



Evaluating Traditional Folk Literature

Children are introduced to traditional folk literature through school curriculum or stories told or read, most often presented in picture books. Therefore, let's examine **picture book folk literature**. Most criteria can be applied to other formats such as collections of folk tales.

While looking at traditional tales using the following selection criteria, keep in mind that children's literature experts—especially traditional folk literature scholars—do not agree on universal definitions and categorizations.

I. Authenticity of Story

1. How does the author reveal their sources (e.g., Author's Note) of having researched the story's authentic origins?
2. What source notes or other references does the author include that provide scholarly context?
3. What credentials or authority does the author cite for having done the retelling of this tale?
4. Is there no evidence of cultural appropriation with this retelling?
5. What features makes this a story one that you would want to read again and again?
6. How do this authors' version of this story differ from previously known versions? If you have other versions, why would you add this selection? What does it add?

II. Cultural Authenticity

1. Is the story free of stereotypes or tokenism of the characters?
2. Is the story retold from someone whose ethnicity or home country provides authentic contextual experience(s)?
3. How is the author absolved from cultural appropriation with this retelling?
4. In what ways do the author and illustrator present a culture's authentic history, traditions, or common experiences? How are cultural norms



expressed in the story? Does the story allow for a new way of looking at a tale of old, an epiphany of perspectives?

III. Language, Literary Worthiness

Tales “as old as time” must be refreshed by language that is carefully crafted.

1. Why should we buy another version of this folktale? What does the writer do to offer a fresh version of this story?
2. How does the author offer fresh ways of viewing an old tale by using descriptive figurative language such as original similes, metaphors, personification, or alliteration?
3. In what ways does the language match the setting?
4. In what ways do illustrations match text?

IV. Authorship

1. What is the writer’s background? Does this writer have the authority to write about the culture represented in the book?
2. Is the story retold from a writer whose ethnicity or home country the story provides authentic contextual experience(s)?
3. If relevant, what has the author included that shows they have knowledge of the historic context of this story?
4. If relevant, how does the author show respect for the cultural context of the story?
5. Does the selected story have limited or wider audience interest or literary need?
6. Is this title selected for pleasure reading, curriculum connection, research?
7. What new culture or country does this folk tale selection represent?



8. Fairy tales, in particular, often have two-dimensional stock characters, and it takes a very clever writer to create original or unique characters in folk literature. How does the author accomplish this?

V. Illustrations

Folk literature picture books are very often shared aloud, the illustrations shown to the audience.

1. Starting from the book's initial appeal, how does the cover illustration draw the reader in (e.g., selected subject, media, color, artistic style)?
2. How do the illustrations enhance the cultural context of the picture book accurately?
3. Are the lines between artistic interpretation and the "bones" of an old tale balanced? How does the author use their artist style, media, and the visual elements of color, shape, and texture to create something exciting and new?
4. Cite ways in which the illustrator contributes to the intended mood and tone?
5. If you chose a folk tale with exact words (such as a ballad), it is only through the illustrations that differences in interpretations happen. What techniques has the illustrator used to change the setting, characterization, tone, or mood for audience/age appropriateness?

VI. Audience

1. Is this book for a younger readership? Is the language used appropriate for the intended audience?
2. What is the reading level of the book? Does the reading level match the audience for which it is being selected for a collection?
3. How long is the story? Is it short enough to hold the interest of the intended audience?
4. How do the illustrations "help" the reader interpret the folk story?