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**Russian Folklore Lesson Plan**

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***Exploring Russian Folktales from an Interdisciplinary and Comparative Perspective***

**Grade Level:** 9-12

**Time Frame:** 150 minutes

**Overview/Rationale:** This lesson plan provides an opportunity for students to explore themes in Russian folklore in a student-centered and comparative fashion. Investigating folklore traditions through stories enhances a student’s ability to understand and appreciate various cultural, historical, geographic, and social customs that are embedded, expressed, and reflected in cultural practices across people and places. Using stories, literacy strategies, hands-on activities, and 21st century skills (such as critical thinking, creativity, cultural awareness, and communication), students will read, discuss, and compare Russian folklore traditions to Pacific Northwest Coast Native American folklore (instead of using this context for comparison, you may choose one of your choice – could be a sub-culture of the United States or folklore traditions from another part of the world). Through careful reading, small group activities, and a project, students will engage in a thoughtful examination of the similarities and differences that exist in various folklore traditions. Ultimately, students will develop a deeper understanding of Russian folklore from a comparative perspective. This lesson is applicable to a wide range of Social Studies and Language Arts courses such as World Geography, Anthropology, or World Literature. In addition, it meets standards expressed in the Common Core for English and the Social Sciences.

**Objectives:**

* Students will develop a greater understanding of Russian folklore traditions through the reading of stories, small and large group discussions, hands-on activities, while comparing and contrasting these cultural expressions with another culture.
* Upon conclusion of unit activities, students will be able to analyze the basic elements of folklore traditions, how they reflect cultural beliefs, values, and practices, and design/develop their own folklore project (see possibilities and extension activities).

**Common Core Standards:**

* [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RH/11-12/2/)  
  Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

* [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/11-12/3/)  
  Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed)

* [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.A](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/SL/11-12/1/a/)  
  Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

**Materials Needed:**

* Folklore Brainstorming Chart
* Notebook or Chart Paper
* Russia Folklore Readings
* Pacific Northwest Coast Native American Folklore Readings
* Construction Paper, Pens, and Art Supplies (see project possibilities)
* Cubing sheet (optional)

**Essential Questions:**

* How are Russian and Pacific Native American Folklore traditions/cultural beliefs reflected through stories?
* Why is folklore considered to be an important element in understanding the culture of people and places?

**Procedures:**

1. Please pass out the folklore brainstorming sheet to students. Ask students to respond to the following questions and place specific answers on their paper (pre-assessment activity).

* How would you define “folklore” or “folklore traditions?”
* What examples of folklore do you know?
* What do you know about Russian cultural traditions?

1. After students have had an opportunity to write their ideas on their paper, have them turn to a partner and share their ideas (Think, Pair, Share). Ask students to reflect on their responses, listen to what their partner came up with, and be prepared to share as a large group.
2. Ask students to share their responses as a large group. Write their ideas on the board and identify a specific definition for folklore – such as “traditional art, story-telling, knowledge, and practices that are shown and shared through various modes of communication or behavior (oral, dance, music, traditional products, etc.).
3. As a large group, pose the following question to the class: How is a person’s **identity** expressed through folklore traditions? Next, write on the following statement on the board and have students discuss a relevant example.

Folk traditions are expressed in what **PEOPLE:**

* Believe
* Do
* Make
* Say

**Alternative Activity: Cubing Folklore:** This is another way of analyzing the concept of folklore. You have students break down the concept in the form of a cube (see the handout provided). Students are required to apply, associate, and analyze the concept in different ways. Students actually cut out the cubes if you wish.

1. **Literature Circle Activity:** Break students into groups of three and provide them with one of the Russian folklore stories provided in the lesson. Have students actively read the story (stories) by completing the following:

* What folk traditions do you think the story is trying to convey?
* What cultural traits (acts, values, and beliefs) are expressed in the story? Are there examples of what people **BELIEVE, DO, MAKE, and SAY? - Identify these from the story.**
* How are folklore traditions expressed through the plot, characters, and settings of the story?
* What message or moral can we learn from this particular story?
* How does the story compare to other stories you have read **(text to text)**?
* How does the story connect with you as a person **(text to self)**?
* How does the story connect with the world **(text to the world)?**

1. Have students read two or three of the Russian folklore stories provided and identify/discuss each of the following elements mentioned above. Please have students chart their responses on chart paper.
2. After students are finished, please have a large group discussion in which students share their reflections and conclusions with the class.
3. **Comparison Activity:** Have the same group of students read two or three of the Pacific Northwest Coast Native American Folklore stories/legends provided in the lesson. Have students go through the same process as they did for the Russian folklore stories. Ask students to think about, identify, and be able to discuss some of the similarities and differences between Russian and Pacific Northwest Coast folklore.
4. When students are finished charting their ideas, please reconvene as a large group and discuss their conclusions. What similarities and differences did they find between Russian and Pacific Native American folklore traditions?
5. **Folklore traditions expressed through story motifs:** Ask students if there were specific motifs (story elements) employed in each of the individual stories. Tell students: motifs are often used in folklore to communicate important cultural beliefs. In addition, have students think about the power of recurring motifs in our society. Using the motifs provided in this lesson or your own, please show your students representations of Russian and Pacific Northwest Coast Native American folklore motifs. You can do this as part of a PowerPoint. Discuss with students the important role motifs play in helping us understand folklore traditions. Here are examples of motifs found in both sets of stories, and more generally in folktales everywhere:

1> wise, talking animals  
2> wise elders  
3> the obligation to provide hospitality (ceremonies for the salmon, food for Ivan Tsarevich).   
4> bones as “seeds” of new life   
5> the quest (for light, for Vassilisa)  
6> ritual preparation (the sign of the cross, bathing) before starting a quest  
7> quest accomplished through perseverance and courage   
8> strength in alliances (Raven & Mink, Ivan Tsarevich & the twins with their respective magical helpers)

1. **Extension/Culminating Activity:** Please have students work individually or in pairs to complete one of the following projects:
2. **Folklore mobile**: Create a folklore “mobile” that captures the themes and cultural traits expressed in the stories. The mobile could contain motifs

with brief descriptions of their significance on the back.

1. **Folklore Bulletin Board**: Create a “section” for a Russian folklore bulletin

board on the theme of folktales, fables, myths, or fairytales. Students could do additional research on the topic.

1. **Museum Exhibit**: Create a tri-fold of Russian folklore that characterizes key

cultural themes, motifs, and values/beliefs for a special museum exhibit

for a local library.

1. **Folklore Children’s Book**: Compose, design, and illustrate your own Russian

folktale.

1. **Puppet Show:** Write your own script and create characters to tell your own

Russian folktale. Perform in front of the class.