Once Upon A Time...

Module 6- Jokes & Riddles

Myths, Legends and Pourquoi Tales
Joke/Riddle Me This

Knock Knock

Who’s there?
Banana

Who’s there?
Banana who?....

What has a face, but no arms or legs?

What letter of the alphabet holds the most water?

What begins with T… ends with T and has T in it?
Did You Know…?

That the jokes, riddles, and puns we encounter in our lives tell a lot about the folklore of our community?

In fact, jokes and riddles are among the most commonly shared structure-dependent verbal expressions known to us.

In this module we are going to look at how folklore contains certain recognizable structures which can help us interpret the verbal, material, and customary texts of folk groups.

"What goes on four legs in the morning, two in the afternoon and three in the evening?"
Module 6 Objectives

 пряжка Identify approaches to interpreting folklore.

 пряжка Analyze the pros and cons of each approach to interpreting folklore.

 пряжка Identify the characteristics of myths.

 пряжка Identify the characteristics of pourquoi tales.
In order to have a deeper understanding of folklore, folklorists have spent the past century and a half studying and applying theoretical frameworks toward their understanding “and recognition of the interplay of texts, groups, performances, contexts, society, and culture” (Sims and Stephens 180).

Let us now look at a few of these approaches more closely, in addition to their pros and cons.
Functional Approach

The functional approach looks at the folklore of a group and how it functions within its community. According to our text, there are four main functions of folklore:

1. Informally teaching cultural attitudes to younger group members
2. Escaping accepted limitations of our culture
3. Maintaining cultural identity
4. Validating existing cultural norms
## Functional Pros/Cons

### PROS
- Provides a framework to consider the meaning of folklore
- Helps us understand how groups employ folklore and what it means to them
- Acknowledges that folklore has meaning within a group
- Helps us understand what folklore does and means, rather than what it is
- Suggests a natural or organic connection between people and their expressive culture

### CONS
- Considered too broad
- Allows no room for folklore to accommodate changes in beliefs and attitudes or for new forms of folklore to emerge
- Ignores the challenges to stability some folklore performances can present
- Implies that folklore always means the same thing to a folk group, no matter when or where it occurs
- Implies that all genres of folklore function in the same ways across entire cultures
- Provides only one meaning of folklore – so who determines that meaning?
Structural Analysis Approach

The analysis of structure approach is exactly what it sounds like: looking at the structure of folklore.

Here the emphasis is on identifying common structures in folklore and placing them into certain categories or genres.

This naturally applies to stories with their characters, settings, and plots, as well as the many patterns or motifs that can be found, as discussed earlier in the course.

Verbal expressions such as jokes and riddles also follow a structure. When someone says “Knock-knock,” you automatically know how to reply with “Who’s there?” because you know the structure.
# Structural Pros & Cons

## PROS

- Illuminates similarities between groups and texts that are shared in many different groups
- Reveals ways in which groups deal with and express their understanding of basic narrative themes – relationships, life, death, etc.
- Provides a concrete way to talk about how stories are related to one another through recognizable structural patterns
- Emphasis on the whole, rather than the parts, when analyzing text
- Permits a wider view of folklore in relation to culture beyond geographical identification
- Identifies the frames or performance markers connected to rituals and other socially defined events

## CONS

- Emphasis on identifying structural patterns viewed as too simplistic
- Limits our ability to interpret individual items
- Not enough emphasis on what texts mean to a group, or when, where, or why they exist
- Used more for identifying than analyzing
- Viewed as simplistic and elitist
Psychoanalytic Approach

The psychoanalytical approach to folklore study has many supporters, as well as those who dismiss it entirely.

This approach seeks to interpret symbolic meanings within texts, and believes that a culture’s folklore presents a look at its shared psychological concerns.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>PROS</strong></th>
<th><strong>CONS</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emphasizes a more in-depth interpretation of folklore</td>
<td>Considered too broad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides insight to the more symbolic, psychological aspects of folklore</td>
<td>Assumes that all human beings share exactly the same experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goes beyond mere collection of texts or artifacts and descriptions of context</td>
<td>Not possible to determine what’s going on in the minds of other people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Most frequently applied to verbal texts and is difficult to apply to the study of groups, performance, materials, and customs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lacks enough detailed data in the form of careful collecting</td>
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Proverbs by Culture

Proverbs are also culture-specific and tend to express the traditional ideas and knowledge valued by their communities. While many are statements of common sense and experience, some can promote negative connotations that can be stereotypical in nature.

Here are some examples from different cultures:

- A dog is wiser than a woman; it does not bark at its master. – Russian
- It is better to be a man for one day than a woman for ten days. – Kurdish
- If you want to be criticized, marry. – Irish
- A single Russian hair outweighs half a Pole. – Russian
- After shaking hands with a Greek, count your fingers. – Albanian
- An Englishman will burn his bed to catch a flea. – Turkish
Social Dimensions

In addition to applying the aforementioned approaches to studying folklore, “folklorists look at how, when, and why people share folklore and consider ways the relationships among people and their physical, social, and cultural context are expressed through acts of communication” (Sims and Stephens 1998).

This includes the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, class, etc., and how these can influence our worldview. In extreme examples, you can have one group controlling another’s social, political, or economic contexts. This condition, known as hegemony, can be demonstrated by a tyrannical dictator or by something more subtle or aesthetic. A great example of this from our text is the way Mexican food in Texas was turned into a more Anglo-American version.
Myths

Like jokes and riddles, myths also share a common structural pattern.

Myths are a special group of stories that were formed as people sought to explain both natural phenomenon and human behavior, as well as to express the beliefs and religious customs of ancient cultures (Galda and Cullinan 142).

Some examples of myths include “Persephone,” “King Midas and the Golden Touch,” and “Hercules.”
# Characteristics of Myth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Story</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristics:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Characters:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Little dialogue</td>
<td>• Deities, demons, and some humans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Names of characters and setting change from culture to culture</td>
<td>• Flat, static personalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sophisticated language</td>
<td>• Possess supernatural powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Symbolic and abstract terms rely on figurative language and imagery to portray mood and events</td>
<td><strong>Plots:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Set in another world</td>
<td>• Complex; often pit humans against gods, gods against gods</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Incidents linked by characters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Limited descriptions of events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Severe punishments</td>
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Adapted from Goforth and Spillman
Pourquoi Tales

A more simplified version of myths are pourquoi tales. Pourquoi is the French word for “why”.

“These simple stories tell how the Earth began, why the seasons change, and the origins of some animals and their physical attributes.

Some examples of pourquoi tales include “Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People’s Ears,” “Why the Crab Has No Head,” and “Why the Sky Is Far Away.”
# Characteristics of Pourquoi Tales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Story</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristics:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Characters:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack figurative language</td>
<td>• Real places within culture of tale’s origin</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Limited descriptions</td>
<td>• Timeless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Written in style of storyteller</td>
<td>• Realistic animals in animal form and habitat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Stereotyped characteristics, e.g., sly fox, slow turtle</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Plots:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fictional stories explaining the creation and attributes of animals</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Simple narratives</td>
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Adapted from Goforth and Spillman
It’s Time For......

Reader’s Theater