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# Jewish Folktales

## Interdisciplinary Integration

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### SNAPSHOT

The folktale unit is a culminating cross-curricular project for students in fifth grade, integrating Jewish Studies, reading, writing, and public speaking. Students read a variety of Jewish folktales and choose one to study in depth. We strengthened this project by partnering with a local theater company, Wolf Performing Arts Center, to work with the students to present it effectively, analyze the setting and values, and reflect on the morals of the tale.

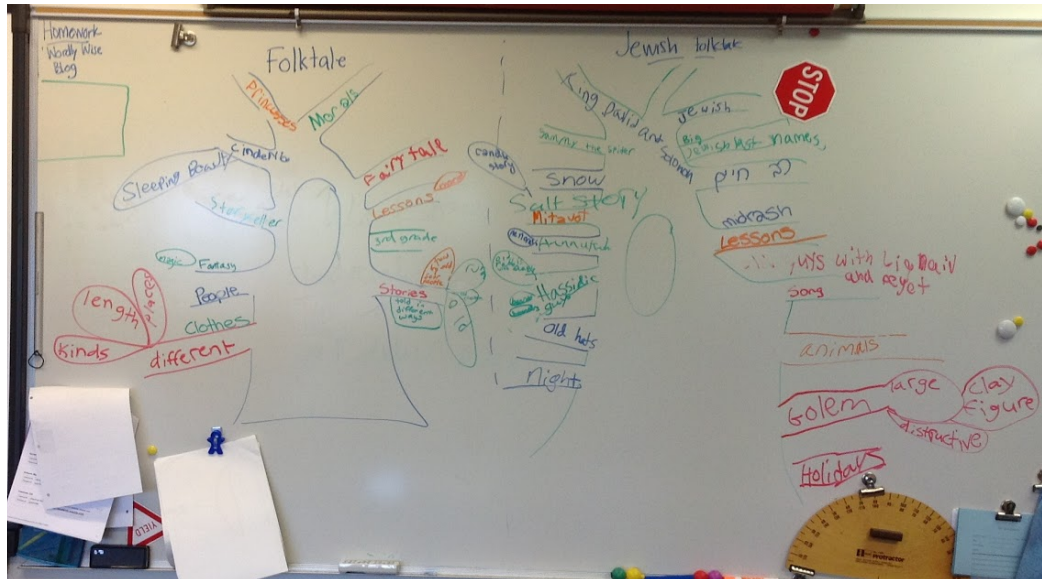


### Goal

Students will see themselves as a crucial link in our midrashic, storytelling tradition. They will become familiar with a range of stories including their various versions, see how these stories fit into Jewish and non-Jewish literature, and gain confidence and understanding to retell these stories with purpose.

## Overview

In fifth grade, we bring together many parts of the students' studies from throughout their years at Perelman, including studying folktales in gan and first grade, Aesop's Fables and Hans Christian Andersen in second grade, and folktales around the world in third grade, and we connect with the Jewish storytelling tradition.



We begin the unit by immersing students in rich collections of folktales. As they read, they are excited to find stories that they have heard at school, camp, synagogue, and other places in their lives. They discover various versions of the same tale, laugh at the funny stories, and discuss the more serious ones. Throughout the room there is sense of enjoyment and discovery as they lose themselves in these stories.

Rabbi Galfand, our school rabbi, speaks to the students about the art of storytelling. Students have been watching and learning from stories that Rabbi Galfand has been sharing with them since kindergarten. He gives them strategies on how to effectively remember important details and best practices on how to deliver the story to others, such as using hand motions as well as tips on how he remembers details, and how he adds to scenes to increase drama and engagement. This is a moment of transition, as students graduate from being the listeners of the tales to being their teller.



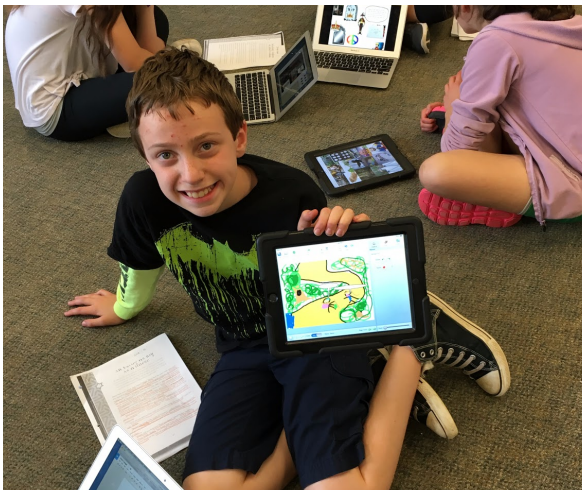
An important early piece of this project is for the student to reflect on the purpose of being a storyteller. We discovered that a few authors wrote their own storyteller's prayer to set the tone prior to telling their stories. After reading a couple of those examples, our students write their own prayer that matches fits their feelings and the tone of their chosen story. One storyteller we look at is Peninnah Schram, who wrote this statement of motivation and purpose:

"As a storyteller, I never know when a story or an image or words from a story will take hold, like a seed that is planted that may take seven years to root and flower....Several years ago I realized that before I tell stories I needed to have a prayer, much like the cantors and the Hasidim who pray before their prayers. I must remember why I am telling these stories, so that I can become ready to tell the stories, and also to prepare my audience to listen and receive the stories.... One of the most awesome prologue prayers is the Hineni, the prayer the cantor chants before the main service on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. For me the Hineni evokes special associations because my father was a cantor. I see him, in my memory's eye, standing in the doorway at the rear of the synagogue, Ahavath Chesed, in New London, Connecticut, waiting to enter. He was waiting for the congregation to sense his presence, to become ready to hear his opening prayer, Hineni ("Here I stand"), in which he would ask G-d to consider him worthy and to accept his prayers and to accept him as a messenger who sends up the prayers of the people. And then, chanting the Hineni, my father would walk slowly, haltingly, up the aisle to the bimah, walking among the people in the congregation, singing out from his heart the words of the prayer. Along with the words, he prayed with his tears. And so, too, did we all walk and chant with him and call out, 'Hineni.'"

Hineni prayer:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6sjCCxYZhQ>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y17iJ51qgO0>



Once each student picks a folktale to retell, the students continue to think about the meaning behind the folktale. They write about the setting, including a location and a time period. Some of their stories don't include this information so they need to infer and make the folktale their own by giving it a setting.

Every folktale has a lesson or purpose for retelling. The students look at the lesson of the folktale and what the reason is for telling it. Does it teach a lesson or make the audience laugh? Is it trying to explain a hard concept?



While they are continuing to practice their folktale to share their story with others, they are making connections between their folktale and themselves or another story. By adding these components, it helps deepen their connection with the story. Another way for students to connect to their folktale is to create discussion questions for others to ask and talk about after hearing the story.

One of the goals of this capstone project is to gain public speaking skills, by telling a story to an audience and making it their own. For the first couple years, teachers worked with individuals and groups, coaching them to gain confidence and expression. In 2015, our PTO came to us and offered a grant. Teachers were asked to identify a program that could be taken to the next level with PTO support. The folktale unit and Wolf Performing Arts Center (WolfPAC) were immediately identified. The



folktale unit, entering its sixth year at that time, was a point of pride for students and teachers. Yet every good unit has room for improvement. Wolf Performing Arts Center has a fabulous local reputation. Its motto, "[Where] confidence, character, and creativity are center stage," encapsulates its mission, which is to use the arts as a way to build up students. Having the experts at WolfPAC come work with us was a natural and exciting collaboration for WolfPAC, the PTO, and the fifth grade teachers and students.

Wolf Performing Arts Center conducts a series of lessons on storytelling. They begin with setting the scene and imaging the lives of the characters in the tales. Next, they move into character voices and movement. These activities help students shed embarrassment and add drama to tales. They can also help to remember lines and, more importantly, chose words and phrases to emphasize. Finally, WolfPAC coaches students individually, as they work on their stories.

#### Folktale Character Essential Questions

**Who are you talking to?**

**Where are you?**

**What do you want?**

**What's in your way?**

**What is at stake?**

**Moment Before**

The fifth graders bring all these pieces together by creating an eBook. They start with their storyteller's prayer and then they record themselves retelling their favorite Jewish folktale. They finish the eBook with lessons learned from the folktales. Of course you can't write a book without a dedication page. This dedication is looking not just at who it is for but also looking at why they are picking that person to dedicate it to. We look at some samples together.

Samples: <http://thoughtcatalog.com/christine-stockton/2013/09/amazing-book-dedications/>

Once complete, students are also excited to share with other grades. They perform their folktales live for small groups of students in kindergarten to fifth grade.

This project is a culmination of our literature study at Perelman. It brings together elements of literature circle roles and text analysis. Also, after studying a variety of literature and folktales, students enjoy ending their time at Perelman studying literature that is their own and becoming part of the tradition. A Perelman student is a link in the generation and every story they shares carries its own impact.

Attached below is the sheet the students use as they are reading folktales and the final assignment the students have.

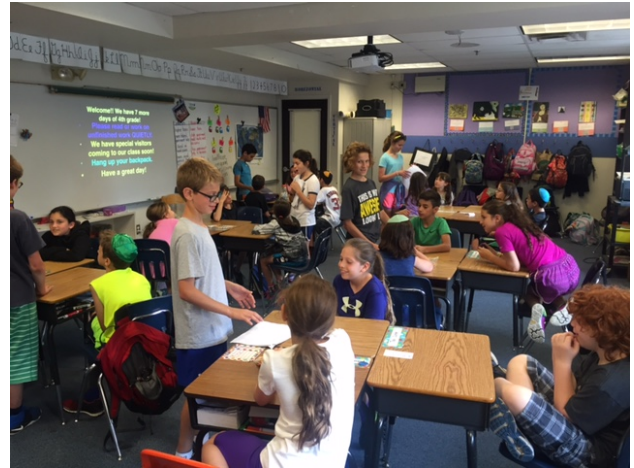
Here are eBook examples.

[Example 1:](#)

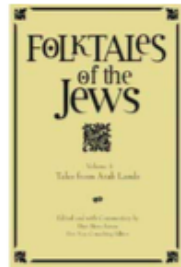
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[Example 2:](#)

[https://drive.google.com/open?id=0Bxf\\_ccy2EjjibEJYUXBXcIFPU3c](https://drive.google.com/open?id=0Bxf_ccy2EjjibEJYUXBXcIFPU3c)



## Making Choices in Jewish Folktales



Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_ Book: \_\_\_\_\_

Who is the main character? \_\_\_\_\_

What choice does the main character make? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How does this choice reflect a Jewish teaching? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How does this relate to another Jewish story? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How does this relate to another non-Jewish book, or to your life? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What thoughts does this story leave with you? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

When would you want to retell this story? Why? \_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## ***Jewish Folktale eBook***

As a final project you will have an opportunity to create your own eBook on a folktale. Your presentation will include your retelling of a favorite folktale, as well as a message you want to give to your audience. So, start getting creative. The following document will give you a framework for your presentation and the criteria. If you come up with a creative idea that will make your presentation special, but is not part of the assignment, please discuss it with me.

The following elements are to be included in order:

1. Cover, Include: Title and Retold By
2. Page 2: Title Page, Include: Title, Retold By and the Date
3. Page 3: Dedication Page
4. Page 4: About the Storyteller
5. Page 5: Setting
6. Page 6: Storyteller's Prayer
7. Page 7: Video
8. Page 8: Lesson/Purpose
9. Page 9: Connection or Comparison
10. Page 10: Discussion Questions (At least 5)
11. Page 11: Character Traits (5 character traits for 1 character)
12. Page 12: Wolf PAC Collage with brief description about it
13. Page 13: List sources (website links for pictures) and credit to the Folktale book

This folktale was inspired by \_\_\_\_\_(name of folktale) folktale retold by \_\_\_\_\_(author).

### **Cover**

Include Title and Retold by

### **Title Page**

Include the name of the folktale, retold by your name and the date.

### **Dedication Page**

Write a dedication. Think about who you are writing it to and why you are choosing that person. The dedication should be more than I dedicate this to my parents. The dedication should be 3 to 6 sentences. [Samples](#)

### **About the Storyteller**

Insert your about the storyteller on this page.

### **Storyteller's Prayer**

Insert the prayer here.

### **Setting**

Please make one page about the setting of your story. If you know the country where it takes place, include that . Otherwise, describe the town and the Jews there. This might also include a picture. This should be about a paragraph.

### **Video**

You will record yourself telling your folktale. Remember, look at the camera and project your voice.

### **Lesson/Purpose**

What are two lessons that this folktale teaches? You must write at least three sentences for each lesson, explaining how the story teaches the lesson and how it related to modern life. You can also write about the purpose for your book in at least three sentences.

### **Connection**

How does this story relate to another story or to an event in your life? Using a two or three circle Venn Diagram, compare this folktale to something else. When you complete your Venn diagram and it has been checked, take a screenshot so it can be added to your book.

### **Discussion Questions**

If you were the discussion director for a literature circle for this folktale, what are 4 to 6 question you would ask. Remember to make them thick questions that are not just a yes or no answer.

### **Character Traits**

Pick 1 character and write about 5 character traits that relate to him/her and give a support.

### **Wolf PAC Collage**

Insert a picture of the Wolf PAC Collage here and write a brief description of what you included and how this connects to your folktale.