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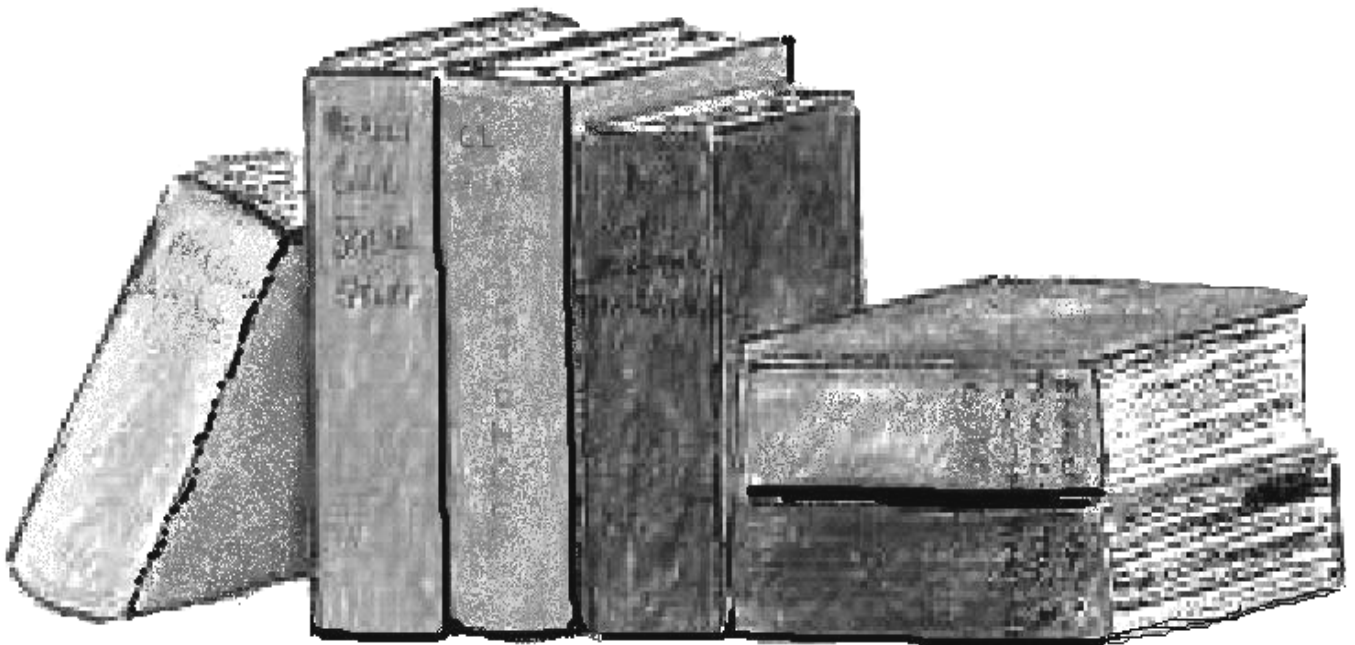
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I Think: Reading & Writing

Literary Themes



**By Kendra Corr and
Dr. Sue Vansant**

** It is the goal of InspirEd Educators to create instructional materials that are interesting, engaging, and challenging. Our student-centered approach incorporates both content and skills, placing particular emphasis on reading, writing, vocabulary development, and critical and creative thinking in the content areas.

Edited by Sharon Coletti and Kendra Corr

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Déjà vu All Over Again

Springboard:

The students should read “Psychology and Literature?” and answer the questions.

Objective: The student will be able to explain what a literary theme is and give an example.

Materials: Psychology and Literature? (Springboard handout)
The Great Flood... (2-page handout)
Shared Stories (handout)

Terms to know: **motif** - a recurring pattern through time and place
unconsciousness - the state of being unaware
theme - a unifying idea or subject of a story or other work

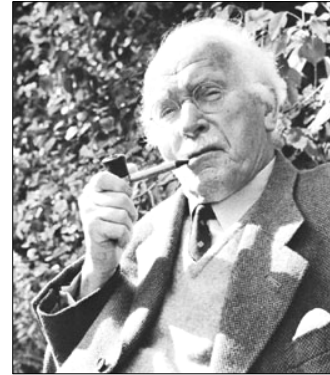
Procedure:

- After reviewing the Springboard, explain that *much of this unit will deal with the common motifs, otherwise known as “themes” (review the term) that are present in literature.* Go on to explain that *in this lesson the student(s) will do what Jung did: examine stories from various times and places to discover common motifs or themes.*
- Distribute “The Great Flood...” and “Shared Stories.” The student(s) can work independently, in pairs, or small groups to read the stories and complete the matrix.
- Have the student(s) share and compare their findings and discuss the questions. *(Similar elements in all stories were: flood as punishment, righteous man and animals saved, etc. An example of a “theme” would be that “gods” punish wrongdoers with natural disasters, “gods” have ultimate control over humans’ lives, “gods” forgive and bless those who follow their commands, etc.)*
- **EXTENSION:** Have the student(s) conduct research to find additional flood stories in other cultures.



Psychology and Literature?

The 19th century psychologist, Carl Jung's (pronounced Yung) interests were many including: astrology, the study of the effects the movement of heavenly bodies on people and events; alchemy, an early form of chemistry; and even literature. Jung was quite the **Renaissance Man!** Still, Carl Jung was best-known for his ideas about the mind and human behavior.



One of his most famous psychological theories was about a “collective unconscious,” the idea that humans have all had similar experiences. These common pasts, he believed, influence our behavior and actions. Yet we act and think without understanding why we do what we do or why we feel as we feel. A baby, for example, cries when it’s hungry but doesn’t know why. Jung believed that throughout history, people have experienced similar events, situations, conditions, and interactions, leading them to act, react, and think in similar ways. He calls these shared experiences “motifs.” Over time, Jung reasoned, the motifs became so common that they became permanently “stamped” into the minds of humans everywhere.

To support his theory, Jung compared the mythologies, oral stories, written histories, art, music, and poetry of many different cultures. He found that every group regardless of time or place had similar motifs! In some cases even the details were the same, such as names of gods, goddesses, settings, and events. He studied a wide range of civilizations from various time periods, ranging from highly educated to isolated and primitive cultures. Yet despite times and circumstances, the results were the same: civilizations share many of the same motifs.

The term “Renaissance Man” in the first paragraph **MOST LIKELY** refers to a person who

- A. admires the artists of the Renaissance.
- B. can create works of art or literature.
- C. has a wide range of interests and skills.
- D. makes a living as a psychologist.

According to Jung, “motifs” have all these characteristics **EXCEPT** that they

- A. only exist in highly educated or advanced cultures.
- B. are based on similar experiences among peoples.
- C. contribute to why we act and feel the way we do.
- D. become part of our “collective unconsciousness.”

Give another example of something that Jung might consider a “motif.”

Psychology and Literature? - Answers & Explanations

The 19th century psychologist, Carl Jung's (pronounced Yung) interests were many including: astrology, the study of the effects the movement of heavenly bodies on people and events; alchemy, an early form of chemistry; and even literature. Jung was quite the **Renaissance Man!** Still, Carl Jung was best-known for his ideas about the mind and human behavior.



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The term “Renaissance Man” in the first paragraph **MOST LIKELY** refers to a person who

- | | |
|--|--|
| A. admires the artists of the Renaissance. | <i>(While Choices A and B are often true of Renaissance Men or women, the term is used to describe Jung after telling of his many and varied interests.)</i> |
| B. can create works of art or literature. | |
| C. has a wide range of interests and skills. * | |
| D. makes a living as a psychologist. | |

According to Jung, “motifs” have all these characteristics **EXCEPT** that they

- | | |
|--|--|
| A. only exist in highly educated or advanced cultures. * | <i>(The passage explains that motifs crossed time and levels of cultural achievement.)</i> |
| B. are based on similar experiences among peoples. | |
| C. contribute to why we act and feel the way we do. | |
| D. become part of our “collective unconsciousness.” | |

Give another example of something that Jung might consider a “motif.”

Answers will vary but could be similar to the baby example in the passage. For example mothers will defend their children; people marry and have families; worship, etc. Jung would have attributed these common behaviors and practices to shared experiences.

The Great Flood...



FROM THE GREEKS:

Zeus sent a great flood to destroy all people of the Bronze Age. Prometheus advised his son Deucalion to build a chest to save them from the rising waters. Everyone but Deucalion and his wife died, except for a few people who escaped to high mountains. The water swelled to such heights that the mountains in Thessaly parted. Deucalion and his wife, after floating in the chest for nine days and nights, landed on Parnassus. When the rains finally stopped, Deucalion made sacrifices to Zeus, and then he threw stones over his head, which became men. His wife also threw stones over her head, and these became women.

FROM THE HEBREWS:

God, was upset at the wickedness of man, so he decided to destroy all of the humans. Only Noah was a good man and found favor with Him. God spoke to Noah, instructing him to build a huge ark with three decks. Noah did as he was told and took his family of eight on board along with two of each kind of animal. For forty days and forty nights the floodwaters rose until even the highest mountains were under water. The earth was covered for 150 days. Then God sent a wind to recede the waters, and the ark came to rest on Mt. Ararat. After forty more days Noah sent out a raven, which kept flying around. He next sent out a dove, which returned without finding a perch. A week later he sent out the dove again, and it returned with an olive leaf. The next week, the dove didn't return at all, so Noah knew it had found land on which to perch. So, after a year and ten days from the start of the flood, Noah and the animals were able to emerge from the ark. He then sacrificed some of the animals to God. God, pleased with his sacrifice, promised never again to destroy all living creatures with a flood and gave the rainbow as a sign of this promise.

FROM THE BURYAT OF SIBERIA:

The god Burkhan advised a man to build a great ship, and the man worked on it in the forest for many days. But he did not tell his wife what he was up to, telling her instead that he was chopping wood. The devil, Shidkur, told the wife that her husband was building a boat and that she should refuse to board it. She was told to say to her husband when he struck her in anger, "Why do you strike me, Shidkur?" The woman followed this advice and called the devil to board the boat with her when she did so. With the help of Burkhan, the man gathered two of all kinds of animals except the Prince of Animals (possibly a mammoth), which considered itself too large to drown. But in fact the flood destroyed all animals left on earth, including the Prince of Animals, whose bones can still be found in the land. Once on the boat, the devil changed himself into a mouse and began gnawing holes in the hull, so Burkhan created a cat to catch it, and the ship was safe once more to carry them until the waters dried.

FROM ISLAM:

Allah sent Noah to warn people to worship none but Allah, but most would not listen. The people challenged Noah to show them what Allah would do about it and mocked him when, under Allah's inspiration, he built a ship. Allah told Noah not to speak to Him on behalf of wrongdoers; that they would be drowned. Then as Allah had told him, water began to gush from underground and fall from the sky. Noah loaded onto his ship pairs of all kinds of animals, his family, and just a few others who believed. One of Noah's sons did not believe and said he would seek safety in the mountains, but he was among the many that drowned. The ship sailed upon great waves until Allah commanded the earth to swallow the water and the sky to clear. Then the ship came to rest on Al-Judi. When Noah complained to Allah for killing his son, Allah scolded him, saying the son was an evildoer. So Noah prayed for forgiveness, and Allah heard his prayers and told him that he and his family would be blessed.

FROM THE SUMARIANS:

The gods decided to destroy all men. The god Enlil warned the priest-king Ziusudra (which meant "Long of Life") of the coming flood. Ziusudra was told to build a great ship and load beasts and birds onto it. Then violent winds came, and a great flood covered the earth for seven days and nights. Then Ziusudra opened a window in the large boat, allowing sunlight to enter as he bowed to the sun-god Utu. After landing, he sacrificed a sheep and an ox and gave thanks to the gods. As a reward for protecting the animals and the seed of mankind, Ziusudra was given eternal life and taken to the country of Dilmun, the land where the sun rises.

FROM THE MASAI OF EAST:

Tumbainot, a good and honest man, had a wife and three sons. When his brother died, he married his brother's widow as was the custom. His second wife then bore him three more sons before the couple argued and she went off to set up her own household. At the time there were many people populating the world, but most were sinful and did not obey God. Yet despite their sins, there was no murder until a man named Nambija hit another over the head. At this, God resolved to destroy mankind. Only Tumbainot found grace in the eyes of God, who commanded him to build an ark of wood and enter it with his two wives, his six sons, their wives, and two animals of every kind. When they were all aboard, God caused a great flood, drowning all the other men and beasts. The ark with Tumbainot and the others drifted for a long time, and they began to run low on food. When the rain finally stopped, Tumbainot let loose a dove to learn of the state of the land. The dove returned tired, so Tumbainot knew it had not found a place to rest. Several days later he loosed a vulture with an arrow attached to its tail feathers. If the bird landed, the arrow would hook on something and be lost. But the vulture returned without the arrow, so Tumbainot reasoned that it must have landed on a dead animal, rather than grass, so the flood must have receded. When the level dropped, the ark grounded on the great plain and all came out. As he stepped forth, Tumbainot saw four rainbows, one in each quarter of the sky, and knew that God was no longer angry.



Shared Stories

Culture	Characteristics	Events	Reason for Flood	Who/What Survived?

1. What are some of the similarities among the stories?

2. What would you say are some of the themes of the stories?



Everyone Loves an Underdog

Springboard:

Students should read “David and Goliath” and answer the questions.

Objective: The student will be able to describe and recognize the underdog theme in fiction and non-fiction.

Materials:

David and Goliath (Springboard handout)
It’s ELEMENT-ary (handout)
Short Story Planner (handout)
Short Story Scoring (1/2 sheet handout)

Terms to know:

element - a basic, essential part of something
underdog - expected loser in a fight or contest; someone at a disadvantage
metaphor - comparison between two unlike things, describing one as the other (ex. love is a rose)
descendants - family members of a later time
prophecy - prediction for the future

Procedure:

- While reviewing the Springboard, explain that *the Biblical story of David and Goliath has become a metaphor for the little guy overcoming the odds and defeating a powerful foe. Such underdog tales are even often referred to as “David and Goliath stories.”* Go on to explain that *all “David and Goliath” tales have three elements: a powerful foe, an underdog that defeats the foe; and the means by which the foe is defeated is a metaphor which stands for something else.* Have the students identify these elements in the Springboard story. (*David is the underdog, Goliath the foe, and the rock is a metaphor for the power of God.*)
- Distribute “It’s ELEMENT-ary” and explain that *in this lesson the student(s) will analyze this underdog theme in both fiction and non-fiction stories and write an original short story surrounding that theme.* Have student(s) work individually, in pairs, or small groups to analyze the two stories and share their ideas. (*Answers may vary. Schindler is the David in the first story, because he’s one man against a huge foe; Hitler and his Nazis are Goliath. The stone could be the love and compassion that Schindler showed his “children.” In the Irish legend Balor is the Goliath figure and Lugh is David. The stone may be the prophecy that came true.*)
- Distribute the “Short Story Planner” and have the student(s) plan and write a short story including all three elements of the David and Goliath story.
- **For group instruction** have the students read their stories aloud and have others identify who or what represents the three elements of the David and Goliath story in each. **For individual instruction** have the student share his/her story and explain the elements.
- Then have the student(s) evaluate their work using the rubric provided.