Oral Tradition in Print:
Fables, Folk Tales, Fairy Tales, Myths, and Legends
Fables

• **Definition**: A brief story that sets forth some pointed statement of truth

• **Origin**: Found in almost every country
  – Handed down from generation to generation as oral literature

• **Content**: Usually contains incidents that relate to the unusual, sometimes supernatural - **Contains a moral or lesson**

• **Characters**: often animals or plants given human qualities, but people and supernatural figures may appear

• **Structure**: lacks development of characters

• **Examples**: Aesop’s fables, The Tortoise and the Hare
Folk Tales / Tall Tale

• **Definition**: deal with heroes, adventure, magic or romance
  Some are tall tales- stories that contain hyperbole. (Ex: Paul Bunyan)

• **Origin**: American folk literature
  – Oral tradition (word of mouth); no known author

• **Content**: Based on hard-working people
  – Bragging and exaggeration – HYPERBOLE (tall tale)
  – Humorous or witty
  – Seemingly impossible feats

• **Characters**: people, fictional characters
  – Told to make the narrator seems as if he/she was part of the story

• **Examples**: Ali Baba, Johnny Appleseed, Jack & the Beanstalk
Fairy Tales

- **Definition**: fictional story that may feature folkloric characters and enchantments

- **Origin**: almost all cultures
  - Oral tradition and then written and recorded

- **Content**: Associated with children

- **Characters**: fairies, goblins, elves, trolls, giants, gnomes, talking animals, princes, princesses, witches, wicked stepmothers, fairy godmothers, etc.

- **Structure**: Contains elements of plot

- **Examples**: Cinderella, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, etc.
Myths

• **Definition**: a sacred narrative explaining how the world and humankind came to be in their present form

• **Origin**: Almost all cultures
  – Passed through oral tradition

• **Content**: Closely linked to religion and the explaining of why something is; establishes models for behavior

• **Characters**: Gods or supernatural heroes

• **Structure**: Elements of plot, personification

• **Examples**: Greek mythology, Roman mythology
Legends

- **Definition**: stories about the past. They are often based on facts, but storytellers have added imaginative details.

- **Origin**: found in almost all cultures
  - Passed on through oral tradition

- **Content**: occurrence of miracles

- **Characters**: real people going through imaginary events

- **Structure**: Includes element of plot

- **Examples**: Beowulf, Robin Hood
  George Washington cutting down the cherry tree
Quiz Time w/ group

• Which genre teaches a moral at the end?

• Which genre usually features gods & goddesses?

• Which genre usually has no known author & is passed down by word of mouth (oral tradition)?

• Which genre includes elements of plot, is based on facts, but has imaginative details?

• Which genre has fictional characters, such as fairies and giants?
COMMON ELEMENTS (p. 828)

• CLUES TO STORY DEVELOPMENT:
  • PLOT
  • CHARACTER
  • REPETITION/PATTERNS
  • SETTING
  • THEME
PLOT

- Sequence of events in a story that revolves around a conflict, or problem.
- In folk literature, events unfold quickly and predictably (much easier than in novels or longer stories)

Notice the way:
- Events are presented in sequence
- Main character solves the conflict often with help of gods or magic
- Satisfying conclusion
Common Elements of a Folktales: Characterization

- Characters change only after they have gone through the lesson learned during the course of the story.
- The hero is usually young and fair, kind, brave, unselfish, and may possess some sort of special power.
- **Magic helpers**, such as the Fairy Godmother in Cinderella, allow for things to occur within a story that would otherwise be impossible.
Common Elements of Folktales:

- Rule of Three: Items happen in sets of 3 or 7s (things happen in 3s, lots of repetition or repeated phrases)
  - 3 characters
  - 3 events
  - 3 tests the character must overcome

Ex: “Jack and the Beanstalk” showed Jack climbing the beanstalk three times. The wicked stepmother visited Snow White in the forest three times before she finally got her to eat the apple.

- Magic is commonly used, to explain the unexplainable.

- You will see similar characteristics from stories across the world
**Common Elements of a Folktale: Setting**

- **Place** is usually described easily and briefly, leaving the imagination to fill in the gaps. For example, folktales take place in a cottage in the woods or in a magical kingdom.

- **Time** is fantasy time, such as *Once upon a time*, or *A long time ago*.
Common Elements of a Folktale: Themes

- Characters go through tests to prove something (the good character must solve a problem)
- Good v. Evil (has characters that good, others are bad)
- Good is rewarded and evil is punished in the end (tales have a happy ending)