



History Lesson Plans

Bell Witch Play - American Storytelling
American Storytelling: The Legend of the Bell Witch

Grade: 7-12 grades

Objective:

- To understand the definition of legend
- To examine how stories are expressed/shared
- To experience different versions of the Legend of the Bell Witch
- To explore how fictional stories can provide information about American history

Standards Connection:

- History (7-12): Understands the folklore and other cultural contributions from various regions of the United States and how they have helped to form a national heritage

Background for Teachers:

- Read *The Bell Witch of Tennessee* by Charles Bailey Bell and *Authenticated History of the Bell Witch* by M.V. Ingram
- Watch the movie, *An American Haunting*, 2006, Director Courtney Solomon
- Internet sites: www.bellwitchcave.com ; www.bellwitch.org ; www.bellwitchfallfestival.com

Activities/Procedures:

1. Discussion: Introduce students to the Legend of the Bell Witch. Print out the information provided from the sources above. Distribute copies to your students and read aloud together the background information. Discuss the definition of legend. A legend is a story handed down for generations and popularly believed to be of a historical basis.
2. Reading exercise: Have all students participate in reading a version of the Legend of the Bell Witch. (Half the class can read the *Black Book* by Charles Bailey Bell and the other half the *Red Book* by M. V. Ingram.) Ask your students to describe what America was like in the 18th century based on book. *Suggested questions:* What information is historically accurate and which is embellished? How does the story make you feel? Scared? Angry? What aspects of the story make you feel this way?
3. Discussion: Discuss the different mediums in which stories can be told (e.g. orally, in books, newspapers, paintings, video, plays, puppet shows). Compare and contrast the different mediums. *Suggested questions:* Why are stories told in different formats? How are these formats similar/different? Which way do you prefer to learn a story?
4. Video: Watch a video version of the Legend of the Bell Witch. *Suggested questions:* How is the video different from the book? Do the characters look different from what you imagined? Do you feel the same way about the story?
5. Discussion: Discuss how stories can be expressed in artwork. Talk about how some artists may choose to depict actual historical events and experiences, while other will use their imaginations to create stories for their artwork. Paintings and drawings that are purposefully created to share a story often include a lot of visual details and viewers have to closely examine the works in order to construct meaning.
6. Drawing: Ask your students to create their own version of a passage from the *Red Book* or the *Black Book*. You might choose the passage or have your students select one that is of interest to them. Remind them to include as much details as possible.

Assessment:

Through their involvement in several discussions, students will demonstrate their understanding of the multiple ways in which the Legend of the Bell Witch can be interpreted. They will apply their “reading” skills to a variety of mediums. Criteria for assessment include:

1. active involvement in discussions
2. descriptive language in discussions
3. ability to retell story using main characters and setting, and in correct sequence
4. detailed drawing relating to scene in Bell Witch book