and record their response on a transparency, chart, or board.
    - What was the moral of each fable you read?
    - What are some moral lessons that could be written into a fable?
9. **Assessment:** Using **Student Resource Sheet 3**, “Fable Writing,” have students apply what they have learned about the interaction of narrative elements in a fable to create a modern fable that reflects their own culture.

**Modified Assessment:** Teachers may wish to use **Student Resource Sheet 4**, “Original Fable,” instead of **Student Resource Sheet 3**.

**Thoughtful Application:**

Read and discuss fables from other cultures. Discuss how narrative elements are used to present aspects of culture. (Use the same analysis chart to guide students’ reading.)

**Lesson Extensions:**

- Visit the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture.
- After students have created their own fables, have them share their fables with younger students.
- Examine the role that griots have played in preserving African and African American culture.
- Invite a local griot to perform for the class. The National Association of Black Storytellers (<http://www.nathanielturner.com/natlassocblstorytellers.htm>) may be a resource for finding a local griot.

**“Guinea Fowl and Rabbit Get Justice”**

**How do the three elements of narration—character, plot, and setting—work together to create the theme (moral) of a fable?**

<b>Character</b>		<b>Plot</b>		<b>Setting</b>	
<b>Example</b>	<b>Character Traits</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Characteristics of Culture</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Characteristics of Culture</b>
Guinea Fowl	Hard-working	Carried vegetables to market	Barter society	Guinea Fowl’s farm	Farmed for a living
<b>Theme (Moral)</b>					

Student Resource Sheet 2

**“Why Brother Alligator Has a Rough Back”**

How do the three elements of narration—character, plot, and setting—work together to create the theme (moral) of a fable?

<b>Character</b>		<b>Plot</b>		<b>Setting</b>	
<b>Example</b>	<b>Character Traits</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Characteristics of Culture</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Characteristics of Culture</b>
<b>Theme (Moral)</b>					



### Fable Writing

**TITLE** \_\_\_\_\_

**SETTING**

--

Characteristics of Character

**CHARACTERS** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**PROBLEM**

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Event 1	
Event 2	
Event 3	
Event 4	
Event 5	

**MORAL**

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Student Resource Sheet 4

**Original Fable**

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Character</b>		<b>Plot</b>		<b>Setting</b>	
<b>Example</b>	<b>Character Traits</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Characteristics of Culture</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Characteristics of Culture</b>
<b>Theme (Moral)</b>					