

WHO'S AFRAID OF THE BIG BAD WOLF?

Cultural Perspectives on the Wolf

TEACHER NOTES

Grade: 5 and up

Subject: Social Studies

Group Size: Whole class

Duration: 50-minute period

Skills: Identifying main ideas, interpreting, comparing, character analysis, identifying theme in literature

Vocabulary: Myth, legend, folklore, theme, Iroquois, oral tradition, protagonist

OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of this lesson, the students should be able to:

- Define and understand the cultural value of oral tradition
- Understand the value of myth, legend and folklore
- Compare the role of the wolf in the Iroquois tradition with the role of the wolf in selected stories of European origin
- Analyze a main character
- Explain the theme of the story

READING ASSIGNMENT:

- Chapter 2 of "The Return of the Wolf" (book)

MATERIALS:

- Set of slides and script legend *The Flying Head*
- Children's tales and legends:

1. The Wolf and the Seven Kids

2. Excerpt (the tale of Mowgli) from "The Jungle Book" by Rudyard Kipling

3. Native American myths

BACKGROUND:

Review or introduce the terms legend, myth and folklore. It is important for students to understand that myths, legends and folklore reflect values of different cultures and communicate people's understanding of the world and socially acceptable conduct. The symbolic presence of the wolf is everywhere in myth and legend. In some cultures, the wolf was revered and worshipped; in others, reviled and feared. The perspective depended on the direct experiences of the people who generated the stories and passed them on to their children.

PROCEDURES:

European Stories and Tales

Discuss the excerpt from “The Return of the Wolf.” This is an excellent source of information about the legacy of fear of wolves that settlers carried with them from Europe to America. Ask your students why these people were so afraid of wolves?

- Read *The Wolf and The Seven Kids*, and the excerpt from “The Jungle Book,” with your students. Read them aloud or, for fun, divide the class into groups and have one person in each group read aloud to the others. Then ask one of the group members to repeat (not read) the story to the rest of the class. This is an interesting way to demonstrate how stories are often modified as they are repeated.
- Pass around the Grooms book and have students look closely at the color illustration on page 25. Then ask the class how the artist and storytellers of the day contributed to the image of the wolf (remember “The Three Little Pigs” and “Little Red Riding Hood?”). How have our perceptions and depictions of wolves changed since then and why?
- Ask students to find other examples of European stories and tales to share with the class.

Native American Myth and Legends

- Read the **Native American Myths** with your class.
- Prepare the class for a presentation of the slide show “The Flying Head” by reading the following passage to them:

“In mythology of the Iroquois, the earth and all the people of their tribe had their origins in six people who existed at the Beginning. Hoguehah, which means Wolf, was one of the men who was sent to heaven to find a woman who was thought to live there. Hoguehah sought to get her to come to Earth by giving her a gift of bear fat. The master of heaven discovered the plan and cast her out of heaven as a punishment for her betrayal. She fell to Earth and landed on the back of a turtle and an island was formed to receive her. The woman had two children from whom all the people of the earth were descended. The descendants of these children were divided into three clans, linked to three animal entities: the bear, the turtle and the wolf.”

- Present the slide show “The Flying Head.”
- Lead a discussion about the slide show by having students address the following questions (this could also be a writing assignment).

1. Describe the attributes and the character of Wolf Marked. What qualities that he exemplified made him a valued member of his community? Does our culture value these same character traits?

2. How did the Iroquois people portray wolves in this legend? How does the Iroquois perception of the wolf compare to that of the European settlers and your own view of wolves?

3. What word would you use to describe the ultimate gift the wolves gave to Wolf Marked? How would this gift impact the Oneida (One Nation of the Iroquois) community?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY:

- Have students compare and contrast the wolf and the human protagonists in the stories from Europe and the Native American myths and legends. Some questions to consider: What human qualities are attributed to the wolf in stories like “Little Red Riding Hood,” “The Wolf and the Seven Kids” and other stories of European origin? Compare this to the way wolves are portrayed in the Seneca legend and in “The Flying Head.” Are these qualities based on fact, fiction or both? In what way do the protagonists differ in, for example, “Little Red Riding Hood” and in “Wolf Marked?” Do any of these stories depict wolves realistically?

The Wolf and the Seven Kids
A Retelling of the Story by the Brothers Grimm

Once upon a time a ravenous wolf happened by the house of a goat and her seven kids. The wicked wolf knocked on the door and begged the kids to open it. Disobeying their mother's instructions, the kids opened the door. Snarling with glee, the wolf devoured the kids one by one, smacking his lips and licking his chops all the while. So intent was he that he did not notice one little kid who slithered behind the tall grandfather's clock that ticked in the corner of the room. When the mother goat returned, she recoiled in horror at the scene before her. "What happened, where are my kids," she cried. The little kid who had hidden behind the clock tearfully explained that his brothers and sisters had been devoured by the ravenous wolf. Wiping away the kid's tears, the mother goat turned and walked into the garden behind the little house. There, near a bed of flowers, she came upon the wicked beast who, full from his huge meal, had lain down in the grass for a long nap. Seizing a knife, the mother goat slit the wolf's bulging stomach and rescued her children, all of whom were alive because the wicked wolf had swallowed them whole. Quickly the mother goat had her kids bring her stones, whereupon she placed them in the wolf's stomach and sewed him up before he awakened from his nap. Upon waking, the wolf stretched and yawned. He then wandered down to the river for a long drink of the cool water. But as he drank, the weight of the stones caused him to lose his balance. The wicked wolf tipped over and fell into the river and drowned.

**From *The Jungle Book*
by Rudyard Kipling**

“The Law of the Jungle lays down very clearly that any wolf may, when he marries, withdraw from the Pack he belongs to; but as soon as his cubs are old enough to stand on their feet, he must bring them to the Pack council, which is generally held once a month at full moon, in order that the other wolves may identify them. After that inspection the cubs are free to run where they please, and until they have killed their first buck no excuse is accepted if a grown wolf of the Pack kills one of them. The punishment is death where the murderer can be found; and if you think for a minute you will see that this must be so. Father Wolf waited till his cubs could run a little, and then on the night of the Pack Meeting took them and Mowgli and Mother Wolf to the Council Rock - a hilltop covered with stones and boulders where a hundred wolves could hide. Akela, the great gray Lone Wolf, who led all the Pack by strength and cunning, lay out at full length on his rock, and below him sat forty or more wolves of every size and color, from badger-colored veterans who could handle a buck alone, to young black three-year-olds who thought they could. The Lone Wolf had led them for a year now. He had fallen twice into a wolf trap in his youth, and once he had been beaten and left for dead; so he knew the manners and customs of men. There was very little talking at the Rock. The cubs tumbled over each other in the center of the circle where their mothers and fathers sat, and now and again a senior wolf would go quietly up to a cub, look at him carefully, and return to his place on noiseless feet. Sometimes a mother would push her cub far out into the moonlight, to be sure that he had not been overlooked. Akela from his rock would cry: ‘Ye know the Law - ye know the Law. Look well, O Wolves!’ and the anxious mothers would take up the call: ‘Look - look well, O Wolves!’”

Native American Myths

- **Menomi** - In the Menomi creation myth, twin brothers, one of whom is a wolf, are responsible for naming all the animals of the earth.
- **Chipewa** - In the Chipewa origin myth, the hero's bodyguard is a wolf. In other Chipewa myths, wolves provide the people with food and hides.
- **Nez Perce** - The Nez Perce credit wolves with being the origin of the human race.
- **Zuni** - The Zuni believe the wolf spirit represents the East, one of the six cardinal directions; the other five are West, North, South, Up and Below. The wolf is the chief of the hunt.
- **Cree** - The Cree believe a wolf formed the first land by covering a raft floating on the water-covered earth with moss.
- **Sioux** - The Sioux considered the wolf as "wakan," an entity with supernatural powers. Wolves were powerful images in dreams; the howl of a wolf could signify trouble to come.
- **Delaware** - The Delaware believe a wolf could signify a change in the weather; the bark of a wolf, a long and productive life.
- **Seneca** - Once there was a Seneca war chief who was captured during a raid of a Cherokee village. The Cherokee tortured him, but the great war chief escaped. Exhausted and in pain, he began a lonely trek through the wilderness with no food, no clothing and no shelter. Just as he was ready to give up, two mysterious strangers appeared each night. Out of the darkness they brought him food and clothing and built a fire to warm him. When he finally neared the safety of the Seneca village, he turned to thank his benefactors for having saved his life and for guiding him back to his people. As he began to speak, he saw them change form. As they slowly dissolved into the trees, he realized they had become wolves, one black, the other white ...

FOR ADDITIONAL STORIES, LEGENDS AND MYTHS:

OF WOLVES AND MEN

BARRY LOPEZ

TABLES OF THE WOLF

DENISE CASEY

AND

TIM W. CLARK

SCRIPT: “THE FLYING HEAD”

1. This old Indian story was told to me by two Standing Stone (Oneida) Indians.
2. ...when I was a boy.
3. Many winters ago...
4. Near Oneida Lake there was an Oneida settlement.
5. In this settlement there was a famous hunter whose name was Wolf Marked.
6. Wolf Marked lived in a bark house at the edge of the village.
7. His only companions were two large wolves who never left his side. They were his constant companions and Wolf Marked treated them as his brothers/
8. It was said that while hunting, these swift running wolves would drive the game to Wolf Marked. This famous hunter was never known to have returned from the hunt empty handed.
9. Wolf Marked was well liked by other members of his nation. A portion of all game brought down by his arrow was always given to the needy, the widow and the orphan.
10. He was always ready to help those of his people who were in want or need. His aid was given willingly and he always refused pay or reward for his services.
11. No one was more swift of foot than this young man and often the chiefs of his nation sent him with wampum messages down the long trail that bound one end of the Long House Country to the other. His wisdom was also great and his advice was often at Council.
12. He was a great ball player and many times his strong arm and fleet foot carried the ball through the goal post of a rival people. In feats of endurance and strength he excelled all others of his people.
13. One day...Wolf Marked made preparations for a hunt.
14. With a quiver of arrows and a pack of provisions he left the village. His trail led toward the west (known as Great Panther).
15. On each side of him trotted one of his faithful wolves.

16. All day he traveled, his eyes alert for signs of game. But on this day all life in the forest seemed to have vanished. Over the entire countryside a deep silence had fallen. Not a bird sang a song. Not a rabbit crossed the trail. No leaf rustled in the wind. The forest was silent.
17. Wolf Marked was looking for signs of bear and deer.
18. He wondered why his two faithful wolves traveled close to his feet. He wondered why their hair rose on their backs, why they acted as though they feared something. They sniffed the air looking toward the north growling low in their throats. In this manner they traveled the entire day.
19. Toward sunset Wolf Marked prepared camp, making a fire and cooking their evening meal.
20. As Wolf Marked wondered at the strange behavior of his wolves he thought that he heard a strange wailing cry coming from the North (Great Bear). His wolves answered by growling in their throats. He knew that they feared something very unusual.
21. One of the wolves looked Wolf Marked straight in the face and spoke. "Friend do not surprised that we can speak to you in your own language. Because you have been kind to us, always sharing with us, treating us as your brothers, we are going to break the rule to warn you. A terrible monster who is master in the forest is approaching you. You must flee and head for a clearing because only there can he do you no harm. Flee while you can and immediately."
22. There was no mistaking the terror in the eyes of his wolves. With a bound Wolf Marked flung his pack aside and ran down the trail toward the village, his wolves following close behind him. He knew that his only hope for life was to reach the clearing that surrounded his village. As Wolf Marked ran, he heard the terrible scream of the monster. It was a high, long drawn out, piercing wail. It was a cry he had never heard before. It sounded like the combination of the howl of the wolf, the scream of the panther and the roar of the north wind. As Wolf Marked ran, the wail got nearer, and nearer. The creature was fast gaining on him.
23. Once, while at the foot of a hill, he glanced back.
24. What he saw startled him so much that he almost froze in his tracks. A great fiery head with large, round yellow eyes, a long hooked beak and large open mouth appeared over the brow of the hill. The creature had fiery hair that flowed in a long streak as the monster traveled. It had no body, but fastened to the bottom of the head were two scale-covered paws. On the ends of the paws were long, curved and ugly looking claws.
25. The monster traveled in a peculiar fashion. It would jump to the foot of a tree, climb the tree and then jump to the foot of another tree. In this way it traveled very rapidly. There was a wide burnt path cutting back through the forest where the creature had traveled.

26. Soon Wolf Marked could feel the hot breath of the creature on the back of his neck. One of the wolves spoke to him saying, "Brother, the creature is almost upon us. I am going back to fight it. I can delay if for a little while, but will never see you again on this earth. Farewell, kind and good friend." Saying this, the wolf turned and ran back.
27. Wolf Marked heard the barking and growling and then a yelp of pain. He knew that his faithful friend was dead and was being eaten by the head. His friend had given his life for him.
28. Wolf Marked ran on. The village was just around the bend of a hill. If he could only make it, he knew he would be safe. Again he heard the wailing cry of the creature. Nearer and nearer it sounded. He could feel the hot breath of the head singe his head hair. Sparks from his fiery mouth fell around him. The monster was close. His brave wolf fell behind him, getting between the Monster and Wolf Marked.
29. The remaining wolf said, "Brother, the creature is almost upon us. Perhaps I can delay it until you reach the village. I am going to fight it. I will never see you again on earth. Farewell, kind and faithful friend."
30. Saying this, the wolf turned and ran back over the trail. Wolf Marked heard the barking and growling and then a yelp of pain. He knew that his faithful friend was dead and was being eaten by the monster.
31. He was tired but ran on and after a brief silence, he again heard the wail of the monster. He could hear the creature getting nearer as it cut a burning path through the forest. He could feel the hot breath burn his back. He could sense its huge eyes upon him.
32. Ahead of him he could see the sky lit up by the fires of the villages.
33. With a staggering sun, he entered the clearing in the center of which was the village. Running across the field he came to a stop with startled people and looked back over his trail. A great head came bounding up to the edge of the forest. Showers of sparks shot from its mouth. Its great yellow eyes glared in fiery hatred at the people. With a mighty bound and a terrible cry of anger, it turned and disappeared over the dark forest, traveling toward the North.