

Assignment Critique
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Folktale Assignment

In a multicultural environment like Case, it is important to welcome all backgrounds and learn about these different cultures that comprise our community. In the following assignment we will set out to display some of these different traditions in our compositions. This will be accomplished in two sections/essays:

1. Everyone will pick a traditional folktale from her/his country of origin to write about. This will be a proper narration of the folktale. Depending on the folktale, the important point will be to convey the themes that arise from the story, i.e., mythological accounts of how we see the world, moral issues that we are to take away from the story allegorically, an account of how a tradition specific to the culture arose, et cetera. Essentially, this first essay will be twofold: It will need to be a description of the tale, then followed by a critical account of the tale's role/implication in its culture/tradition.
2. Once everyone in the class has finished her/his essay, all the folktales will be assembled together so that everyone can read each other's folktales. This will then begin the second part of our assignment: Once everyone has become familiar with each other's essays, each student will write a comparative/contrastive essay on the folktales as a whole. For instance, if all the folktales, despite their origins, betray a commonality or a universal quality of "folktale-ness", then this should be put forth in the essay and properly fleshed out. Obviously, there will be differences between the folktales and this should be properly addressed as well. If it happens, for instance, that there are aspects of Korean folktales peculiar to it, in contrast of Japanese or Chinese folktales, then this should be analyzed and put forth. The student is encouraged to be imaginative with her/his comparative/contrastive analysis. The thesis of the essay should be clear in what it plans to compare and contrast, and it should be properly supported with evidence.

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- Describe the context of the assignment

It is clear that this assignment calls for a very diverse and multicultural classroom. For this assignment to success, the students need to be able to put forth a variety of cultural backgrounds. While this assignment is somewhat contextually contingent on a diverse

classroom, it is apparent that it can be offered to both high-level and low-level classrooms. The latter will encounter this assignment as an introduction to comparative/contrastive essays, while the former will be expected to have a more refined analysis of the project. In addition, it is clear that this assignment will be drawn out over several weeks. Since it has two parts involved, sometime will be needed to address it properly. This could be a continuing assignment throughout a semester, depending on how involved the teacher wants the final essays to be.

- Identify the theoretical tradition from which this assignment comes

There are three possible pedagogical traditions involved in this assignment: Genre, Collaborative, and Cultural. As to the first, there is a certain style or genre that is involved in writing a folktale. It is a descriptive retelling of a story; it is a type of narrative that the students must learn. In addition, there is another genre involved, namely, the academic genre of the comparative/contrastive essay. They are two distinct types of composition that the students will encounter. As to the second, this assignment is collaborative in the sense that all the essays are shared among the class. Each student will see the styles, approaches, and progress that the other students are bringing to the table. In this sense, the assignment is dictated by the students; the development of the first set of essays are offered by and contingent upon the students. To a certain extent, they are prescribing the material and the themes themselves. As with collaborative learning, some of the power is in the hands of the students and the teacher is not the only arbiter of classroom development. Finally, as to the third, it is clear that the assignment will be made up of different cultural approaches. Rather than emphasizing one type of folktale, one type of culture as the paradigm of the genre (say, for instance, Aesop's fables or The Brothers Grimm), all cultures and styles are welcomed into the classroom discourse. This is really a main object of the assignment: There are many different types of folktales that fall outside of the traditional Western tradition, so let us try to find commonalities and differences, but most of all, let us include them into our classroom discourse and give them equal footing.

- Comment on strengths/weaknesses of the assignment (in terms of those theoretical traditions and in terms of the practicalities of the assignment itself)

Many of the strengths of the assignment have already been outlined above. It is clear that exposing students to two different genres, one more informal and the other more academic, will serve them well. They will see the difference between a story, a fictional description and narrative, and a more academic and analytic essay. It is also equally clear that introducing difference cultural backgrounds into the classroom will be of benefit. This will be especially true of non-native speakers who may feel that they are outside of their environment. By incorporating a familiar theme into the classroom, it will give them more of a footing within the discourse, and hopefully secure a place for them. However, it should be stressed that the goal of the assignment is to produce polished

academic writing and that the essays do not address different cultural writing styles *per se* into the discourse. In short, the content is multicultural but the writing itself is centered on the academic style of the university. Because of this, a strongly cultural pedagogy (and/or critical pedagogy) would not be involved with this institutionalization of writing. Finally, it seems that while there is a collaborative bent to the assignment, the students are never asked to get together in groups and work on their compositions. Because of this, the assignment can only loosely be labeled as collaborative. The material is a collective whole, but the process of composition is still executed at the individual level.

- Comment on the results of the assignment (if you know them)

This assignment was inspired by an assignment by Mrs. Paulette Goll for her 148 students. However, although I have seen some of the folktales written by her students, I cannot make a final assessment of her either her assignment or my variation of it (since the former is not completed and the latter is not being implemented). So this section of my critique has to be labeled as N/A.

- Suggest changes or alterations to the assignment (as applicable)

The only suggestion I might have is to emphasize the collaborative aspect of the assignment. If students could get together into groups, both while writing the folktales themselves and then analyzing them in comparative/contrastive essays, they could not only compare their content, their results, but they could also compare each other's process in composing. It seems to me that students can learn just as much from fellow students as they do from teachers; by getting them into collaborative groups in this assignment, the results might be benefited. Lastly, it seems that an assignment like this could really make use of some rhetorical principles. It is evident how 'metaphor', 'simile', 'analogy', 'allegory' would fit in to the study of folktales. The students would learn even more if they were told to recognize and analyze some of these rhetorical principles that are involved in folktales.