



David Wisniewski

Suggest Activities for the Six Multicultural Books

Elfwyn's Saga—Viking Era Scandinavia

Golem—Jews in 16th Century Prague

Rainplayer—Mayan Empire, A.D. 300 to 900

Sundiata—Mali in 13th Century West Africa

The Warrior and the Wiseman—12th Century Japan

The Wave of the Sea-Wolf—Tlingit Indians of the Pacific Northwest

1. The picture books listed above have many commonalities. All are rooted in the great body of traditional literature that includes legends, myths, and epics. Four of the six stories are original and have been classified as fairy tales, one is a retelling, and one is a biography. Each tale is set in a different culture and historical period. Wisniewski's thorough research of his subject is documented in the informative author's note at the end of each story.
2. All books share the universal theme of a character overcoming great odds to persevere. In each story, the character remains true to his or her moral values, and it is the adherence to these values that helps the individual achieve his or her goals. The books can all be explored on several levels. For example, a first grader might like the clay giant in *Golem* saving the people, but he or she wouldn't be expected to understand the historical and moral implications of the story.
3. Each book is an entertaining story that could also be an introduction to a multicultural literature unit or a historical period. The books could also be used collectively to compare and contrast various characters, settings, values, cultures, and historical periods.
4. Literature circles would provide an excellent forum to explore these books. Each group could read one book and then retell or dramatize the tale, create story maps, do follow-up research, and present to the class.

Literature Activities

1. Folktale genre—Discuss this genre of literature with students and explain that folktales were a way to convey cultural history to future generations, perpetuate the society's values, or explain natural phenomena. Characters were rarely fully developed but were often symbolic of good or evil. After reading and discussing one of the books, ask students to decide which of these functions each story could perform.
2. Story elements—Using a graphic organizer, ask students to note the literary elements: setting, character, problem, and resolution for each story.
3. Setting—Ask students to describe the setting for the story. What effect does the setting have on the characters' dress and actions? Using a Venn diagram, ask students to compare and contrast the settings of two books.
4. Character—Direct students to identify characters for each story. Ask them to decide whether each character portrays good or evil? Which characters are neutral?



5. Theme—Discuss and elicit from students the universal truth or moral for each story. How did this specific value help the main character achieve his or her goal? Ask students to discuss if this value is still relevant today in our own culture.
6. Illustration—In a picture book, the illustrations and the words work together to tell the story. Ask students how Wisniewski’s artwork contributes to the story in terms of their knowledge about the setting and each character’s appearance. Do the illustrations help create a mood, e.g., carefree, threatening, mysterious, etc?
7. Literary devices—Ask students to describe the magical elements in each of the stories. Are any similar? How did they contribute to the story’s resolution? Introduce the concept of allegory to older students; then ask which of the stories might be considered an allegory.
8. Comparing folktales—Stories often change as they are retold. Direct students to read or research other versions of *Golem*. Compare and contrast one of these versions to Wisniewski’s *Golem*.

Language Arts Activities

1. Predicting—Before reading the story, display the cover and leaf through the entire book. Ask students to suggest a possible story line. Perhaps the teacher or a student could take simple notes using the computer connected to the classroom television. Compare the predictions to the actual story.
2. Retelling—Discuss the role of the oral tradition throughout history, noting that many people still enjoy listening to storytellers today. Direct students to prepare a retelling of one of the stories; the complexity of the retelling could vary with the age of the student.
3. Readers theater—Direct students to dramatize any of these stories. Encourage students to use some of the cultural words Wisniewski incorporated into his stories. The performance could be a puppet show using stick puppets. The Wisniewskis provide detailed instructions on this subject in their book, *Worlds of Shadow: Teaching With Shadow Puppetry*.
4. Word study—Ask students to select five words from the story; then, using a thesaurus, direct students to develop a list of synonyms that could be used in the context of the story.
5. Creative writing—Direct each student to choose a country and research its geography, history, and culture. As part of the project, ask students to create an original story or folktale that could be set in that country.

Social Studies Activities

1. Geography—Direct students to locate the setting of each story on a world map. Ask older students to include the latitude and longitude of each setting.
2. Climate and habitat—Ask students to briefly describe the habitat, including the climate and geographical features, of each story’s setting. Are Wisniewski’s settings authentic? Ask students to identify three or more animals one might find in each setting. Do any of these animals appear in the story?
3. Culture—Explain to students that they can learn about a culture through language and illustrations in fiction. Direct students to note five things they learned about one of the



cultures, e.g., the clothing, the houses, the food, etc. Using cooperative groups, direct each group to share the information about each culture gleaned from one of these books.

4. *Sundiata* is a biography of the African King Soundiata (Sunjata or Sundiata) Keita, and Rabbi Judah Loew really lived in 16th century Prague. Using the author's "A Note" at the end of the story, ask older students to suggest where "artistic license" may have been used in both stories. Were events accurately documented in those places? Why or why not?
5. Research—All these books afford multiple research opportunities. Explain to students that any story set in the past must be authentic to the time and place of the story, requiring authors to do extensive research. *Rainplayer* takes place during the height of the Mayan Empire in Central America. Direct students to research the Mayan Empire or any of the other cultures portrayed and to make up questions about that period in history, e.g., The Mayan worshiped many gods; was the rain god Chac among them? What is the game of pok? Is it still played today? Encourage students to stage a classroom quiz show. Ask students to compare the achievements of the Romans and the Mayans.

Art Activities

1. Ask students to look closely at the Wisniewski's illustrations. Ask them to speculate how all the paper was cut so neatly. How were the shadows created?
2. Direct students to create a setting for an original story or picture using cut or torn paper techniques.
3. Tell students to locate other books in the library that have cut or torn paper illustrations. The best places to look are in the picture book section or the folktale section of the library.
4. Wisniewski uses vibrant colors in his artwork. Discuss with students how the setting influences the color palate in several of his books, e.g., the arid climate in West Africa is conducive to yellows, oranges, and browns while the rain forest climate of Central American lends itself more to greens, blues, and reds.

Suggested Activities for *Tough Cookie*

Tough Cookie lends itself to read-aloud activities, guided reading groups, or literature circles. This book also makes an interesting literature connection as an addition to the study of mystery and humor genres.

1. Show students the cover and ask them whether they have read other books by David Wisniewski. Ask students to predict what this book is about.
2. Read the first two pages of the book *Welcome to the Jar*, or ask the students to look at the pages to establish the setting of the story.
3. As the book is read, ask students what they notice about the language used (short, choppy sentences) and the artwork. Ask students for ideas about how the illustrations were done.
4. Explain to students that personification is a literary device that authors use to create interest in their stories. What inanimate objects does Wisniewski personify in *Tough Cookie*?
5. Direct students to conduct a text scavenger hunt and to list the many types of cookies mentioned.



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6. Ask students to locate examples of humor throughout the book.
 7. Direct students to complete a story map including setting, characters (hero and villain), plot, and theme. Ask students to share their story maps with the whole class or in small groups.
 8. Literature responses:
 - a. How did the author get you interested in the story? Give examples.
 - b. Write a letter to David Wisniewski telling him what you like most about *Tough Cookie*.
 9. Do you agree or disagree that *Tough Cookie* is a munchable mystery?

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