

Historica Canada Education Portal

Winnie

Overview

This lesson is based on viewing the Heritage Minute, "Winnie," which recounts the true story of the Canadian soldier's bear that became the inspiration for writer A.A. Milne.

Aims

Students will discuss the cultural importance of meaningful symbols by looking at how animals are personified and anthropomorphized in literature and popular culture.

Secondary students can often learn a great deal about common literary themes and devices through exploring childrens' stories. These activities will guide your students through the creation of a children's story while also giving them the opportunity to think about the importance of communicating with an audience.

Activities

The lasting popularity of Winnie the Pooh illustrates the cultural importance meaningful symbols can have. For Canadian soldiers fighting

on the front lines during World War I, Winnie was a warm remembrance of a safe home. And, many years after World War I, Winnie remains a significant example of the way people attribute human characteristics to animals and the ways in which we use animals to represent certain human qualities.

1. Brainstorming Activity

With your class discuss the idea of attributing human characteristics to a simple animal. It is a theme which recurs in many different childrens' fables ("Tortoise and the Hare," "The Ugly Duckling"). Brainstorm with your class to make a list of human qualities that have been, or might be, applied to different animals.

2. Class Discussion

Briefly discuss how certain animals are commonly given specific qualities the sly fox, the sinister wolf, the wise owl, or the innocent lamb. Our cultural perceptions help us to create the connection between a characteristic and an animal. Discuss with your students how the use of this device is present in all cultures with messages and meanings that are specific to that culture (e.g., the African spider, the Native raven, and the American eagle).

- Have the students pick an animal that they believe best symbolizes their own culture, assigning the best elements of the culture to the animal that they see as inherently possessing those qualities.
- Discuss why Canada's national symbol is the beaver.
- Have the students pick an animal that they feel represents them as an individual. From these discussions, have them write a one page paper about that animal and about the importance of specific qualities that they

share.

3. Optional: Sports Teams and Animals

The personification of animals is not only present in literature, it also takes place in our day to day living. Animals have traditionally been the inspiration behind the names of sports teams, and have often also been the mascots (e.g., the Toronto Blue-Jays and B.C. Lions).

Another common theme in the naming of sports teams is to apply a regional characteristic to the team, for example the Edmonton Oilers. Discuss what is behind the names of their favorite sports team. Ask your students why they think it is important for sports teams to be named in this way. Have your students create a sports team, name it, and create a logo to represent the image of the team. Then the students can either present their project, or write a paper explaining the reasoning behind the choices that produced the name, logo, and overall image of their team.

For Secondary Students:

1. Discussion

Discuss briefly the anthropomorphization of animals as a common device used to illustrate aspects of human behaviour. How is it through personification that animals begin to represent human behaviour? Why is this such a common theme in childrens' literature?

2. Activity

In this activity you will have your students present a childrens' story to an elementary class in an original way. Students may illustrate the story, act

it out, or devise another method for presenting a story to an audience. Have your students select stories that attribute human characteristics to animals.

- Start by bringing in either an elementary teacher or librarian to talk to your students about childrens' stories. It is important that they convey the priorities of elementary students. What do they like? Why do they like it? How is a childrens' story structured? What kinds of characters do children like and why?
- Once your students have a grasp on what they will need to think about to make their project effective and interesting, the next step is to select an elementary class that your class will present to. Divide your students into collaborative groups, and then have them choose stories that are appropriate for that age group of the elementary class.
- Have your students create their presentations.
- Set up a time to do the presentations for the elementary students.
- Once the actual presentations are finished it is important to hold a follow-up discussion for the students to review their projects. Was the project effective? Was it appropriate for that particular audience? Was the message of the story clear and presented in a way that the children liked? Could they have done anything differently to make it more effective?

Resources

- [Heritage Minute: Winnie-the-Pooh](#)

- [The Canadian Encyclopedia: Winnie-the-Pooh](#)