

Celtic Stories and Songs

Study Guide

K-2nd & 3rd-5th grades

Who Were the Celts?

The Iron Age Celts, (pronounced “Kelts”) referring to a time as far back as 1,500 BC, were tribes of people who lived in many areas of present day Europe. Around 500 BC the ancient Celts migrated and settled in modern day Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

The Celts never founded an empire or built cities, but lived in smaller family groups in farming communities. The Fine was the smallest family group in Celtic society. It was an extended family group including grandparents, parents and their kids, and could include uncles, aunts and cousins. The individual was not important. The Fine was treated like one person. There was no such thing as individual glory or shame- everything belonged to the Fine. The next step up was the Clan. A Clan was comprised of several Fines. You were part of a Clan for life and beyond. The leadership of the clan was not an inherited position. A leader was chosen on his ability.

The Celts were a proud and talented people. They loved music and they loved to tell stories, especially about the supernatural “little people” – fairies, brownies and leprechauns as well as battle victories and gods and goddesses. Their culture lives today in the folk music stories and songs of Scotland, Ireland and Wales.

Traditional Music and Songs

Folk music is traditional melodies, words and songs of the common people that are handed down from one generation to the next, often in the oral tradition.

Dance Tunes

Jigs, reels and hornpipes are the three most common kinds of dance tunes from Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The number of beats per measure, the number of measures in a phrase and the number of times a tune is played is determined by the pattern of dance steps in the dance. Dance tunes are also played as instrumental performance pieces as well.

Discussion Questions- Jigs, hornpipes and reels are music that is often played for people to dance to. How does this music make you feel? Did it make you want to move- clap your hands, tap your feet or snap your fingers?

Folk Songs

Folk songs can deal with almost any kind of human activity. They often express the cultural identity of an ethnic group. A folksong can express feelings, political or religious beliefs, tell a story, describe history, or just provide entertainment. Sometimes the words and music of folksongs change and evolve over time

Cockles and Mussels. Also called the “Ballad of Molly Malone”. A ballad is a song that tells a story. (see lyrics sheet). Molly Malone is not a real person, but the song is the unofficial theme song of Dublin Ireland.

Discussion Questions- Who is the story about? What story did the song tell? Overall, did the song have a happy or a sad feeling? Why do you think the music slowed down during the last verse? What does it mean when the song says “her ghost wheels her barrow”? (Even though she died, the memory of her life continues.)

Loch Lomond. This traditional Scottish song is an example of a song that speaks of national pride and love of one’s country. Loch is the Scottish word for lake, and Loch Lomond is a beautiful, large fresh water Lake in the Scottish Highlands. The lyrics speak of the capture of two Scottish brothers who were imprisoned during the Jacobite Uprisings which was a rebellion against England during the 17th and 18th centuries. The boys were sentenced to death, but one was given a reprieve allowing him to be released. The younger brother chose for his brother to live for the sake of his family. The symbolism in the song is represented by the younger brother taking the “low road” which is a reference to the Celtic belief that if someone died away from his beloved homeland, then the fairies would provide a spiritual route home. Therefore the younger brother would arrive home to Loch Lomond more quickly than the older brother taking the “high road” or land route. Like many folk tunes, the words also provide powerful imagery of the beauty of the Scottish Highlands.

Discussion Questions: How does the imagery in the lyrics of this song paint a picture of the brothers’ beloved Loch Lomond? Scotland has many beautiful lakes- what are some other Scottish lakes and are there any legends or stories surrounding them? How does the song display a love and pride for Scotland? What are some American songs that display a love of our country? (Star Spangled Banner, God Bless America, America the Beautiful.)

All Through the Night. Traditional Welsh lullaby. A lullaby is a soothing song meant to lull a child to sleep. Lullabies have been sung by parents to their children in all cultures throughout history.

Discussion Question: How does this song make you feel? Compare it to Cockles and Mussels, Loch Lomond and the dance tunes.

Traditional Stories

Folklore is the traditional beliefs, tales, myths and other oral literature passed from one generation to the next. They often express the cultural identity of an ethnic group.

Stories for Kindergarten through Second Grade The “Little People” of Celtic Folklore

Maureen O’Malley and the Leprechaun. Irish folktale. A leprechaun is an Irish fairy. They are usually discovered by the tapping sounds they make while mending tiny shoes. They are usually found in some lonely spot behind a wall or hedge, or in a ruined castle. They keep to themselves unlike some other fairies that travel in groups. A leprechaun usually wears a red jacket, leather apron and high heeled shoes with silver buckles. As a trickster he can not be outsmarted. Leprechauns are said to know where buried gold can be found. If he is caught, he must tell his captor where his gold is hidden. Typically he escapes his captors by tricking them into looking away.

Discussion Questions: How did the leprechaun trick Maureen? How did the music help to tell the story? Think of a creative way you could capture a leprechaun (without hurting him!) and write a story or draw a picture about it.

The Little Old Woman Who Hated Housework. Scottish folktale. The little people featured in this folktale are the brownies of Scotland. Brownies are Scottish fairies that live outside and like to visit cottages to help with household tasks. They generally liked to be helpful, but could turn bad if neglected. They were small, and wore brown clothing.

Discussion questions: This story is an example of a folktale with a moral or lesson. What do you think this story teaches us? (It teaches the importance of being content with your situation and it teaches the little old woman to stop complaining.) How did the music help to tell the story?

Pennard’s Castle. Welsh folktale. This is a cautionary fairy tale that features the Tylwyth Teg (pronounced *Tulwith Teg*) or Welsh fairies. Tylwyth Teg is a Welsh term meaning “the Fair Folk”. These creatures were described as ethereal, beautiful and fair haired. They placed a high value on hospitality and would sometimes disguise themselves as travelers to visit people and test their hospitality. Those who gave the Tylwyth Teg an ungracious welcome were sure to have bad luck for the rest of their days. But those who were good to the little folk received great favors from them.

Discussion Questions: What is the moral or lesson of this story? (Kindness and hospitality are very important qualities to practice!) How did the music help to enhance the mood of the story? Wales is often called *The Land of Castles* because there are over 400 castles, about 100 of which are still standing. There is information and pictures of many of them on the website www.castlewales.com. Write your own story or draw a picture of castles, Kings, knights and the Tylwyth Teg. What could happen if a knight, King or Queen showed kindness and hospitality to the fairy folk?

Stories for Third through Fifth Grades Folktales and Myth

The Harp of the Dagda. Celtic Myth. A myth is a traditional tale that tells the story of ancestors, supernatural beings, heroes, gods or goddesses with special powers. The Dagda is the chief of the Celtic Gods. The Dagda has magical power and a magical harp. As seen in this story, music was of great importance to ancient Celtic people. They thought that harp music had the power to enchant people. In the story, the Three Noble Strains of Music, joyful music, sad music and music for sleep had the power to control the listeners' actions and emotions. Discussion Questions- how does this story fit the definitions of a myth? Check out another harp related Greek myth, Orpheus and Eurydice. How did the harp music help to tell our story? Although people no longer believe that music can control someone's actions, how can music affect our moods and memories? Consider the following examples- The Star Spangled Banner played at the Olympics (national pride). A love song (tenderness). Suspenseful music in a movie (anxiousness). What are some other examples?

The Beast of Loch Dunvegan. Adapted by J. Daidone and J. Egan from a Scottish folktale. There are many different supernatural creatures that can be found in Scottish folklore. In our story, the beast is a "Water Horse". These shape-shifting water creatures haunted the lakes of Scotland. They were devious monsters that often tried to trick passers by so they could capture, drown and devour them. As is the case with many supernatural beings in traditional tales, the water horse in our story can not cross over running water like a river or stream. We wrote this story to emphasize the lesson that it teaches.

Discussion Questions: What do you think the moral of this story is? (Do not judge a book by its cover or beauty is skin deep) Scotland has many lakes and many supernatural or legendary creatures associated with them. Research information on the Loch Ness monster. Do you think it is real? Some other supernatural creatures that reside in Scottish waters include the Blue Men of Minch, the Kelpie, or the Selkie to name just a few.

Pennards Castle. Welsh folktale. See notes above.

Using Traditional Tales for Inspiration in Creative Writing.

We enjoyed researching, adapting and re-writing *The Best of Loch Dunvegan* using the creatures, characters and settings of Scottish folklore for inspiration. Many famous authors such as J.K. Rowling (Harry Potter series) Susan Cooper (The Dark is Rising series) C.S. Lewis (The Chronicles of Narnia) J.R.R. Tolkien (The Lord of the Rings) have written very popular books which use many of the creatures and themes from folklore, myths and legends from around the world. Research some traditional folktales (like the Celtic tales we told today) myths (Greek, Norse or Celtic) or legends (King Arthur or Robin Hood) and write your own story inspired by these traditional tales.

Instruments

Celtic harp.

The harp in its many forms can be found in almost all world cultures, but it was particularly important to the cultural heritage and way of life of the ancient Celtic people. Each clan had a harper who had the very important job of preserving by memory the cultural identity of the people, their music, stories, history, and law. He then passed this information orally to the harper of the next generation. As you can see, telling folktales and stories accompanied by harp music is not a new idea! The harper was required to have wide repertoire of pieces including the Three Noble Strains of music (see notes on the Harp of the Dagda). A Celtic harp is a cousin to the larger, more ornate concert pedal harp that can be seen in orchestras and other venues. The Celtic harp is smaller, more portable and has a lighter sound, perfect for the accompaniment of folksongs or folktales. The Irish coat of arms has a Celtic harp on it today.

Discussions Questions- How did Mrs. Egan produce a sound on the harp? Which notes had a higher sound (pitch), the shorter strings or the longer strings?

Pennywhistle

Flutes in their various forms have been played since prehistoric times by a variety of cultures. Flutes can also be seen in various myths and folktales. For instance, the Pied Piper of Hamelin (German folktale) used a flute to cast spells of enchantment over animals and humans. Mrs. Egan played a pennywhistle, which is a wind instrument often played in traditional music from Ireland and Scotland.

Voice- Singing and Expressive Reading

Mrs. Daidone uses her voice as her instrument while singing songs and telling stories. The voice is an instrument that everyone has. Mrs. Daidone uses her voice in different ways which help to make the presentation of a song or reading aloud more meaningful and interesting. Some of these techniques include: volume (loud/soft), pronunciation (speaking the words clearly), tempo (faster or slower), inflection (change in tone or accent of voice for different characters), pauses at certain moments for dramatic effect, using eye contact, and using head and arm movements. Discussion Questions: How did Mrs. Daidone's voice change when she sang different songs? How did Mrs. Daidone use her voice as she read stories aloud? Did that help to make the story more interesting and entertaining to listen to? Can you use some of techniques when you read aloud? You don't have to memorize the text, but practice reading it several times!

Some suggested classroom activities and resources.

Classroom Storytelling Arts

Puppets and Masks Stagecraft and Storytelling by Nan Rump. ISBN: 0871922983.

This book contains detailed instructions for producing a classroom performance of a folktale. There are scripts, suggestions for producing sound effects, scenery and masks.

Reader's Theater Folktales

Divide the class into storytellers (readers) and "musicians". This gives the opportunity for each student to participate, even if they are not entirely comfortable with reading aloud. Students can take turns switching from storytellers to musicians. Choose a folktale that is written in Reader's Theater format. Provide recorded folk music that students can choose from to create a mood for the story as it is being introduced and/or read. Provide some simple sound effects instruments (student made or store bought) that the "musicians" can play during certain times during the story presentation for sound effects, for instance, drums (thunder) rainsticks, sandblocks (walking) making sound effects with their voices (wind, animal noises, crowd noises).

www.aaronshep.com/rt has free scripts, tips and a booklist for reader's theater.

www.musicmotion.com has lots of ethnic instruments and music related stories and resources.