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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2009 Volume I: Storytelling around the Globe

A Study of Oral Tradition: Storytelling in Ireland, West Africa and Japan

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This unit is a study of the tradition of oral storytelling in West Africa, Ireland and Japan, and will focus on legends and epic tales. Instead of reading two legends, we will study two films, *The Secret of Roan Inish* and *Into the West*, both examples of Irish legends. These films beautifully illustrate how a legend is passed down from one generation to the next and introduces the mysterious people and places of which legends are made. The study of epic tales will come next, with a lot of time spent examining the role of the storytellers, the *griot* of West Africa, the *filii* of Ireland, and the Biwa recitations of Japan. These storytellers communicated these stories for hundreds of years and in West Africa and Japan, the practice of oral storytelling has not shifted much over time. I have chosen the theme of "Origins" for this unit because my overarching goal is for students to understand how the cultural significance oral tradition is in these three regions of the world and to study the elements of legends and epics. The epic tales we will study are *Sundiata* (West Africa), *Tain Bo Cualnge* (Ireland), and *The Heike Monogatari* (Japan).

(Developed for Language Arts, grade 8, recommended for Language Arts, grades 6-8)

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