

Grade 4 Playlist: Cross Cultural Comparison of Literature

Aligns with *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.9*:

- Compare and contrast the treatment of similar themes and topics (e.g., opposition of good and evil) in stories, myths, and traditional literature from different cultures.

Welcome

Sometimes a story is familiar to people all across the world. While the characters, setting, or even some of the plot might be different, a theme can shine through. This helps readers make connections between similar stories, and it also can help teach a lesson. This is especially true of fables and traditional stories.

Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- examine similarities and differences between stories that share a similar theme and topic.
- explore literature from different cultures in order to find similarities between their themes.

Review

Key Terms

- A **theme** is the lesson or main idea that the author wants to portray in the story.
- A **topic** is a subject that a story is about.
- A **fable** is a story that usually ends in a lesson, or moral.
- A **myth** is a more traditional story that usually has a hero.

Practice!

To review a bit more about similarities and differences in themes and topics, go to this link:

- <http://www.learningfarm.com/web/practicePassThrough.cfm?TopicID=146>

Exploring the Standard

There are many forms of literature that tend to share similar themes across cultures. Some examples are fables, fairy tales, and myths. Any time someone learns a lesson in their day-to-day life, there is a good chance that a fable, myth, or fairy tale already has been written to explain this theme in more detail.

What is the difference between a topic and a theme? Topics are very broad. Ideas such as “love” or “family” can be considered a topic, and thousands (or maybe even millions) of stories can share the same topic. Many stories, no matter where they are written, discuss “friendship” or “struggle” or even simpler topics like “animals” or “science.” Try to think of the topic as a one- or two-word description of what the story is about.



A Closer Look: Theme

Many stories also share a similar theme. Themes are more specific than topics. In fact, a theme is a topic that is described in more detail. An example of this is shown below.

Topic = Friendship

Theme = True friendship will stand the test of time.

Therefore, a theme shows the author's beliefs in detail.

For example, take a look at the way theme is developed in C. Collodi's novel *The Adventures of Pinocchio*. The topic is lying. The theme is that lying comes with a cost. The book is about a living wooden puppet named Pinocchio and his many adventures. Throughout the story, he lies a lot, and each time his nose grows.

Read the excerpt from Chapter 17 below to find out what happens to Pinocchio when he lies. Does this theme seem familiar?

¹"Where are the gold pieces now?" the Fairy asked.

²"I lost them," answered Pinocchio, but he told a lie, for he had them in his pocket.

³As he spoke, his nose, long though it was, became at least two inches longer.

⁴"And where did you lose them?"

⁵"In the wood near by."

⁶At this second lie, his nose grew a few more inches.

⁷"If you lost them in the near-by wood," said the Fairy, "we'll look for them and find them, for everything that is lost there is always found."

⁸"Ah, now I remember," replied the Marionette, becoming more and more confused. "I did not lose the gold pieces, but I swallowed them when I drank the medicine."

⁹At this third lie, his nose became longer than ever, so long that he could not even turn around. If he turned to the right, he knocked it against the bed or into the windowpanes; if he turned to the left, he struck the walls or the door; if he raised it a bit, he almost put the Fairy's eyes out.

¹⁰The Fairy sat looking at him and laughing.

¹¹"Why do you laugh?" the Marionette asked her, worried now at the sight of his growing nose.

¹²"I am laughing at your lies."

¹³"How do you know I am lying?"



Teaching Notes: Cross Cultural Comparison of Literature

The goal of RL.4.9 is for students to determine the similarities and differences of stories, fables, myths and traditional literature from various cultures. The following information contains ideas that teachers can incorporate into their classrooms as well as additional resources to peruse and integrate into instruction as appropriate.

Activities

1. Students will go to the following link to reinforce basic ideas about comparing and contrasting literature. <http://www.learningfarm.com/web/practicePassThrough.cfm?TopicID=146> (after landing on that site, have students click on “view full lesson.”) Students may do this alone, in small groups, or this might be done as a warm-up activity as a class. The teacher could show this short demonstration on a large screen, and answer the two questions as a class.
2. Direct students to watch the following video: <http://www.watchknowlearn.org/Video.aspx?VideoID= 54934> This video is approximately seven minutes long and will give students the chance to hear two fables read to them. Students may watch this individually or as pairs.
3. Students will read an excerpt from *The Adventures of Pinocchio* and compare it to a famous fable by Aesop called “The Dolphin and the Monkey.” Students should be able to determine that both fables discuss lying and the importance of telling the truth.

Writing Prompts

1. Instead of group work above, consider having students write or complete diagrams about the similarities and differences found in step three above individually.
2. Give students a theme, and have each of them write their own small fable or story about it. Then, have students read them aloud to determine how each author can make a setting, characters, and plot unique, but a theme or lesson can still shine through.

Additional Resources

Consider these additional resources when teaching RL.4.9:

A YouTube video for teachers that describes the importance of Topic vs. Theme: While this video is not recommended for classroom use, it is a good refresher for teachers to watch prior to teaching this lesson.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9H6GCe7hmmA>

Cross-Cultural Cinderella: Cinderella is perhaps the easiest fairy tale for fourth graders to relate to, and it has been written in many different cultures. For a larger unit on this standard, many variations of a Cinderella project can be found online. Here are just a few:

- http://www.colorincolorado.org/watch_and_learn/57466/
- <http://www.lowvilleacademy.org/webpages/MBlow/cinderella.cfm?subpage=868111>
- <http://kidworldcitizen.org/2012/10/11/cinderella-story-around-the-world/>

