

Writing
A
Modern
Fairy Tale

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The wisdom of the wise and the experience of the ages is preserved into perpetuity by a nation's proverbs, fables, folk sayings, and quotations.

-William Feather

I wanted Yoda to be the traditional kind of character you find in fairy tales and mythology. And that character is usually a frog or a wizened old man on the side of the road. The hero is going down the road and meets this poor and insignificant person. The goal or lesson is for the hero to learn to respect everybody and to pay attention to the poorest person because that's where the key to success will be.

-George Lucas

Rationale

Happy endings are what we all long for. Reading fairy tales in elementary school certainly bring pleasure to most students. In this writing task we are incorporating fairy tales with modern morals and issues to instruct students on narrative writing, in what we hope will be an enjoyable process for our students. Despite the enjoyment that fairy tales bring to the reader, many students may excuse these types of stories as old fashioned or irrelevant to their modern lives. In an attempt to have students consider modern day cultural and societal values that affect their everyday lives, we have designed a writing assignment that will incorporate both research and analysis of existing fairytales, while scaffolding writing instruction that will prepare students to write an effective narrative fairytale.

Although this writing task satisfies one of the Georgia Performance Standards, we feel as though it holds additional value in the classroom. Student's will acquire the skills to develop character, setting, plot, conflicts and resolution, chronology and cause and effect relationships while also learning to critique modern society and its values. For this writing assignment we will use both scaffolding and differentiated types of instruction. Catering to the needs of all of our students, we will allow for both individual, small group and large group brainstorming and instruction. We will

have students prewrite and compile several different ideas about societal morals and issues prevalent in our modern lives. Students will examine effective and less effective fairy tales and their succession and mutation over time. Students will finally be able to construct a list of the desirable characteristics within fairy tales in a fashion that will allow them to create their own. Students having difficulties creating an original fairytale will be given the option of modernizing an existing fairytale. Our desire is to incorporate peer review and teacher conferences to ultimately foster the following:

- Ability to ask relevant questions and success in responding to these questions with appropriate information
- Employs group decision making techniques such as brainstorming, or a problem solving sequences
- Actively solicit another person's comments and suggestions
- Offer their own opinion forcefully without domineering
- Gives reasons in support of opinions expressed

Even George Lucas refers to a similar formula for the production of writing. Students will, after the completion of this product, not only be able to write effectively, but more importantly learn to brainstorm and work collaboratively within both small and large groups. Through teaching writing as a process and differentiating our instruction, the execution of this writing project will allow different processes to culminate into a class wide knowledge of the same facts concerning narrative writing and the creation of fairytales. Students will become effective writers in an entertaining fashion which will result in a happy ending for everyone.

Unit Context

The schools in which we will be teaching this writing instruction sequence are drastically different. The sequence will, however, satisfy Georgia Performance Standard ELA10RL4 which all tenth grade English classes are required to meet, as well as several others that are included but not the primary focus. Additionally, because this sequence asks students to examine the values of modern culture through writing, it is easily tailored to virtually any school setting. Different values will likely be focused on in each school, and the same writing sequence is designed to help students discuss these values. The contemporary values that are focused on in each school will reflect the individual context of each school.

Commerce High School is a very small, close-knit school. It is one of three school systems in Jackson County, but it is part of an autonomous city school system. The students at Commerce are predominantly white and come from working class backgrounds. There is a small population of African-American students, and an even smaller population of Hispanic students. There are no guidelines from the county or city on what material should be covered in class; meeting the Georgia Performance Standards is the only requirement. The three teachers in the English department collaborate to decide what material to cover and which texts to use. The major concerns within the department is preventing overlap between classes for different grade levels and ensuring that all the students in one grade receive basically the same curriculum regardless of who teaches their class.

Oconee County High School, part of the Oconee County school system, is situated in an affluent community that boasts thriving parental involvement in its schools. The average resident of Oconee County is a college graduate. Of the students that graduate from OCHS, 80% of them go on to college of some sort. The students at Oconee are overwhelmingly white (85%). Of the remaining 15% of students, 8% are African-American, 5% are Asian, and 2% are Hispanic or other nationalities. There is no pressure from the school to teach certain texts, but the community in

which the school is located dictates judicious choices because there is a fear within the teaching community that what is taught might be challenged because of content.

As of 2004, Collins Hill High School had the largest enrollment of students in the entire Gwinnett county area with a reported 3,556 students. Of this number, there was a fifty-fifty split between male and female students. The school is primarily white, non-Hispanic (66%) with the remainder of students being of African-American (13%), and Asian or Pacific Islander (11%) descent. The remaining ten percent of the school is a combination of American Indian, Hispanic, and Multi-racial students. The Gwinnett County school system has fairly strict guidelines for what each grade level should be covering and the English department at Collins Hill collaborates extensively to ensure that all students are receiving the information required by both the state and the county in each English class.

The fairy tales written at Commerce High School are likely to reflect the working class values of the majority of students. Those written at Oconee County High School will likely reflect the upper-middle class values of its students, while those written at Collins Hill High School will likely reflect the ethnic diversity of its population. All of these fairy tales will have been written based on the same sequence of writing instruction. The needs of different schools may demand adding or deleting certain steps. Also, the individual contexts become important for the student-teacher interactions unique to that school. Despite modifications that may need to be made, the same writing sequence can be used effectively in various types of schools.

Assumptions

Walking into a classroom, we hope that as teachers we will be open to all of our students without bias or pre-conceived notions. We as humans are, however, fallible and do make assumptions about our students. These assumptions about our students' prior knowledge exist because without them, we would begin each year teaching the ABC's and there would be no progression in the learning process. By making these assumptions we are not attempting to judge our students' individual personalities or beliefs.

When our tenth grade, college preparatory students enter the classroom we will have the following assumptions about their abilities with respect to this writing task: students will have a basic knowledge/grasp of the conventions of writing, including punctuation, grammar rules, and the format of a five-paragraph essay. As with all assumptions and the notion that "no child [should be] left behind," if students appear to be lacking in these areas, mini-lessons will be incorporated to secure the students' abilities before moving on to writing their own fairy tales. We also feel confident in claiming the assumption that students will have exposure to the characteristics of fairy tales/fables; consequently, if students do not come into the class with previous exposure, our unit does provide opportunities to experience this genre of writing.

Furthermore, we feel confident in assuming that our students have a grasp of literary characteristics as explained from the Ninth Grade Georgia Performance Standards:

- a. Students are able to demonstrate comprehension by identifying evidence: Diction, Imagery, Point of view, figurative language, symbolism, plot events, and main ideas...and using this evidence as a basis for interpretation (ELA9RL1)
- b. The student identifies, analyzes, and applies knowledge of theme in literary works from various genres and provides evidence from the works to support understanding (ELA9RL2)
- c. The student deepens understanding of literary works by relating them to contemporary context or historical background (ELA9RL3)
- d. The student employs a variety of writing genres to demonstrate a comprehensive grasp of significant ideas in sophisticated literary works (ELA9RL4)

- e. The student produces writing that establishes an appropriate organizational structure, sets a context and engages the reader, maintains a coherent focus throughout, and signals closure (ELA9W1)
- f. The student demonstrates competence in a variety of genres. The student produces narrative writing and applies polished narrative strategies acquired in grades 6-8 to other genres of writing such as reflective compositions, historical investigative reports, and literary analyses, by raising the level of critical thinking skills and rhetorical techniques (ELA9W2)
- g. The student practices both timed and process writing and, when applicable, uses the writing process to develop, revise, and evaluate writing (ELA9W4)
- h. The student demonstrates understanding and control of the rules of the English language, realizing that usage involves the appropriate application of conventions and grammar in both written and spoken formats (ELA9C1)

Again, if students appear to be lacking in these areas, mini-lessons will be incorporated to secure the students' abilities before moving on to writing their own fairy tales.

Task Analysis

A task analysis outlines the kind of knowledge that students need in order to complete a particular writing task successfully. For this Georgia Performance Standard, ELA10RL4, students need a variety of skills ranging from acknowledging culture/societal values to evaluating an author's style. Below, we have outlined the necessary knowledge students will need to compose an original, modern day fairy tale with the specific purpose of promoting or supporting one or more contemporary cultural or societal values OR rewriting and modernizing an existing tale with the specific purpose of promoting or supporting one or more contemporary cultural or societal values.

Students will need to...

1. Research contemporary culture and/or societal values
2. Define the characteristics of fairy tales: description, morals, personification
3. Evaluate the author's original piece: literary devices, style
4. Relate a literary work to non-literary documents and/or other texts from its literary period, historical setting
5. Analyze the influence of mythical, classical, and canonical literature on contemporary literature and film

6. Explain important ideas and viewpoints introduced in a text through accurate and detailed references or allusion to the text and other relevant works.
7. Identify and assess the impact of ambiguities, nuances, and complexities within the text.
8. Include a formal works cited or bibliography when applicable.

Georgia Performance Standard

(As used for the purpose of creating this writing task)

ELA10RL4: The student employs a variety of writing genres to demonstrate a comprehensive grasp of significant ideas in a sophisticated literary work. The student composes essays, narratives, poems, or technical documents. The student

- a. Demonstrates awareness of an author's use of stylistic devices for specific effects.
- b. Explains important ideas and viewpoints introduced in a text through accurate and detailed references or allusion to the text and other relevant works.
- c. Identifies and assesses the impact of ambiguities, nuances, and complexities within the text.
- d. Includes a formal works cited or bibliography when applicable.

ELA10RL4 Sample Task: The student composes an original, modern day fairy tale with the specific purpose of promoting or supporting one or more contemporary cultural or societal values OR rewrites and modernizes an existing tale with the specific purpose of promoting or supporting one or more contemporary cultural or societal values.

Writing Fairy Tales

You have read several fairy tales and will now write an original one on your own. The following is a set of guidelines you can follow to help you write a good fairy tale.

Prewriting: Large Group

Think of a cultural or societal value that you could write a fairy tale about. Free-write about this value (i.e. its importance, relevance, history etc.).

Prewriting: Small Group

1. In small groups of three to five students, give a brief synopsis of the fairy tale that you brought into class today and say why you think it is or is not a fairy tale.
2. In a small group of three to five students, think of the common characteristics of fairy tales. List these characteristics here:

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____
- D. _____
- E. _____

Prewriting: Large Group

Share the common characteristics of fairy tales that you discussed in your small-groups with the rest of the class in order to create either a more detailed or a narrower class list of characteristics.

Prewriting: Small Group

Share your free-writing from the first part of this assignment with your small-group members. Then:

- A. Brainstorm a list of settings in which your fairy tale could take place. For instance, do you want your fairy tale to be the typical damsel-in-distress story, or do you want something far more creative and original?
- B. Think of the actions that your characters might take in order to explain/live up to the cultural or societal value you have selected to write about. How will your story progress from beginning to end? What will it take to get your characters from point A to point B?

Producing a Draft: Individual

Write a draft of your fairy tale, making sure to include the elements that you identified in the above steps.

Revision: Small Group

Get back into your small groups and proofread each other's fairy tales. First make sure to point out the parts of the story that the writer has done well. Make suggestions about how to fully include the characteristics previously discussed, how to create a situation that illustrates the chosen value, and other areas in which you think other writers could improve their fairy tales. Remember to help your group member find and correct grammar mistakes throughout his or her paper. Refer to writing handbooks if you need help. Make comments in the margins of the draft wherever you feel they would be helpful. Feel free to discuss the essay with the writer, but remember to Stay Positive and Be Specific!

During this time I will be available for writing conferences with each of you. Feel free to ask for my help if you wish to do so.

Revision: Individual

Based on the suggestions of your small-group members, write a final draft of your fairy tale. You may wish to decorate it or present it creatively. Use your imagination to think of ways in which you can present your fairy tale effectively.

Option: Writing a Children's Book

You may wish to turn your fairy tale into a children's book. Working alone, or in a small group of three to five, you can illustrate the story, bind the book and decorate the cover, and then present it to a group of elementary or age-appropriate children. You may wish to videotape yourself or your group reading your book in front of your audience.

Modern Fairy Tale Rubric

Name: _____

Teacher: _____

Date Submitted: _____

Title of Work: _____

	Criteria				Points
	5	10	15	20	
Organization	Sequence of the elements of the narrative are hard to follow.	Reader has difficulty following narrative because student jumps around.	Narrative is written in a logical sequence which reader can follow.	Narrative is written in an interesting, logical sequence which reader can follow with no difficulty.	—
Creativity/ Originality	Narrative is unoriginal and not engaging.	Narrative is not as engaging as it could be and is lacking in originality.	Narrative is engaging, but could be more original.	Narrative is engaging, creative, and highly original.	—
Grammar and Spelling	Work has four or more spelling errors and/or grammatical errors.	Presentation has three misspellings and/or grammatical errors.	Presentation has no more than two misspellings and/or grammatical errors.	Presentation has no misspellings or grammatical errors.	—
Neatness and Effectiveness of Presentation	Work is nearly illegible and fails to meet guidelines for presentation.	Work and presentation are both sloppy.	Work could be a little neater. Presentation was good, but could have been better.	Work is neatly done and effectively or creatively presented.	—
Incorporates Characteristics of Fairy Tales as Discussed in Class	Narrative uses few, if any, of the characteristics of fairy tales as discussed in both small and large groups.	Narrative weakly uses the characteristics of fairy tales as discussed in both small and large groups.	Narrative makes good use of the characteristics of fairy tales as discussed in both small and large group.	Narrative makes superior use of the characteristics of fairy tales as discussed in both small and large group.	—
				Total---->	—