



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative

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Stick to Your Story: Fleshing out Existing Narrative Structures

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Introduction and Rationale

Once upon a time, before digital media, I was an only child living in a little, pale green house next to a neglected cemetery. I read books, watched television, talked on a landline, had pen pals, formed one-member clubs, invented siblings, and wrote narratives. I invented backstories for the people whose tombstones I saw on my walks, and would tell my friends about them. I fantasized about life as a grown up, elsewhere. I had a sense of longing for what I knew I was missing, and for what I hoped might come in the future. My imagination was my "bestie." Life was otherwise fairly simple, and my awkward photographs stayed within the family. There was rarely instant gratification, and the waiting gave me room to think, to dream. That's how things worked before technology crept in and changed the world. We had alone time. Growing up was painful already, but doing so now—in a time when teens feel the pressure to share every minutiae with their social networks—is a dystopian horror story not even I could have imagined.

My students do not know the world before social media, or before phones that fit in their pockets. They are obsessed with immediacy—the "here and now" of shared experiences. They sometimes recall stories from elementary school, but they rarely, if ever, look forward or outward. They are constantly connected. They sleep with their phones under their pillows after staying up too late tapping, tapping, tapping, consuming, sharing, and tapping. With a few exceptions, my students are firmly rooted in tangible, firmly unimaginative, reality. Since they are constantly connected, there really is no free time for them to think, dream, or imagine. When they do have free time, the siren songs of their mobile devices are too strong to resist, and the potential for imaginative is life cast aside for social media (and the ubiquitous Snapchat filters), videos of people physically fighting, and any game that lets them enter an almost vegetative state.

When discussing this phenomena based on students being rooted in the "here and now," my seminar leader, Joe Roach, said he sees the image of "a digital clock, which only shows the self-succeeding now, [showing] neither the past nor the future"¹ as on a face of an analog clock. The face of an analog clock has the capacity to show the past and the future, and its structure enables us to situate ourselves in time by reading where the hands lie on the continuum. This image is painfully apt, as the majority of my students do not know how to read an analog clock. The students are living their stories, but they often lack foresight and hindsight, which are skills they need in order reflect upon their pasts and look toward their futures. While the structure of an analog clock might be lost on my students, I can teach them another structure: narrative. In *Reading for the*

Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative, Peter Brooks claims, "We live immersed in narrative, recounting and reassessing the meaning of our past actions, anticipating the outcome of our future projects, situating ourselves at the intersection of several stories not yet completed."² Narrative is the analog clock: it is the story structure that will help students look forwards and backwards while still knowing where they are on the continuum. Narrative structure will help them tell their own stories, personal and fictional. By understanding narrative, students will begin to understand that "here and now" is the intersection of stories waiting to be told.

Once the students understand narrative structure, they still need to generate content to speak and write their stories. Technology and social media have dulled my students' imaginations, so it is my job to help them reignite those flames of creativity. In the past, when asked to use their imaginations to write a story, my students have either stared blankly or have regurgitated narratives provided by the media they consume. To counter that vacuum of imagination, I must find engaging alternatives to the various digital environments (social media, video games, etc.) in order to help students reconnect with their imaginations so that they can start writing their own narratives. To do so, one method is to engage the students with existing narratives that have enchanted people for generations by letting them rewrite the stories using ideas from their personal cultures. In "Rewriting 'Goldilocks' in the Urban, Multicultural Elementary School," Heather Lotherington and Sandra Chow observe that their students "envision their cultural worlds as plugged into pop culture; their ideas about culture are more heavily influenced by television than by the physical world around them,"³ I agree with her, and that is why I, too, have decided to have my students examine and then rewrite a familiar cultural narrative. I welcome revisionist folktales with characters borrowed from current pop culture, because most of their imaginations are tied to the media they consume. I also believe my students will still be able to write innovative stories while still participating in this cultural pastiche.

This unit focuses on many aspects of narrative structure and storytelling in order to awaken hibernating imaginations and provide time-tested frameworks that will inspire the students to write their own narratives. Students will learn pieces of narratology and structuralism through the examination of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" or "The Story of the Three Bears." Once they understand how that plot functions, they will use the same lens of narratology to explore other folktales in groups and independently. For group and independent work, they will choose from stories that fall under the four story types as Joe Roach outlined in our seminar: Quest, Showdown, Decision, and Discovery. All of this will be tied together by a continued practice of oral storytelling via Story Circles, a practice that will get the students comfortable with the storytelling process. With the knowledge of narratological structures, oral story telling, folktales, and plot, each student will then develop and compose a five-paragraph narrative that showcases their awakened imaginative abilities.

While this unit was developed with seventh graders in mind, it can easily be adapted for all grade levels. "The Story of the Three Bears" works well for primary grades, as elements can be simplified or omitted per the standards. As for older students, specifically those in high school, teachers can review or gloss over "The Story of the Three Bears" and discuss its structure before having the students work on a more challenging text. Narratology and plot can be applied to any narrative at any reading level, which means its principles can be taught at every grade. Additionally, oral story telling/story circles can be used across all grade levels.

School and Students

Many of my students are affected by the problems endemic to racially and economically segregated cities: poverty, violence, physical abuse, drug abuse, transience, truancy, and mental health issues. The majority of my students live in either the Hillside projects, which is primarily African American, or Southwood Apartments, which is primarily Hispanic/Latino. Most of my Hispanic/Latino students are children of immigrants, and are either already bilingual or English language learners (ELLs). My first year teaching, in 2012, I only had four Hispanic/Latino students, but the number grows every year, as the south side immigrant population continues to expand. That said, our school has been and will continue to be in a state of cultural transition. Within the school, the students have divided themselves along racial and cultural lines: the African Americans stick together, the Hispanics/Latinos stick together for the most part, and the handful of white students always seem kind of lost with no place to fit in.

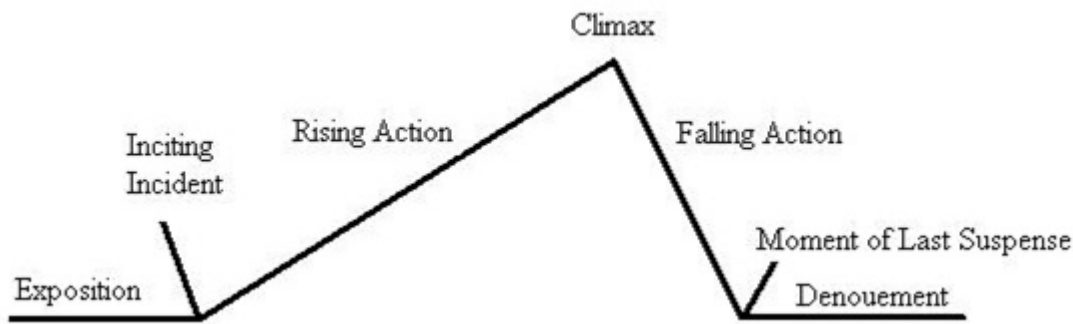
I teach seventh grade, and as our school went from being under “School Improvement” to “Conditional Accreditation,” I am under a lot of pressure to keep the students reading from “bell-to-bell,” which leaves little time for creativity or quality writing. Therefore, I always hit a wall when I ask my students to write narrative. In this era of high-stakes testing, the students no longer take a writing SOL exam in fifth grade, so teachers typically do not focus on writing until the students have to take the exam in eighth grade. Prior to eighth grade, there is so much pressure to get the students to pass the reading test (and every other subject that is “officially” tested), that writing is simply pushed to the side, if even taught at all. Therefore, the majority of students simply do not know where to start writing due to pure inexperience. Furthermore, somewhere between childhood and adolescence, they seem to have misplaced their imaginative abilities and remain firmly planted in the physical and digital realities of their day-to-day lives.

Content Objectives

Narratology

Narratology, in general terms, is a critical literary theory that examines the plot functions that all narratives have in common while also looking at the elements that allow them to differ.⁴ Russian Formalists describe this as “the relations between *fabula* (‘basic story material’) and *sjuzet* (‘plot’).”⁵ The plot is the solid structure upon which the “basic story material” is hung. This relationship and how it relates to folktales, specifically “Goldilocks and the Three Bears,” is central to this unit.

The challenge lies in explaining narratology to seventh graders. Developmentally, seventh grade students have difficulty thinking in the abstract, which is where theory resides. In the mathematics classroom, teachers have “manipulatives” to bring abstractions into the concrete realm, but what does the language arts teacher have? Our “manipulatives” must be extracted from interactions with narrative. An easy way to show basic plot functions is through Freytag’s triangle.



By the time my students reach me, they are usually already familiar with a simplified version of Freytag’s triangle, which they usually call “the roller coaster” (and I call the “plot diagram”). I survey what they remember and then expand upon it to include the full diagram, which includes the following functions: exposition, inciting incident, rising action, climax, falling action, moment of last suspense, and denouement.

Aside from Freytag’s Triangle, I must also try to break parts of Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale* down into digestible pieces for seventh graders. Propp explains the thirty-one “functions of the *dramatis personae*,” which details the character functions possible in a fairy tale. He defines function as “an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action.”⁶ Function is essential to moving the plot forward. Furthermore, Propp contends that “functions of characters serve as stable, constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled. They constitute the fundamental components of a tale.”⁷ While each folktale has functions as outlined by Propp, not every function is in every story. However, the order of the functions is important, as “one function develops out of another with logical and artistic necessity.”⁸ In other words, you can identify which plot functions and elements are present because they are presented in order. When writing narrative, one must choose which functions will be present in the story, and then craft it in the proper order to produce a complete story with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Detailing all of Propp’s functions for my students would overwhelm them, so it is best to file it down to strategies with which they already have experience, something as simple as determining what elements are constants or variables on a who, what, when, where, why, and how chart.

- Who VARIABLE Exposition
- What CONSTANT Inciting Incident, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action, Denouement
- Where VARIABLE Exposition
- When VARIABLE Exposition
- Why VARIABLE Motivation/Reason
- How VARIABLE Exposition/Description

Once you determine which elements are variable and which ones are constant, the story’s structure is revealed. When rewriting an already existing narrative, the only constant are the functions, the “what.” Everything else can be changed to suit the storyteller’s imagination and personal motivations for this new narrative.

After gaining an understanding of structure with its constants and variables, one can build upon that knowledge by introducing basic story types, which deepen one’s understanding of narrative structure. In Joe Roach’s seminar, “Over the Rainbow’: Fantasy Lands, Dream Worlds, and Magic Kingdoms,” he outlined four basic story types, based on the predominant archetypes in the stories: quest/journey (*The Odyssey*),

showdown (*The Iliad* and *Hamlet*), decision (*Antigone*), and discovery (*Oedipus Rex*).⁹ Each story can have elements of the other stories, but is predominantly one story type. By understanding the story types, storytellers can decide how the story functions are executed in the story in order to achieve the desired story type and outcome. Of course, different examples must be provided for younger audiences. For example, if we wanted to use well-known folk tales and fairy tales, “Little Red Riding Hood” is quest/journey, because it details her journey through the woods to her grandmother’s house. “Hansel and Gretel” is a showdown, because the children must defeat the witch in order to survive. “The Little Mermaid” is decision, because she decides to make a deal to become human, and everything that occurs is a result of that decision. Lastly, “Goldilocks and the Three Bears” or “The Story of Three Bears” is discovery, as story relies on the bears discovering Goldilocks’s trespasses. Just as all stories have basic functions, all stories also fall into one of those four categories.

Enduring Relevance of Folktales

I should begin by explaining that, for my purposes, the generic term “folktale” describes both fairy tales (which have magical elements) and folk tales (no magical elements). Why do folktales have such widespread appeal? Aside from the fact that many people are familiar with folktales via reading, oral storytelling, and pop culture, the stories are appealing because they allow us to live in the subjunctive for the duration of the story. What if a wolf ate your grandmother? What would you do if you came across the home of three bears? What if a witch tried to fatten two siblings up so that she may feast on them? These tales have been told for hundreds of years in many different languages, and unlike many things in the digital age, these narratives will survive when the hard drives and servers crash. They may change to suit the inevitable cultural shifts, but their narrative functions—their bones—will remain and take on new flesh for future generations.

The narrative functions appear again and again in folktales because they represent all of the trappings of being human. In *New Tales for Old*, Gail de Vos and Anna E. Altmann claim that scholar Max Lüthi “thinks that recognizably similar folktales with the same motifs have been told in very different cultures all over the world because the tales express something fundamental about what it is to be human and live in the world—about universal experiences, struggles, and desires.”¹⁰ The fundamentals (universal human experiences, struggles, and desires) paired with straightforward narrative structures help the stories survive with their appeal in tact. These features also make folktales perfect texts for analysis.

The folktale is structurally simple enough for seventh graders to deconstruct and then reconstruct using the knowledge of plot elements and their narrative functions. Folktales are deceptive in their simplicity, as my students quickly discover that, if done correctly, identifying the plot elements in a “simple” story is harder than they think. Again, abstractions become a sticking point, as it is hard for students in the middle grades to grasp concepts that are not rooted in the tangible world, such as suspense. Still, as de Vos and Altmann point out, folktales “have patterned repetition, strong contrasts, very little description, and unambiguous characters” that make them easy to comprehend and dissect.¹¹ Folktale heroes are also likely very relatable to middle school students, as they are often “orphaned, disregarded, scorned, or abandoned in some other way.”¹² There is nothing more quintessentially teenage than feeling scorned and abandoned. That sense of abandonment also sets those characters “free to move through their sharply delineated world, responsible only for their quest and open to engage the wondrous when they encounter it, even though it may be disguised.”¹³ Don’t teenagers simultaneously feel disregarded and ignored while dreaming of having an adventure without having to report to a guardian?

Folktales are also fascinating because their iterations reveal what society deems important along with the

fundamentals of being human. In the introduction of *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*, Jack Zipes asserts, “the nature and meaning of folk tales have depended on the stage of development of a tribe, community, or society. Oral tales have served to stabilize, conserve, or challenge the common beliefs, laws, values, and norms of a group.”¹⁴ Indeed, “Goldilocks and the Three Bears” or “The Story of the Three Bears” can be read as a cautionary tale that illustrates social mores and life lessons that our society considers important. Of course, the lessons depend on the point of view: Goldilocks’s or the Bears’. For Goldilocks, it could be the following: Don’t enter a house uninvited, don’t eat food that isn’t yours, don’t break furniture, and don’t sleep in a stranger’s bed. Conversely, the lesson is a little more humbling if viewed as one of the bears. Someone may trespass in your home, someone may eat your food, someone may break your chair, and someone might sleep in your bed. You can choose to forgive the trespasser, you can scare her off, or you can punish her. Sometimes, the interloper will escape before you get to decide her fate: she could just get away with the crime. Additionally, the story makes a great model for budding storytellers, who can rewrite the tale in a way that completely challenges those social mores and delivers different lessons.

It is important for people to participate in retellings of narratives because they actually help preserve cultures while insuring the basic tales’ survival through reinvention. In “Students as Storytellers: Teaching Rhetorical Strategies through Folktales,” Jeffrey Howard asserts:

the process of passing on oral texts through retelling them to a different audience with different goals or objectives consists of interplay between permanence and adaptation, stasis and change, and individual innovation and conservation of community traditions over time. Storytellers control the narrative and adapt to circumstances or contextual factors.¹⁵

By retelling a story, the storyteller both preserves the story’s structure while participating in the story’s continual cultural evolution. The basic story remains the same over time, but the *fabula* changes to suit cultural and community goals, objectives, and values. Retelling narratives (both orally and written) fully engages the storyteller with the narrative’s history and interpretive possibilities. Through their participation in the retelling process, the storyteller becomes a part of that story, and every version told before and after: past, present, and future.

Applying Narratology to “Goldilocks and the Three Bears”

Scholars do not seem to pay much attention to “Goldilocks and the Three Bears” or “The Story of the Three Bears.” My guess is that it is dismissed because it is fairly short, and maybe because it lacks the magical elements of fairy tales. Others have pointed to its questionable lineage as a point of contention, and its true origins are still murky. However, folklore scholar Maria Tatar tells us what is known about the history of “The Story of the Three Bears” in the *Annotated Classic Fairy Tales*. The tale’s history reveals its morphology, as well: British poet Robert Southey is credited with being the first to record “The Story of the Three Bears” as a narrative in 1837. Tatar also notes that “It has been speculated that Southey did not rely on oral sources but instead conflated a Norwegian story about three bears with the scene from the Grimms’ ‘Snow White’ in which the heroine enters the cottage of the dwarfs.”¹⁶ “The Story of the Three Bears” is itself cultural pastiche, but the bones of Southey’s version remain to this day. In Southey’s tale, a little old woman is the transgressor. In 1850, Joseph Cundall replaced the little old woman with a little girl. She did not get her illustrious name until 1918, when British storyteller Flora Annie Steel called her Goldilocks in her *English Fairy Tales*.¹⁷ Tatar also notes that the “relationship among the bears has also changed over time. At first they appear to be a random

trio of friends or brothers, but by 1852 they had become a family—mother, father, and baby bear.”¹⁸ The history of the story, from Southey forward, illustrates how the variables change but the basic plot remains the same. By utilizing Freytag’s triangle, we see that all of the variables serve the same function.

While Tatar illuminates the history of “The Story of the Three Bears,” Terence Patrick Murphy actually applies Propp’s “functions of the *dramatis personae*” to the story in *The Fairy Tale and Plot Structure*. Murphy argues that there are eleven functions present in “The Story of the Three Bears”: Absenteeism, Forbidding, Violation, Reconnaissance, Delivery, Temptation, Yielding, Entrapment, Mediation, Counteraction, and Escape.¹⁹ Murphy asserts that the “Initial Situation” is not a function, in part, I believe because there is very little exposition. While I understand his argument, I still think the “Initial Situation” is that there are three bears that live in a house in the woods. If the first function were indeed absenteeism, the story would start with the bears leaving the house. Instead, the beginning of the story calls the bears and the house into existence before they can leave. De Vos and Altmann said that folk tale characters “have only as much background or history as is required to motivate the action,” and that sliver of background does indeed exist so that the three bears, who live in a house, can leave for a walk, so Goldilocks can arrive.²⁰

After the bears and their house have been called into existence within the narrative, Murphy’s analysis of the functions is accurate. The bears leave for their walk while their porridge cools (Absenteeism). Goldilocks appears at the empty house, and she is not supposed to go inside (Forbidding), but she enters the house anyway (Violation). Once inside, she takes a look around to see what’s in the house (Reconnaissance) before eating Baby Bear’s porridge and breaking Baby Bear’s chair (Delivery). Then, she finds Baby Bear’s bed so inviting (Temptation) that she falls asleep in it (Yielding). Next, we reach the climax, which is a little tricky because Goldilocks falls into a trap she sets for herself when the bears come home and discover her violations before they find her asleep in Baby Bear’s bed (Entrapment). Once Goldilocks is aware that the bears have discovered her (Mediation), she runs toward the open window (Counteraction), and jumps out, never to be seen again (Escape).

Placing the events of “The Story of the Three Bears” onto Freytag’s triangle is a bit simpler. Three bears live in the woods and decide to go for a walk (exposition). Goldilocks arrives and enters the house uninvited (inciting incident). Goldilocks eats the porridge, breaks the chair, and falls asleep in Baby Bear’s bed (rising action). The bears come home (climax). The bears discover the trespasses and then find the interloper asleep in Baby Bear’s bed (falling action). Goldilocks wakes up, notices the bears, and jumps out of the window (moment of last suspense), and the bears never see her again (denouement). When explaining this to the students, I will likely leave out the “moment of last suspense” because it will only confuse them. Introducing the “inciting incident” is enough for seventh graders, as the moment of last suspense and denouement can bleed together into one function for this unit.

Narrative (Re)Writing

Based on the countless articles and chapters of books found on even the most cursory search, the most popular folktale to rewrite in the secondary classroom is “Little Red Riding Hood.” While “Little Red Riding Hood” is rich with plot functions and variables begging to be rewritten using student-generated content, the majority of my students need a much simpler plot before they can attack something as rich as “Little Red Riding Hood.” For my purposes, “Goldilocks and the Three Bears” or “The Story of the Three Bears” is perfect in its brevity, simplicity, and clear, balanced plot.

Tasking students with rewriting existing narratives is not a new idea, but in this era of high-stakes testing,

almost all fiction is being pushed aside in favor of nonfiction reading and persuasive writing. We complain that the students have no imagination because of social media, but the system itself discourages imaginative life. In our seminar, “‘Over the Rainbow’: Fantasy Lands, Dream Worlds, and Magic Kingdoms,” Joe Roach urged us to keep returning to the idea of the subjunctive, which is the grammatical way of discussing a condition contrary to fact.²¹ My students’ subjunctive capabilities desperately need to be resuscitated, and one way to accomplish that is through creative writing. In fact, the process of rewriting an already established folktale is subjunctive—the student revises a tale based on “what if any (variable from the story) was different?” By rewriting story with student generated details while still maintaining the plot functions, the subjunctive “what if” becomes the student’s authentic narrative. The *fabula* can be replaced by whatever the writer imagines as the subjunctive and can therefore be conjured into being. Folktales, according to de Vos and Altmann, are “a superb playground for the imagination, full of wonders and the bizarre, free from the limitations of every day reality, with layers of meaning that the conscious or unconscious mind may discover according to its readiness or need.”²² Folktales are the realm of the subjunctive, so it is fertile ground for interpretation and revision.

“In my composition classes, I have taken to using texts from folklore, such as fairy tales or folktales, to help my students develop critical thinking skills that heighten their awareness of the value of those individual experiences as part of a larger narrative tradition.”²³ (Howard 170)

Oral Storytelling

In order to get the students motivated and excited about this unit, it is imperative that we build a culture of trust and creative cooperation. I have yet to meet a group of people who don’t groan at the thought of participating in an icebreaker, but it really is the quickest way to get people talking in order to begin building a community. To achieve this, I am going to use the “Story Circle,” based on the method developed by John O’Neal and Theresa Holden. NYU Wagner’s Research Center for Leadership in Action claims, “Leaders of social change efforts have used story circle to stimulate memory, share experiences, and/or to build community solidarity through remembering events, people, or repertoires.”²⁴ A teacher is a leader of social change and growth, so I can think of no better way to build the classroom community.

The Story Circle method could take some time to accomplish our goals, but the benefits make the investment worthwhile. Once the students are confident speaking narratives, they can more easily transition to writing narrative. Storytelling has a long history as a powerful teaching and learning tool, and the Story Circle helps us harness that power to support young writers. R. Craig Roney argues for the value of storytelling in “A Case for Storytelling in the K-12 Language Arts Curriculum”: “storytelling is also valuable because the key to success involves developing a young child’s background knowledge about and affinity for literature as a foundation for them developing the ability and desire to read and write on their own.”²⁵ While Roney’s research focuses on students in primary grades, the same argument could be made for older students who may be lacking the foundation needed to read and write independently. When students hate reading and writing due to lack of (positive) experience, the only way to combat that is through oral storytelling. The engaging interaction between speaker and listener in the Story Circle will help those reluctant students develop positive relationships with narrative, which will in turn change their attitudes toward reading and writing.

Strategies and Activities

Story Circles

The unit will actually begin with a Story Circle, and will ultimately be used throughout the unit. Our first Story Circle will focus on whatever theme I think is relevant to the students. I will model by telling my story before each student takes a turn telling his or her personal story based on the same theme. Then, once the thematic story circle is a success, we will shift to a collaborative version of the Story Circle. In the collaborative version, one person begins an oral narrative and each member of the circle continues and adds to the story until we reach the denouement. Each story circle serves the same purpose: to build a community in which students can collaborate and begin speaking narratives. Once the students succeed in the story circle, they should have the courage to leave the (dis)comfort zone of reality in order to begin reconnecting with and expanding their imaginations.

To form a Story Circle, we will move the desks to the outskirts of the room, and sit on our chairs in a circle, with no barriers between us. I will explain the method and the theme, and model a story or begin the shared story. The group size will vary due to class sizes and time constraints, but ideally each student will have 2-3 minutes to tell an individual story, or one minute to add to a group story. If a participant isn't ready, they can pass and tell their story once the circle is completed.

Guided Reading and Plot Diagram of “The Story of the Three Bears”

In the past, administrators have questioned my use of folktales in the classroom, and even the students themselves have looked at me quizzically when I hand them *Little Golden Books* to use when examining plot. Administration believes students should be reading rigorous nonfiction each day, and the students think the stories are for little kids. However, these “simple” stories are essential to understanding plot structure due to their universal appeal and clear plots. They also make great mentor texts due to their adaptability.

Before this activity begins, I will deliver a brief presentation on Freytag's triangle/plot diagram, and the students will take notes. They will need that background information in order to connect the plot functions with an actual narrative. I will both project a copy of “The Story of the Three Bears” and pass out a copy for each student. I will read the story to the students as they follow along, and after we have read the story once, we will go back and fill out the plot diagram together. We will then discuss the who, what, when, where, why, and how of the story, noting that the only constant is the “what.” We will then generate examples together of how we can change the variables and therefore rewrite the story using our own details while leaving the plot functions in tact. If the students struggle with providing their own *fabula*, I will read different versions of “The Story of the Three Bears” with the class in order to compare and contrast the variables and constants of the stories that share the same basic plot functions. Once they have heard or read several examples, it should be easier for the students to come up with their own variables.

Story Circle Retelling and Storyboarding of “The Story of the Three Bears”

In this particular story circle, students will retell “The Story of the Three Bears” using variables generated in their imaginations. Before beginning this story circle, students should review the plot, along with its constants and variables, and brainstorm ideas independently before forming and beginning the story circle. As the story is told, the teacher will act as a recorder and type the story for later projection or distribution. Once the story

is finished, students will use what they have learned about plot to dissect their story and identify its *fabula* ('basic story material' or variables) and *sjuzhet* ('plot' or constants) on a plot diagram. Additionally, depending on the variables provided, students can determine whether their retelling remains a story of discovery, as the original narrative, or if their variables have changed the story type. With "The Story of the Three Bears," the story type really is dependent on the variables. It is conceivable that students will end the story with a fight to the death, which could turn the tale into a showdown if the characters' motivations lead the story in that direction.

To extend this activity further, students can work independently or in groups to storyboard their collaborative narrative. To do so, they can either draw the scenes on notebook paper or on an appropriate graphic organizer.

Small Group Reading and Plot Diagram of a Folktales

After the whole class activity, the students will break into small groups and choose one story from variety of folktales provided (folk tales and fairy tales). Students may be provided with a selection of Little Golden Books that demonstrate plot, or copies of other folktales, such as the following: "Little Red Riding Hood," "The Three Little Pigs," "Hansel and Gretel," "Cinderella," etcetera. The students will read the stories aloud in their groups, and then fill out a plot diagram, identifying elements and functions for their specific story. Students will then transfer the diagram to a poster board, and each group will take turns presenting their narratives to the class. Students can also be asked to identify which of the four story types their text exemplifies.

Narrative Writing

Each student will draft, develop, and complete a five-paragraph story (or "narrative essay," in Virginia DOE parlance). The students will complete polished, five paragraph narratives in which they do one of the following: rewrite and reimagine a mentor narrative, imagine three ways they wish their worlds were different, or cast themselves as the hero who has to pass three tests. If they could reimagine themselves as heroes, what "tests" would they face? If they could create their own fantasy worlds/utopias, what would they be like? How would they change the variables without pre-scripted options from which to choose an answer?

My students flail about and groan in despair when I ask them to write more than one paragraph, so it would be best to get them to write something short before I ask them to tackle a five-paragraph narrative. At this point, they should all be comfortable with oral storytelling via the Story Circles, so they should be able to write a short, thematic narrative piece.

Based on successes using fairy tale structure, I would like to find different "templates" for the students to use. The plot of The Wizard of Oz is especially promising, as the students would be forced to develop characters that embody qualities that they themselves find valuable, while writing a narrative. A more basic template involves an introduction, "three things," and a conclusion. The "three things" template lends itself well to folktale adaptations or narratives in which a hero faces three tests to achieve glory. If the student chooses to write the hero narrative, the sequence of three tests that each top the previous will challenge the student to really stretch their imaginations while still providing a solid organizational template. To create any of these narratives, we would again refer to mentor texts before the students begin prewriting (brainstorming either with notes or graphic organizers) and then drafting their narratives.

Once the students have drafted their narratives, they will pair up to peer edit and analyze each other's

narratives before revising to create their final drafts. In pairs, the students will copy edit, provide feedback, and identify the constants and variables of each other's narratives by plotting the events and their functions on Freytag's triangle (plot diagram graphic organizer). By using the plot diagram to analyze the stories, the students will have a deeper understanding of how their narratives work. Of course, there will be ample opportunities for revision if the students' plots are found lacking before they submit their final versions. Additionally, while most of my students shudder at the thought of drawing, I would like for my artistically inclined students to have the opportunity to create storyboards or even graphic novel versions of their final narratives.

Narrative Writing Differentiation

Even with the foundation of narratology, some students may still struggle with writing narrative. In those cases, an alternate, more easily accessible topic may be helpful. Sticking with the "three things" template, the "If I Had Three Wishes" prompt would ask the students to rewrite their worlds (neighborhoods, schools, communities, homes) to create their personal utopian societies. While this kind of narrative may not fit on a plot diagram due to its personal and opinion-based nature, students can still participate in the peer editing and revision process without having to delve into a full plot analysis.

Implementing District Standards

This unit meets Common Core English Language Arts Standards described under writing standard CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences. The standards are detailed as follows:

- ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3.A: Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and point of view and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically.
- ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3.B: Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
- ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3.C: Use a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence and signal shifts from one time frame or setting to another.
- ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3.D: Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events.
- ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3.E: Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on the narrated experiences or events.

In Virginia, the unit will meet multiple Virginia Standards of Learning for 07 Reading. In the Richmond Public Schools pacing guide, narrative writing is to take place in the first nine weeks, so this unit can serve as the beginning of the year icebreaker as well as the narrative writing unite. The unit specifically covers the following standards: 7.5 a) Describe the elements of narrative structure including setting, character development, plot structure, theme, and conflict; 7.5 b) Compare and contrast various forms and genres of fictional text; 7.5 c) Identify conventional elements and characteristics of a variety of genres; and 7.7 a-j, applicable to a focus on narrative writing.

Annotated Bibliography

Anonymous. "The Story of the Three Bears." In *The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales*, edited by Maria Tatar, 245-252. New York: W. W. Norton, 2002. This version of "The Story of the Three Bears," chosen by Maria Tatar, is a great version to dissect with students.

Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989. In this text, Bettelheim argues for the importance of fairy tales to childhood psychological growth and development.

Brooks, Peter. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984. Brooks presents an intensive exploration of narrative and how its patterns shape and mimic human life.

De Vos, Gail, and Anna E. Altmann. *New Tales for Old: Folktales as Literary Fictions for Young Adults*. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1999. De Vos and Altmann make a strong argument for the importance of folktales as literary fictions, while also applying Propp's theories to individual folktales.

Elms, Alan C. "'The Three Bears': Four Interpretations." *The Journal of American Folklore* 90.357 (1977): 257-273. Elms presents engrossing and somewhat amusing readings of "The Three Bears," focusing primarily on various psychoanalytic interpretations.

Howard, Jeffrey. "Students as Storytellers: Teaching Rhetorical Strategies through Folktales." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* 43.2 (2015): 170-178. In this article, Howard discusses using folktales in his composition classes due to their accessibility.

Lotherington, Heather and Sandra Chow. "Rewriting 'Goldilocks' in the Urban, Multicultural Elementary School." *The Reading Teacher* 60.3 (2006): 242-252. While this journal article focuses on rewriting "Goldilocks" in an elementary school, it is evidence that the method of rewriting already existing narratives helps students further develop their imaginations and writing skills.

Lüthi, Max. "Imitation and Anticipation in Folktales." *Folklore on Two Continents: Essays in Honor of Linda Dégh* (1980): 3-13. In this essay, Lüthi discusses the folktale's reliance on repetition in form and content. He also discusses how the past and future is at work in the present.

Murphy, Terence Patrick. *The Fairytale and Plot Structure*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Murphy critically analyzes fairytales, including "The Story of the Three Bears," using Propp's "functions of the *dramatis personae*."

"Practice Notes: Story Circle Method." *NYU Wagner Research Center for Leadership in Action*. Last modified June 2008. <http://wagner.nyu.edu/files/leadership/PracticeNoteStoryCircleMethod0608.pdf>. This brief document explains the value of story circles as well as step-by-step instructions on how to utilize the method.

Prince, Gerald. "Narratology." In *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory & Criticism*, edited by Michael Groden and Martin Kreiswirth, 524-528. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994. Prince's description of narratology is easy to digest in this guide.

Propp, Vladimir. *Morphology of the Folktale*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968. Propp's critical literary theories about Russian folktales are the basis for the exploration of narratological theory in my unit.

Roach, Joseph. "Over the Rainbow': Fantasy Lands, Dream Worlds, and Magic Kingdoms." Seminar of Yale National Initiative, New Haven, CT, July 11-22, 2016. In this intensive seminar, Joe Roach introduced many ideas—including the "subjunctive" and the four story types—which have been key to developing parts of this unit.

Roney, R. Craig. "A Case for Storytelling in the K-12 Language Arts Curriculum." *Storytelling, Self, Society* 5.1 (2009): 45-54. In this

journal article, R. Craig Roney argues for the continued use of storytelling in K-12 classrooms.

Tatar, Maria, ed. *The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2002. This is a collection of classic fairy tales edited, translated, and annotated by Maria Tatar, chair of the Folklore and Mythology program at Harvard University.

Tatar, Maria. "Why Fairy Tales Matter: The Performative and the Transformative." *Western Folklore* 69.1 (2010): 55-64. In this essay, Tatar argues that fairy tales are still important, as they take child readers elsewhere in order to empower themselves.

Vasudevan, Lalitha and Gerald Campano. "The Social Production of Adolescent Risk and the Promise of Adolescent Literacies." *Review of Research in Education*, 33 (2009), 310-353. This illuminating article provides additional contexts for teaching students literacy skills in low-income environments.

Zipes, Jack, ed. *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. This is an index of Fairy Tales edited by and including an introduction from Jack Zipes.

Annotated Bibliography of Versions of "The Three Bears" Currently Available

Below is a preliminary list of some of the in-print versions of the tale to share with students. It is by no means an exhaustive list, but these tomes are a great place to start.

Annable, Graham. "Goldilocks and the Three Bears." From *Fairy Tale Comics*, edited by Chris Duffy. New York: First Second, 2013. 91-94. This is a very brief version of the tale in comic book form. It features no words at all, and is strictly visual storytelling—therefore an excellent example of storyboarding the tale.

Anonymous. "The Story of the Three Bears." In *The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales*, edited by Maria Tatar, 245-252. New York: W. W. Norton, 2002. This version of "The Story of the Three Bears," chosen by Maria Tatar, is a great version to dissect with students.

Anonymous. *The Three Bears*. New York: Golden Books, 1948. This Little Golden Book Classic is illustrated by F. Rojankovsky and is a "standard" version of the tale.

Braun, Eric. *Goldilocks and the Three Bears: An Interactive Fairy Tale Adventure*. North Mankato, MN: Capstone Press, 2016. This "chose your own adventure" version of the tale features forty choices and twenty-three different endings. It also features a critical thinking using the common core page.

Dahl, Roald. "Goldilocks and the Three Bears." From *Roald Dahl's Revolting Rhymes*. New York: A. A. Knopf, 1982. 24-31. "The Three Bears" told in comedic verse, with a "sticky" end.

Hodgkinson, Leigh. *Goldilocks and Just One Bear*. Somerville, MA: Nosy Crow, 2012. In this version, Baby Bear grows up and trespasses upon Goldilocks and her family, where she is living happily ever after.

Lowell, Susan. *Dusty Locks and the Three Bears*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001. The Three Bears live in the (American) Wild West, and "Dusty Locks" is the dirty, lawless, runaway trespasser. This version is chock-full of figurative language that would make a great read-aloud, and ends with Dusty Locks returning to her mother.

Modugno, Maria. *Santa Claus and the Three Bears*. New York: HarperCollins, 2013. The three bears are polar bears, and the

interloper is none other than Santa Claus, who ultimately leaves presents for them on his way out.

Willems, Mo. *Goldilocks and the Three Dinosaurs*. New York: Balzer + Bray, 2012. Instead of bears, this tale features three enormous dinosaurs who leave their home open as a trap for Goldilocks, who was expecting a bear home.

Endnotes

1. Joseph Roach, "Over the Rainbow': Fantasy Lands, Dream Worlds, and Magic Kingdoms."
2. Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*, 3.
3. Heather Lotherington and Sandra Chow, "Rewriting 'Goldilocks' in the Urban Multicultural Elementary School," 251.
4. Gerald Prince, "Narratology," in Groden and Kreiswirth, *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory & Criticism*, 524.
5. Gerald Prince, "Narratology," in Groden and Kreiswirth, *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory & Criticism*, 526.
6. Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 21.
7. Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 21.
8. Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 64.
9. Joseph Roach, "Over the Rainbow': Fantasy Lands, Dream Worlds, and Magic Kingdoms."
10. Gail de Vos and Anna E. Altmann, *New Tales for Old: Folktales as Literary Fictions for Young Adults*, 19.
11. Gail de Vos and Anna E. Altmann, *New Tales for Old: Folktales as Literary Fictions for Young Adults*, 23.
12. Gail de Vos and Anna E. Altmann, *New Tales for Old: Folktales as Literary Fictions for Young Adults*, 13.
13. Gail de Vos and Anna E. Altmann, *New Tales for Old: Folktales as Literary Fictions for Young Adults*, 13.
14. Jack Zipes, *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*, xix.
15. Jeffrey Howard, "Students as Storytellers: Teaching Rhetorical Strategies through Folktales," 171-172.
16. Maria Tatar, *The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales*, 246.
17. Maria Tatar, *The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales*, 245.
18. Maria Tatar, *The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales*, 246.
19. Terence Patrick Murphy, *The Fairytale and Plot Structure*, 157-160.
20. Gail de Vos and Anna E. Altmann, *New Tales for Old: Folktales as Literary Fictions for Young Adults*, 13.
21. Joseph Roach, "Over the Rainbow': Fantasy Lands, Dream Worlds, and Magic Kingdoms."
22. Gail de Vos and Anna E. Altmann, *New Tales for Old: Folktales as Literary Fictions for Young Adults*, 23.
23. Jeffrey Howard, "Students as Storytellers: Teaching Rhetorical Strategies through Folktales," 170.
24. "Practice Notes: Story Circle Method," *NYU Wagner Research Center for Leadership in Action*, last modified June 2008.
25. R. Craig Roney, "A Case for Storytelling in the K-12 Language Arts Curriculum," 50.

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