

# Folk Tales

Some common characteristics of a folk tale are:

- They have no specific time frame but are considered to have happened in the distant past. ("Once upon a time," "Long, long ago," etc.)
- Folk tales have good and bad characters
- The first characters are unsuccessful because they are foolish or unkind, while the final character is smart or loving and is successful.
- Everyday people and/or animals are the characters
- May involve magic of some kind—wishes are granted, magic objects are found, etc. (Folk tales with magic are called fairytales)
- Animals, plants, and sometimes even machines have many human characteristics, such as the ability to talk.
- Folk tales often feature a monster or an evil character that the hero(es) must overcome.
- The good characters in folk tales have a problem to solve. The characters often use trickery to defeat the monster or complete a quest (task).
- Many things occur in threes or sevens (main characters, tasks, objects, etc.).
- Phrases are repeated in folk tales. For example: "Mirror, mirror, on the wall..."
- The stories are short enough to be told in a single sitting.
- One or more of the characters usually learns a lesson.
- Folk tales have happy endings.

All cultures have stories that are shared. In many cases a story from one culture will be similar to the story of another culture. This is because people share a lot of the same experiences and move from place to place. These stories are known as folk tales, which are circulated orally among a people. Folk tales are part of the larger category known as folklore, which includes the traditional art, literature, knowledge, and practices of a culture that are shared usually through oral communication and example.

In folk tales, the characters are not well developed nor the location clearly described. What is more important to the story is that there is usually conflict between good and evil with good usually being rewarded and evil being punished. Often, the purpose of these stories is to teach a lesson or to describe characteristics of one's culture. The stories are also entertaining.

These stories can have different forms, which are sometimes similar to one another. These can include:

- **Fairytales:** These stories, which reveal a lot about human nature, are about characters who have magical adventures.
- **Myths:** These stories contain action and suspense and seek to explain the origins of life and elements of nature. They are typically about the gods.
- **Legends/Epics:** They usually refer to individuals, heroes or kings who lived in the period before written records.
- **Tall Tales:** These exaggerated cultural stories revolve around the pioneer spirit and a person who performs superhuman feats.
- **Fables:** Short, simple stories with talking animals that teach a larger lesson.
- **Religious Stories/Parables:** These are religious stories that communicate values.