

## What is Folklore ?

by Kassondra Torraville

According to Lauri Harvilahti (2003), there is no definition of folklore that would be able to cover everything that can be described as "folklore". In academic terms, the term "folk" can "...refer to any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is- it could be a common occupation, language, or religion- but what is important is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some traditions which it calls its own." (Dundes, 1965, p. 1-2).

Folklore is both unique and all-encompassing: where there are people that interact in groups or communities, there is always some form of culture and tradition, and with that always comes folklore (Carthy, n.d.).

Folklore, according to Dundes (1965), is a large umbrella term for any type of event passed down through a culture. The typical definition we know as folklore is primarily oral traditions, or stories passed down through word of mouth. This includes, but is not limited

to myths, folktales, legends, fables, fairy tales, songs, and epics (Dundes, 1965). It is anything that is culturally relevant to a people as a whole or to a subculture or subcategory of peoples. Cultural nuances such as insults, jokes, and toasts are considered folkloric in nature (Carthy, n.d.). Folklore can also be seen in material culture such as games, designs, and festivals (Carthy, n.d.). In the modern day, as technology is growing and reaching more people, folklore is continuing to adapt in the digital age. This category includes fiction such as urban legends as well as any story that gains popularity and remains in public perception for a long period of time.

Adams (1977) breaks down oral folklore into two separate categories: the folktale and the folk-legend. The folktale is described as a story that immediately reads as fictional and does not have a basis in real events. These typically include fairy tales and fables: magical events, a specific lesson to be learned, talking animal characters, etc. Grimm, Andersen, and Aesop are all prime

examples of folktales. Adams (1977) describes folk-legends as "...a traditional, oral expression which tells of extraordinary events in the lives of everyday people, told as if it were an historical account (p. 11)." Folk-legends are still typically part of oral tradition, passed down through generations by storytellers. The legend is told with the assumption that the story really happened: such examples of folk-

legends can be grand epics such as The Iliad "Goddess, sing the rage of Peleus' son Achilles/murderous, doomed, that cost the Achaeans countless losses...(Fagles [translation], 1998)" but also stories such as Robin Hood and Paul Bunyan. This series of YA Hotline will delve into many characteristics of folklore: folklore in the media, local folklore, typical character types, and much more.

## References

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