

**UNIT 5 Pass It On**  
**Folk Literature Connections**

A STEM school

**FROEBEL**  
BILINGUAL SCHOOL

Home of the Space Generation



**FOLK**  
**LITERATURE**

**WITH**  
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# SPEAK YOUR MIND

Does anyone in your family tell stories or sing songs?

What kinds of stories or songs do they share?

Do the stories or songs have a particular purpose?

Do they express a message?

Do they contain exaggerated elements?

Take a minute to answer in the notebook.

# PASSING IT ON

Human beings are storytellers. Long before people invented writing, they were handing down stories about their gods and heroes and experiences. Many of these stories survived from generation to generation to form the basis of the literature that we know today. The selections in this new unit are products of this storytelling tradition.



Folk literature is the traditional knowledge and beliefs of cultures that are transmitted by word of mouth. Some early stories were told in the form of poems or songs. Others were in the form of prose tales, the first type of fiction. The passing of stories, poems, and songs transmitted verbally from one generation to the next comprises a culture's oral tradition.



# TYPES OF FOLK LITERATURE

**Legends** are stories that are passed down through generations and are often based on real events or characters from long ago. Unlike myths, legends are usually regarded as having a historical basis; however, they may contain fantastic or unverifiable elements. Examples of legends include the story of George Washington chopping down the cherry tree and "The Silver Pool", a story of the legendary Celtic, hero Fionn MacCumhail.



**Myths** are traditional stories, rooted in a particular culture, that deal with deities and other supernatural beings, as well as human heroes. Myths often embody religious beliefs and values and explain natural phenomena. Every early culture around the globe has produced its own myths. Examples of Greek myths include: “The Story of Dædalus and Icarus” and “Echo & Narcissus”.





**Epics** are long tales, often told in verse, involving heroes and gods. Epics are often transmitted orally and may have anonymous authors. Grand in length and scope, an epic provides a portrait of an entire culture—of the legends, beliefs, values, laws, arts, and ways of life of a people. Homer's *The Odyssey* is a great example.



**Folk tales** are brief stories passed by word of mouth from generation to generation. They are oral traditions of a common people. “Brer Rabbit” and “The Ugly Duckling” are both well known folk tales.

**Tall tales** are lighthearted or humorous folk tales that often contain highly exaggerated, unrealistic elements. The stories of Paul Bunyan and Pecos Bill are tall tales.





**Fairy tales** are stories that deal with mischievous spirits and other supernatural occurrences, often in medieval settings. The name is generally applied to stories of the kind collected by Charles Perrault in France and the Brothers Grimm in Germany or told by Hans Christian Andersen of Denmark. "Cinderella" and "The Little Mermaid" are famous examples. "The White Snake" is another famous fairy tale from the European oral tradition.



# OTHER FOLK LITERATURE

**Parables** are very brief stories told to teach moral lessons. The most famous parables are those told by Jesus in the Bible. "The Prodigal Son," a famous story from the Bible, is one such parable.

**Fables** are brief stories, often with animal characters, told to express morals. Famous fables include those of Aesop and Jean de La Fontaine.





**Folk songs** are traditional or composed songs typically made up of stanzas, a refrain, and a simple melody. A form of folk literature, folk songs are expressions of commonly shared ideas or feelings and may be narrative or lyric in style. Traditional folk songs are anonymous works that have been transmitted orally, such as the ballad "John Henry."

**Spirituals** are religious songs from the African American folk tradition. Examples include “Steal Away” and “Go Down, Moses.”

**Proverbs, or adages,** are traditional sayings, such as “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink” and the title of Shakespeare’s play *All’s Well That Ends Well*.



# ASSESSMENT

Complete this page after you read the introduction to folk literature on pages 426–429. Try to answer the questions without looking at your book. Answer each question below.

1. What is folk literature?

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2. What makes up a country's oral tradition?

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3. What is the difference between myths and legends?

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4. What is an epic?

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5. Why do you think the authors of epics are often anonymous?

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6. How do folk tales, tall tales, and fairy tales differ?

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7. Give an example of a folk tale, a tall tale, and a fairy tale.

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8. Describe three examples of names from ancient myths that are still used today.

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9. Explain how the uses of myths and legends have changed since they originated.

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10. Complete the chart to describe other types of folk literature.

| <b>Type of Literature</b> | <b>Description</b> | <b>Examples</b> |
|---------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Parables                  |                    |                 |
| Fables                    |                    |                 |
| Folk Songs                |                    |                 |
| Proverbs                  |                    |                 |



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