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Critical Literacy in ELT Project

READING TALL TALES OF TODAY

Students' Material

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READING TALL TALES OF TODAY

Level: Intermediate on

Language focus: Textual analysis

Educational focus: Folk Stories

Worksheet

Before Reading - Discuss the following questions in groups and then share your views with the whole group.

1. Back in the 1700s, what parts of your country were considered the wild frontier?
2. Who were the pioneers in these wild frontiers?
3. What did these pioneers do? Do you know any stories about them?

The tale of Davy Crockett

Retold by Jose Antonio da Silva

The American Wild West has produced lots of heroes. One of the greatest American frontier heroes was Davy Crockett. Born David Stern Crocket in Tennessee on August 17, 1806, Colonel Davy Crockett became famous as a frontiersman. A son of settlers, he had a childhood full of adventures and was fortunate to have learned during this period of his life the lessons of this world. It was during childhood that he learned the valuable skills of clearing the land, fighting Indians, and trapping wild, dangerous animals. He was also a renowned politician and was elected to the United States House of Representatives congress in 1826 and 1828. A brave military, he is said to have died fighting for Texas Independence from Mexico at the Alamo, in 1836. Nonetheless, other sources say that he actually survived the battle and died later. The story of Davy Crockett is surrounded with myth and accounts of great deeds that started even before his death.

It is said that Davy Crockett had an awesome physical strength and was capable of knocking down the biggest, strongest tree with a single blow. Besides being physically strong, he was also extremely cunning and intelligent. It was told that once while going back home after a long day of fighting wild animals and Indians, Davy came across a flooded creek. Davy could have easily swum across the river because he could swim faster than the fastest fish in those waters. The men that were following him, however, did not have the guts to risk their lives in the strong rapids. Davy then looked for the highest tree in the vicinity, knocked it down using only his right hand and laid it across the flooded creek, so that his men could cross. It is said that one day while walking in the wild forests of the west frontier, our Davy heard a huge noise behind him. He looked back and saw that animals were fleeing frightened by the ferocious beast that was on a rampage of fury. Davy stopped and saw that a huge bear was coming full throttle in his way. Davy did not run away; on the contrary, he fought the vicious bear and defeated the beast. The same bear is said to have become Davy's pet and was used to guard his house against other animals.

Stories like the ones of Davy Crockett, Paul Bunyan, Pecos Bill and other frontier heroes helped to form the American personality and character. Those early heroes led lives which inspired the first settlers to fight against the common hardships of life and the extra challenges added by the untamed nature of the western American territories. The tall tales about Davy Crockett represented to early and later settlers an ideal of man that was able to stand up to the hard task of conquering the west.

Focus on the text

1. According to the author, what were some of the things Davy Crockett did?
2. Do people in your country have any heroes from those times? Who were they?

Focus on the context of writing

3. Who is telling this story?
4. Does this have any influence on the way the story is told?
5. What did the author want the reader to think or to do and why?

Focus on discourse (CL)

6. In this story, what voices (who or what) are not heard?
7. What kind of stories would they tell if they had their say?
8. How does this text reflect the ideas and values of that time? (complete the chart)

Characters	What qualities? (adjectives given in the text)	Assumptions/implications (where these ideas come from/ the consequences of accepting them)
David Crockett		
Nature/Animals		
Native Americans		

6. Davy Crockett was supposed to represent some desirable characteristics of the people who colonised America.
 - From your perspective, what are desirable characteristics of people in your country? (E.g. would your standard citizen be poor or rich, honest and naïve, or clever and deceitful?)
 - Who would represent these characteristics?
 - How have you come to this conclusion?
 - Who would disagree with you?
 - How does your perspective compare to that of the majority of people where you live?
 - What are other alternative views?
 - Who benefits from each perspective?

7. Do you think your country/region has enough folk heroes?

- Why?
- What are the implications of that?

8. What are the similarities and differences between this story of a pioneer and the stories you know of the pioneers in your region/country?

- Who is telling these stories?
- What are their effects?
- What voices are not heard?

9. Is there still a wild frontier in your country?

- If so, who are the pioneers now?
- What are they doing?
- Who defines what a pioneer is?
- For whose benefit?

Tall Tales of Today

Tall Tales of Today	1.	2.	3.
Who or what are the main characters?			
Problem solved?			
What is exaggerated?			
Where does it come from? Where does it lead to?			
Who benefits from it?			
Unheard voices?			
Values created/promoted?			

READING TALL TALES OF TODAY

Lesson Plan

For this lesson we used the Davy Crockett tall tale adapted from Internet sources. You should be able to adapt it and use with any folk hero. It could be Paul Bunyan, Pecos Bill, Johnny Appleseed. Tall tales can be found on the web. It does not necessarily have to be an American folk hero or tall tale.

Lead in

The three initial questions are to be presented before reading. Allow between three to 5 minutes for discussion. Get feedback from the class.

Reading

The text should be cut into paragraphs and students in groups read and retell their share of the story to their partners.

Language work

As a follow up to the reading, some language work should be done in terms of understanding the vocabulary and grasping the story a little better. After this is done, ask students to retell the story in their own words, so they will be able to finally see it as a whole.

Focus on text, context of writing and discourse

Once they have understood the story, move on to the second set of questions (Questions 1 to 4 and the chart). Tell them about the importance of their own ideas to answer those questions. You should also inform them that the questions do not require a specific answer and that all the perspectives are acceptable. Also, remind students to tackle each question at a time. Make sure you explain what the questions 'Where is it coming from? Where is it leading to?' refer to. (From our experience, these are the hardest to understand and do need some explanation. Give them some examples of how these questions might apply to other issues and elicit possible answers. Avoid giving them any answers related to the current text/issue. They will probably need someone to take notes and report some of the group's ideas to the whole class. Allow around 10 minutes for discussion. Move around listening and helping out if necessary. Get each group to report the results of their discussion to the whole class, or ask questions to each group.

Second set of questions (from 6 to 9)

Now, move on to the second set of questions. The procedure should be the same. Allow between 12 and 15 minutes for discussion. Each group should report their conclusions to the class. Be prepared to meet some resistance from some learners. Just be patient, open and supportive.

* Question 9

Here, it would be interesting to explore the role of comedy genres, such as sitcoms, as a similar narrative genre to that of tall tales (in case the audience is over 25). If the audience is younger, it would be interesting to explore the role of the media in replacing folk tales and creating other kinds of stereotypes and role models (e.g. in soap operas, TV shows, etc) and how this might have changed (or not) the rural culture where tall tales have not yet completely died.

The chart/research action

Use the feedback from the group discussion as a lead in into this phase. Introduce the notion of language being used to create values. After that, read/project the definition of tall tales:

Tall tale - A tall tale is a uniquely American story form that features (1) a larger-than-life, or superhuman, main character with a specific task, (2) a problem that is solved in a humorous or outrageous way, (3) exaggerated details that describe things larger than they really are, and (4) characters that use everyday language. Many tall tales are based on actual people or on a composite of actual people. Exaggeration is the major element in tall tales.

Focus on the four points that make up the definition of a tall tale and check if students understand them. Hand out the chart. Tell learners to fill in the first line using information from the tale of Davy Crockett. Students can work in groups, or the teacher can help them out and do it as a whole class activity.

Discuss the idea that tall tales were, then, a source of inspiration for the pioneers, and helped them face the hardships of their realities. Elicit from students what these hardships might have been. Now talk about the world today. Ask students to think about the challenges of our modern world and the needs of society. Elicit ideas, and write them on the board. Ask them: "What stories are used to inspire us nowadays?" "Stories like the one we have seen came from an oral tradition of story telling. What means are used to tell stories nowadays?"

Chart – Tall Tales of Today

This can be assigned as homework. Ask students to fill out the chart with some examples of tall tales of today. Avoid giving them any ideas of what, in your opinion, might be a tall tale (doing so would spoil the sense of discovery and surprise). Tell them it is a sort of research and they will have to think a little to do it. It is important that they understand what they are supposed to do.

If you decide to do it in class, monitor and be open and supportive. Accept their ideas of tall tales even if you don't agree with them, as long as they make sense in filling in the chart (From our experience, the ideas participants come up with can be very interesting and quite surprising!). Remember, that they are all coming from different lenses and perspectives.