

Children's literature in the classroom

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Cinderella to Rhodolphus

Multicultural literature can be used as a powerful tool in illustrating the similarities that exist between cultures. In particular, I have found multicultural folk tales to be an excellent source of content for illustrating not only the uniqueness of different cultures but also the commonalities between cultures. My students find it fascinating that the folk tales of all cultures, regardless of geography, are remarkably similar.

In order to interpret folk tales, Keene and Zimmerman (1997) state that readers must make three types of connections with the text:

- ✓ Text-to-text connections involves comparing and contrasting of elements within the story itself as well as comparing and contrasting the current story with another story experienced previously.
- ✓ Text-to-self connections involve relating aspects of the story to feelings the students hold within their own knowledge base (schemata), feelings and emotions.
- ✓ Text-to-world connections require students to relate aspects of the story to life and surroundings in their own culture.

USING MULTICULTURAL FOLK TALES AS A SPRINGBOARD TO WRITING

My goal for this project was to share my love for multicultural Cinderella tales with my students while using a direct instructional strategy to guide their development as writers of the comparison text structure. I knew from my research that there

is evidence (Langer, 1985) that fourth-graders have a systematic, well-developed knowledge of exposition that they use as they read and write. Therefore, I felt that my students would benefit from exposure to rich literature selections and instructional writing scaffolds for the comparison text structure. The study was built on the premise that to write comparisons, the students needed interesting and readily available content to compare, meaningful instruction in the process of writing comparison text, and guided practice with the structures that organize text.

During the project, my students listened to multicultural variants of Cinderella, engaged in group discussions focusing on the similarities and differences of the tales, completed a comparison chart focusing on common literary elements, and wrote comparison text by synthesizing the available content. By using multicultural Cinderella tales, we were able to compare not only the similarities and differences between versions of Cinderella, but also the similarities between cultures.

LITERATURE SELECTIONS

As an avid collector of folk tales, I have discovered that there are over 500 cultural versions of the Cinderella tale, many of which have been published with beautiful illustrations. The multicultural Cinderella books have similar length (32 page average), complex yet familiar story line, appeal to a variety of age levels (8-13 years), and are structurally representative of the folk tale genre. The multicultural Cinderella books that we read provided an excellent source of content for drawing comparisons of common literary elements that are characteristic of the folk tale genre. My students were able to draw comparisons of common literary elements such as characters, setting, problem, plot and events, ending, and magical features.

For this project, the literary elements of multicultural Cinderella tales that we read were used as content for writing comparisons. The selected Cinderella tales were utilized for specific writing lessons based on the strength of their literary elements. For example, **The Rainbow-colored**

Horse (Puerto Rico) was used to compare characters; **The Talking Eggs** (American South/Creole) to compare setting; and **Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters** (Africa) to compare events.

I used the following sequence for the multicultural Cinderella book response activity for comparing the various literary elements:

1. We began with a teacher-led book introduction activity (Clay, 1991). During this time, I probed the student's background knowledge about Cinderella tales and added new information about the particular multicultural Cinderella book that would be read during the day's lesson.
2. I read the selected multicultural Cinderella books aloud to the students. While reading the book, I modeled effective reading skills and exposed the children to the comparative content of the folk tale.
3. I led a grand conversation (Eeds & Wells, 1989) by engaging the students in a discussion that focused on the reading experience and their aesthetic reaction to the book.
4. As a whole class activity, we developed a Book Comparison Chart (Yopp & Yopp, 1992) (see Figure 1 on the next page) on the board with the entire group. This graphic organizer served as a visual comparison of the literary elements from the multicultural Cinderella book. The students brainstormed and classified literary elements of the book such as characters, setting, problem, plot and events, ending, and magical features. This is a portion of the Book Comparison Chart that my students completed.

*I note the obvious differences
between each sort and type,
but we are more alike, my friends,
than we are unlike.*

*We are more alike, my friends,
than we are unlike.*

*We are more alike, my friends,
than we are unlike.*

Maya Angelou (1990)

WRITING SCAFFOLDS

Young writers must develop increasing skill and sensitivity in selecting form and content in order to shape appropriate messages. In the Cinderella project, my students were provided with appropriate models and strategies for addressing the comparison text structure. My goal was that my students would internalize the strategies, so that they

Figure 1. Book Comparison Chart

	Cinderella	Talking Eggs	Rainbow-colored Horse
Characters	Cinderella Step mother Step sisters Fairy godmother Prince	Blanche Mother Sisters Old Woman	Pio Father Brothers Horse Princess
Setting	Europe House Palace	Southern US House Woods	Puerto Rico House Palace
Problem	Mistreated Go to ball	Mistreated Don't take the eggs	Mistreated Throw the ball
Magical Features	Carriage Godmother's spell	Eggs Old woman's head	Horse
Ending	Married Prince	Went to city	Married Princess

could eventually undertake similar tasks on their own. Through these scaffolding activities, I was able to nudge the students toward the independent use of the complex comparison text structure.

As a group prewriting activity, we reviewed the characteristics recorded on the Book Comparison Chart from the previous lessons and added characteristics from the new multicultural Cinderella book selection. This visual organizer, comparing the elements of the new book to the other previously read variants, aided the students' internalization of the various literary elements of the books that could then be used as they wrote their comparisons. This organizational structure provided my young writers a guide for chunking and clustering the content for their papers. This structure provided the basic organizational pattern for their texts.

In addition to the Book Comparison Chart, I introduced and modeled the comparison text pattern. After modeling the utilization of the content from the Book Comparison Chart into a comparison text, the students were engaged in guided practice before beginning to write their own comparison. Through this scaffolding activity, I was able to guide my students' writing of the comparison text pattern and provide them with a means for developing independence in using this expository text pattern.

FINDINGS

As I began the Cinderella project, my question was whether such an instructional intervention would have an effect on the ability of my fourth-grade students to utilize the literary elements of multicultural Cinderella tales to write comparison text. The Cinderella project was based on the premise that to write a well-organized comparison text, young writers need three things: (a) readily available, interesting content to compare, (b) meaningful instruction in the process of writing comparison text, and (c) a modeled structure to use for organizing their content into the comparison pattern. My analysis of the Cinderella project suggests the following conclusions:

The use of multicultural Cinderella books provided readily available, interesting content to compare and therefore added impetus to the students' writing.

Young writers must develop increasing skill and sensitivity in selecting form and content in order to shape appropriate messages. One goal of this study was to determine if given rich content to compare and additional practice time with the comparison text organizational pattern, the young writers would become more competent with collecting and presenting content in their writing samples.

Following the Cinderella project, the students generated more text in response to the given prompt. The students incorporated the content presented in the multicultural Cinderella book selections into their writing. During grand conversation, students responded positively to the multicultural variants of Cinderella and often commented that the reading of the books was their favorite part of the Cinderella project. Participants often commented that they had more to write when the writing time had expired. During one lesson, Jennifer wrote at the end of her four-page text: "I have more to write but really half (sic) to go because it is time to stop writing."

As a result of the Cinderella project, the writers made improvements in their ability to write comparison text. Fourth graders were responsive to teacher guidance in the form of writing instruction.

Before the Cinderella project, many of the students appeared frustrated and unfamiliar with the comparison pattern. Their initial writing samples, for the most part, were simple listings of parallel characteristics of the two books. They appeared to have had an understanding of the concept "compare" or at least "show how they are the same and different", but were unfamiliar with a structure for organizing and presenting their information. Following the Cinderella project, the students eagerly went to work on the writing prompt. Their papers were written in paragraph form and included well-structured sentences rather than single words or phrases. The visual organizer appeared to have enhanced the students' ability to format comparison text.

The instructional scaffolds had an effect on the students' ability to develop competence in the comparison text pattern.

Before the Cinderella project, the majority of my students simply listed items from the books and used no linkage or organizing structure to communicate to their audience the intent of their writing. However, as the Cinderella project proceeded, my students were able to organize their writing in the comparison text structure. Following the Cinderella project, the students' papers were structured in more complex and more elaborate patterns to communicate the comparisons between books.

CONCLUSION

As teachers, we play a significant role in guiding children to recognize and respect diversity as they interact with other people. This Cinderella project provided my students with a wonderful opportunity to read and discuss multicultural Cinderellas; learn about the characteristics of folk tales by comparing the literary elements of the tales; and use this content to effectively organize comparison text. Literature experiences such as these make it easier for students to form bridges to multicultural awareness.

This project also demonstrated that strategy instruction could be used successfully with fourth-grade writers to improve their ability to write well-organized comparison text. Specifically, this project suggests that incorporating explicit strategy instruction within the writing process model can make writing instruction more effective.

Finally, the collection of multicultural Cinderella books listed in the Recommended Children's Books section was used to develop additional literature response activities to help my students develop an understanding of literature types and their characteristics (Kaminski, 2000). A few examples of the literature response activities that we used are presented as follows.

Literature Response Activities **Focusing on Literary Elements**

Dealing with Character

1. Write a biographical poem about a favorite character. The biographical poem would include adjectives and adverbs that describe the character, their family, and their surroundings.
2. Compare Pio, a male Cinderella from **The Rainbow-Colored Horse** (Belpre, 1978) to any female Cinderella character from another variant.

Dealing with Setting

1. Conduct research to find out if the illustrations from a multicultural Cinderella book are an authentic match with the actual geographic region and time represented.
2. Write a transformation of the tale changing the setting to something completely different. How would a change in setting change the outcome of the tale? (You could use **Cinder-Elly**, Minters (1994), as a model.)

Dealing with Problem

1. Use **Yeh-Shen** (Louis, 1982) and **Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters** (Steptoe, 1987) for

comparing how each Cinderella character deals with the problem of mistreatment by a family member. Have students compare their own feelings or response they might have to the mistreatment with that of the character of the story.

2. Write a "Dear Fairy Godmother" letter asking for help to solve your favorite multicultural Cinderella character's problem.

Dealing with Plot and Events

1. A good choice for a lesson on plot is **Baba Yaga & Vasilissa the Brave** (Mayer, 1994), because it contains events that are very well developed. Students could draw comparisons between this book and the plot of another multicultural Cinderella book. Likewise students could compare events from **The Egyptian Cinderella** (Egypt) and **Yeh-Shen** (China).
2. Make a timeline of the main events of one of the multicultural books. Post the timelines around the room and draw comparisons between the different books.

Literature Response Activities

Dealing with Ending

1. Compare **The Talking Eggs** (San Souci, 1989) with endings of other stories of this type. Blanche (the Cinderella character) never meets a "prince" character but goes off to the city to find happiness on her own.
2. Perform a TV skit in which you conduct a follow up interview with one of the characters from the multicultural Cinderella tale. Be sure to ask questions that relate to the original tale and can be answered logically by the character.

Literature Response Activities

Dealing with the Motif of Magic

1. Use **Princess Furball** (Huck, 1989) as a study of magical features. Students identify the small items that are enchanted and how the Cinderella character must use them properly to achieve their magical qualities.
2. Perform an infomercial to sell a magical item. Develop a prototype of your item. Prepare your script and videotape the infomercial.

These literature response activities were designed to highlight specific elements of folk tale lit-

erature (i.e. characterization, setting, etc.). This format could also be used to develop additional literature response activities for any of the Cinderella books listed.

By introducing our students to stories from many cultures, we can help them build a strong foundation for multicultural understanding. Children's multicultural folk tales can become a powerful tool to help children recognize the commonalities within cultures. In addition, such books are rich in literary examples from which students can develop cognitive strategies for comprehending more complex text and explore the other genres of literature.

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RECOMMENDED CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Multicultural Cinderella Books

- Belpre, P. (1978). **The rainbow-colored horse**. NY: Viking Penguin, Inc. [Latin America]
- Climo, S. (1989). **The Egyptian Cinderella**. NY: Harper Collins. [Egypt]
- Climo, S. (1993). **The Korean Cinderella**. NY: Harper Collins. [Korea]
- Ehrlich, A. (1985). **Cinderella**. NY: Puffin. [France]
- Greaves, M. (1990). **Tattercoats**. NY: Clarkson K. Potter. [Great Britain]
- Huck, C. (1989). **Princess Furball**. NY: Scholastic. [Germany]
- Haviland, V. (1996). **Favorite fairy tales told in Italy**. NY: Beech Tree. [Italy]
- Haviland, V. (1996). **Favorite fairy tales told in Norway**. NY: Beech Tree. [Norway]

- Hooks, W. (1987). **Moss gown**. NY: Houghton Mifflin. [US]
- Louis, A. (1982). **Yeh-Shen**. NY: Philomel. [China]
- Lum, D. (1994). **The golden slipper: A Vietnamese legend**. NY: Troll. [Vietnam]
- Martin, R. (1992). **The rough-face girl**. NY: Putnam's Sons. [US]
- Mayer, M. (1994). **Baba Yaga and Vasilissa the brave**. NY: Morrow. [Russia]
- Perrault, C. (1954). **Cinderella**. NY: Dial. [France]
- San Souci, R. (1989). **The talking eggs**. NY: Scholastic, Inc. [US]
- San Souci, R. (1995). **The little seven-colored horse**. CA: Chronical Books. [US]
- Schroeder, A. (1994). **Lily and the wooden bowl**. NY: Bantam Doubleday Dell. [Japan]
- Steptoe, J. (1987). **Mufaro's beautiful daughters: An African tale**. NY: Mulberry. [Africa]

Transformations of Cinderella

- Cole, B. (1987). **Prince Cinders**. NY: Putnam & Grosset Group. [Character]
- Granowsky, A. (1993). **That awful Cinderella**. NY: Raintree Steck Vaughn. [Point of view]
- Jackson, E. (1994). **Cinder Edna**. NY: William Morrow. [Character]
- Minters, F. (1994). **Cinder-Elly**. NY: Puffin. [Setting]
- Perkal, S. (1997). **Midnight: A Cinderella alphabet**. CA: Shen's Books. [Literary elements]

RECOMMENDED PROFESSIONAL BOOKS

- Kimbell-Lopez, K. (1999). **Connecting with traditional literature**. MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- McCarthy, R. (1996). **Teaching genre in your classroom**. NY: Scholastic, Inc.
- Tiedt, P., & Tiedt, I. (1999). **Multicultural teaching**. MA: Allyn & Bacon.