

LESSON 9: STORYTELLERS CARRY CULTURE

MATERIALS:

Read: Why Possum Has a Bare Tale

Watch and listen: Lyn Ford, *By Another Name* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtH8K8lgz3Q>

- Culture Cards, pre-cut and placed into a stack (examples provided—add to these to create a class set)
- Four storyteller articles: Appalachia, Japan, China, and Africa (one copy per student group)
- Brown paper bags for Culture Topic Bags (four total)
- Storyteller Topic Bags (with objects for each of the three storytellers: Folklorists, Literary Tellers, and Storytellers)
- Folklorist Journals

OBJECTIVES:



Storytellers are revered in cultures around the world and throughout history.

Storytellers deliver tales with specific audiences in mind and choose their words accordingly.

Students will be able to:

- develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.
- participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.



Key Terms:

- culture (review)

SEQUENCE

WARM-UP: Discussion Prompt



Spiral back to ideas from Lesson 5, and review **objective** and **subjective** culture. Then, read the quote aloud:

“It has been said that storytellers hold culture in their mouths.”

TEACHER NOTES



Remind students: A few lessons back we talked about **culture**.

Culture can be difficult to define. Basically, it is the shared traditions, beliefs, and customs of a group of people. Asking

Ask: *What do you think that might mean?* Allow for discussion.



WRITING

Then, ask students to take out their Folklorist Journals and write their own definition of culture.

Ask for student volunteers to share their definitions from their Folklorist Journals. Review the term **culture** with students and create a new kid-friendly definition as a class, based on student input.

students to write their own definition will help them better internalize the meaning of the word. If needed, you can share the definition from the dictionary below and ask the students to help you rewrite it to make it more kid-friendly!

Culture: The totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought. (*American Heritage Dictionary*)

READ: *Why Possum Has a Bare Tale (Fable)*

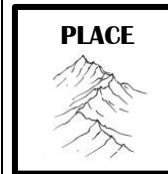


CLASS

Invite students to find a comfortable place for listening. Tell the students that this story, which they already read once in Lesson 1, was originally told in the Appalachian region of the United States, and is a traditional Appalachian folktale.

[For an alternate version of the same story, please visit the Northern Cherokee Nation Website: <http://www.northerncherokeemnation.com/why-the-opossumrsquos-tail-is-bare.html>]

While they are listening, encourage students to think about how this story gives the listener insight into the culture of the region. Ask students to consider: *What does the area that the story takes place in look like? How would you describe that area? What kinds of animals does that area have in it?*



PLACE

Revisit the discussion about Appalachia from Lesson 6. Do your students consider themselves Appalachian? Do you? How does your local understanding of Appalachian culture differ from what is represented in the story? How is the representation similar to/different from the *Ashpet* story?

WATCH: *By Another Name*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtH8K8lgz3Q>

Lyn Ford is a well-known storyteller from Appalachia. She edited a collection of tales told by Black Appalachian residents, *Affrilachian Tales* (Parkhurst Brothers Inc., 2012). The video shows Ford telling a version of another famous fairy tale, *Rumpelstiltskin*. This is an excellent example of storytelling for the students to watch and discuss as they prepare for the Storytelling Festival.

To help them learn more about Lyn Ford and her work as a professional storyteller, consider sharing this article with students (also included as a PDF):

<https://www.dispatch.com/article/20150706/ENTERTAINMENT/307069800>

WORD WORK: Culture

KID-FRIENDLY DEFINITION:

Culture is the way of life for a society that is passed on through families—the sports they watch, the music they listen to, the clothes they wear, the religions they believe in, etc.



LANGUAGE

Explain to students that the culture of a society can be broken down into different elements like the leaders, art, activities, food, and beliefs of a place. Explain that for the next activity, the students will be exploring different elements of



REAL WORLD

Appalachian culture.

ACTIVITY: Get That Culture Off My Back



GROUP

Precut the Culture Cards and place them in a stack to create a deck of cards. Allow students to draw a Culture Card from the deck and tape it to their partner’s back without letting their partner see what is written on the card. Then, allow students to move throughout the room. Students have to guess what is on their back by asking other students “yes” and “no” questions about their card. For example, “Can you wear this cultural object?”

Once the student guesses what is on his/her back, he/she can remove the card and read it. Once all students remove their cards, allow them to do a quick whip-around in which they share their card with the class.

Ask: What did we learn about the Appalachian culture from this game?

GROUP WORK: Storytellers in Different Cultures



INTEREST

Tell the class that they are now going to learn about storytellers in different cultures. Allow students to break up into four groups based on their interest in learning about the following locations and their storytelling traditions: (1) Appalachia, (2) Japan, (3)



TIP

In this lesson, teachers can insert the culture from any community or society they have studied this year—Greeks, Romans, North Americans, Native Americans, etc.

PLACE



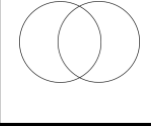
Make sure students understand that different cultures can exist within the same place! For example, Latinx people who live in your community may embrace Appalachian culture while continuing to honor and celebrate their family’s cultural heritage, which may have originated in El Salvador, Mexico, or other Spanish-speaking countries.



TIP

This activity can be a review of the culture previously studied, or act as a way of learning things about a different culture. There are example cards provided for you—you can use those and make additional ones, or students can create Culture Cards for the culture the class is studying before the activity begins and add those to the deck.

2E



For students needing additional support, consider giving them the article on China, as it has the least abstract details. Give students time to read the article silently. Then, you may

China, or (4) Africa. Distribute a copy of the appropriate Storyteller Articles to the students in each group for them to read together.

Once the groups have read their articles, they should create a topic bag on their culture with three or four drawings that represent special things about that culture and the types of storytelling traditions it has. They should place these pictures into a brown paper bag to create a Culture Topic Bag. In the next lesson, the class will have to guess what country the teller is from, so if students give a geographical clue, suggest that they make it the last clue.

EARLY FINISHERS: Additional Cultures/Storytellers



Ask early finishers to find information about storytellers from other cultures on the Internet—the Norse *skalds* or the Celtic *shanachies* are good examples to begin with. After these students have found the other examples of storytellers,

have them create articles similar to those being distributed. If time permits, they can also create a topic bag on the culture and storytellers they identify.

INTRODUCTION: Storyteller Topic Bags

Tell students they are about to learn about different jobs they can have if they like folktales, and that the teacher will model how to share a topic bag.



Students will get to choose one of the jobs to perform in preparation for the storytelling festival that will take place at the end of the unit.

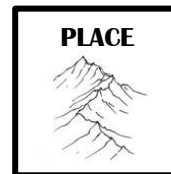
Tell the students that you are going to pull some objects or pictures from each of the three Storyteller Topic Bags that have something to do with each job. Students should think about each object, and as the clues unfold, they can guess what the three jobs involve:

- **Folklorists**—these are the students who will be working behind the scenes. Pictures may include a festival program, a written introduction for an anthology, a written biography, etc.

want to read it aloud to the group so they can decide together what items to draw.



For the early finishers, it would be a good idea to introduce the idea of paraphrasing, to caution against plagiarism, and to have students practice writing for a particular audience.

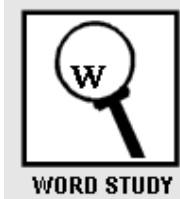


Encourage students to think about their favorite story or their favorite local author. What pictures would help represent that story or storyteller? For example, Virginia author Cece Bell won a Newbery Honor for her autobiographical graphic novel, *El Deafo*, where she depicted herself as a bunny who is deaf. Students could draw bunnies, ears, or superhero costumes to remind them of Cece's stories.

- **Literary Tellers**—these are the students who will be the writers. Pictures may include paper, pencils, an anthology, books, etc.
- **Storytellers**—these are the students who will be performing a story for an audience. Pictures may include a microphone, a mask, a picture of a theater, a picture of an audience, etc.

Once students have made some guesses, reveal the names of each of the jobs: Folklorists, Literary Tellers, and Storytellers and give a brief description of each job (above). Greater detail about each job will be given to the students in later lessons.

WORD WORK: Spelling Bonus “-ance”/“-ence”



Add these variations to your spelling list:

- different/difference
- important/importance
- affluent/affluence
- ignore/ignorance

These words and their variations will be important words to know for comparing and responding to folklore in upcoming units, especially in journal writing.

CLOSE/JOURNAL PROMPT: Interpreting Quotes



Write the following quote on the board:

“Every human, regardless of race or culture, is a leaf from one giant tree.”
(Wague' Diakite', storyteller from Mali)

Ask students to explain what this quotation means by writing an entry in their Folklorist Journals. Ask: *Do you agree or disagree with this quotation? Why?*