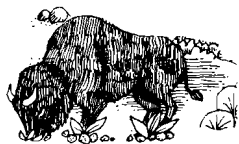


LIVING FOLKLORE

by Joyce Morlan



In the teaching of folklore at Lawrence High School, one basic idea that prevades my class is that folklore is “alive” and “living” all over the world—particularly in my students’ world. Therefore, most of my efforts are channelled against “intellectualizing” my course. Folklore must be enjoyed. In the beginning of the course, I try inductively to have my students realize that lore surrounds their daily lives and indeed permeates almost every facet of their past, present, and future. Therefore, in an effort to develop a relaxed atmosphere and encourage the oral participation that must prevail in a folklore class, we go into some sessions of swapping memorabilia and familiae. But it’s not until a student says: “I remember my grandmother, who grew up in the Ozarks, telling me and swearing to this day, that she actually saw a hoop snake . . .” do we *all* truly become involved. For then even the shyest student knows a family tradition or recalls a tale.

One important element in any folklore class, I think, is music—lots of music: ballads (old and new), folk songs (American and foreign), campfire songs, drinking songs, bluegrass and country songs. Records provide an effective alternative to live presentations, but of course I try to bring as many balladeers, banjo pickers, and folk singers to class as possible. As a class, we listen to the lyrics, working vigorously sometimes to discern the words, for suggestions which relate to any social, religious, linguistic, ancestral, or physical characteristics of an ethnic or regional groups’ values. But most importantly, we become conscious that music not only reflects our values but also is a shaper of our values. And, because of the changing nature of folk music, it may be contemporized, yet still maintain its essential folk spirit and nature.

Perhaps one of the most popular short units in our class is jokes, riddles and proverbs. In class, students break down into small groups for this unit since the small group allows for more spontaneity by individual students who hear “clue words” to add still another joke! It doesn’t take long for the students to become aware of thematic patterns recurring in riddles and understand that “faddish” riddles are in circulation now which are a product of, and oftentimes a reflection of, our times.

Students are amazed, delighted and surprised at the lore which surrounds them in contemporary life. Too often, for example, they have been accustomed to labeling legendary heroes as being the products of the remote past—and for today's secondary students the remote past has been compressed to a fantastic fifteen years! Once students realize that legendary heroes are continuously being shaped, reshaped and created they begin to listen for oral clues to modern heroes. Upon hearing the varied lore which surround the lives and deaths of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, or the explanations and suggested postulated solutions to the mystery which envelopes the life of Howard Hughes, new dimensions are added to the students' concepts of these contemporary men.

The final evaluation is tested when I ask each student to gather a portfolio of his own collected folklore. The outcome, I have found, is exceedingly rewarding. The collections are striking sophisticated and in depth for high school students to produce. An awareness which I have been striving to create throughout the course comes forth as each student consciously begins to pay attention to the sights and sounds that surround him with a renewed appreciation of today.

FORM USED FOR COLLECTED FOLKLORE

Genre	Informant's name and age Informant's occupation and ethnic/national background Informant's native language and dialect Place and date collected
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LORE

When and *Where* the informant learned the item and *from whom*.

If a superstition, note if it is believed or a custom practiced.

If a folksong, include both the text *and* music

If a game, the directions in detail (maybe a diagram) are needed.

Your name and age
Street address and city