



My Story, My Halqa

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YOU MIGHT USE THIS IN A 9-12 ELA CLASSROOM IF...

- ★ Studying elements of story
- ★ Developing writing stamina through freewrites
- ★ Examining identity or cultural perspectives
- ★ Building classroom culture
- ★ Practicing public speaking

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CONTEXT

The following project was designed over the course of a 2022 Fulbright-Hays in Morocco. The premise of the grant was to examine the “evolving landscape” of education in the country and more broadly, of a country in transition. Over the course of a month, I collected various stories in an attempt to capture snapshots of Moroccan life to bring them back to my Perspectives in Literature ELA classroom (11th & 12th grade). I believe that in order for students to better understand their own cultural spaces, they need to first examine those outside of dominant cultural spaces. With this anthropological framework, students will then learn to recognize and share features of their own home cultures through storytelling and learn to recognize and appreciate differences in other’s experiences as story-listeners.

RATIONALE

1. Promote Anti-Racism: [The U.S. Census Bureau](#) predicts that by the year 2045 the U.S. will no longer have a single ethnic majority, and that “currently non-Hispanic whites, and will grow increasingly more diverse in the years to follow” (Anderson et al.). It is precisely for this reason that our public schools in ethnocentric communities in particular have a responsibility to develop curriculum which promotes cultural awareness to our young citizens. As educational consultant and former teacher Mathew Lynch writes in [“6 Ways Teachers Can Foster Cultural Awareness in the Classroom.”](#) learning to talk about culture “helps European-American students realize that their beliefs and traditions constitute a culture as well, which is a necessary breakthrough in the development of a truly culturally responsive classroom.”
2. Honor Cultural Heritage: For nearly a thousand years, the hlaykia, Moroccan storytellers, have drawn audiences to form expanding circles around them, telling stories that link one generation to the next to both preserve cultural wisdom and heritage as well as to adapt to an ever-shifting landscape. In the spirit of this tradition, students will take turns leading the halqa honoring their own heritage.
3. Build Classroom Culture: “Speaker-listener neural coupling” is a storytelling phenomenon studied by scientists. MRI scans show our brains begin to sync when we listen to other people’s stories. This contributes to building empathy, fostering stronger relationships, and allowing for more complex collaborations within groups. Two things are needed for this to happen: listener comprehension and listener engagement.

FOCUS

In this unit, students will learn to examine various texts through an anthropological lens in order to at once, better understand their cultural perspective and also learn to recognize and value differences in cultural perspectives. As a case in point, students will spend time learning a little about Morocco and consider how we can learn about others through story-ing artifacts through various lenses. Students will consider the legacy of traditional storytellers as well as various forms of story expression in Morocco to preserve cultural heritage as well as to adapt to this “ever-shifting landscape.”

LEARNING OBJECTIVES OF UNIT

- Students will observe elements of social life in Morocco via the lens of snapshot stories
- Analyze for a creator purpose and point of view and positionality in various stories
- Identify stylistic features and evaluate their impact on message
- Better understand their own cultural perspective and recognize and value differences in cultural perspectives

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What can we learn about a person and a people through story (specifically how do stories reflect fears, desires, and hopes) and how are they observable through values, beliefs, and behaviors?
- What can we learn about a person's individual story (from various contexts, including Morocco) as well as our own through rituals, places, and persons of significance? What do those stories have the power to *do*?
- What happens when someone's story is told by someone else? What are the real world consequences for *dis*-stories and incomplete stories (consider media, false histories, fake news, stereotyping, "single" stories, etc.)?
- When one learns about a culture outside of one's own, is it possible to ever get at emic perspectives? What does it mean to tell a story so that your interlocutors/listeners get at *your* emic perspectives?

STANDARDS ADDRESSED (*note the following are 11-12 band but could be scaled for 9-10 band)

- ★ RL.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.
- ★ RI.6: Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.
- ★ SL.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- ★ SL.4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.
- ★ W.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

UNIT STORYLINE

Lessons are roughly outlined in this section, but all texts, activities, and daily tasks are fully fleshed out in the unit slideshow to which all students should have viewable access. Click [here](#) to view the student-facing slideshow with external links and activities. Bear in mind that lessons are designed for a block schedule. If class periods are shorter than an hour or needed for scaffolding, break each lesson into two for a total of 14 lessons. Either way, the unit spans 3-4 weeks to factor in the assessment. If a shorter unit is needed, only focus on one of the “lenses” of belonging: rituals, places, or persons of significance. There are three parts: the foundation, the inquiry, and the recitation. Lessons are organized in each.

I. FOUNDATION (lesson 1 & 2)

Lesson 1→ slides 1-22

This lesson is largely a teacher lecture to establish the importance of the unit and develop a sense of what to expect through the unit. Students will need to understand the neuroscience behind storytelling to appreciate the phenomenon of “speaker-listener neural coupling” which is outlined in the Ted Talk by Uri Hasson in the slideshow. Then, students need to learn about Morocco in general and observe the legacy of the halqa if they are to participate in an activity in the spirit of the hikayat.

- Opener: Have students list or discuss a story they have told to a group more than once. It can be fictional or nonfiction. Ask what the purpose and perspective of the story is? What should someone learn or come to understand by the end of the story? To whom is the story told? Why do you keep telling it? Then begin the slideshow to introduce the unit on storytelling and to begin to define “Halqa”.
- Why is storytelling important? (“Speaker-listener neural coupling”)
 - View clip of [TED Talk](#) (option for [full TED Talk](#) here)
 - Discuss: Ask students to identify 3 important reasons storytelling is important.
 - Introduction to “halqa” and the hikayat tradition
 - Click through the excerpts from the introduction of *Last Storytellers: Tales from the Heart of Morocco* outlined on the slides which gives context to the following questions and will help the instructor establish a foundation for understanding the culture and tradition of storytelling in

Morocco.

- Show the slides with maps of Morocco and interactive video
- What is the **history** of storytelling in Morocco?
- Why was storytelling **important** in Morocco?
- Excerpts from 17th century theologian El Hassan Al Youssi demonstrate that the practice of storytelling brought many different kinds of people together and suggests the halqa was culturally enriching which is something to strive for in the community of the classroom.
- Zoom in to the heart of the hikayat tradition in modern day Morocco. Click through the slides: Where is the Jemma el-Fnaa and why is this important to hikayat? (Show clip from the documentary "Al Halqa-In the Storyteller's Circle")
- Emphasize that stories happen outside of the halqa too--walk through each example and let students know they will be exposed to traditional halqa stories as well as stories that happen in every day life in Morocco
- Think-Pair-Share: Is the hikayat unique or is this kind of storytelling alive today in a different form? Explain.
- Optional question: What makes a tradition worth fighting to preserve?
 - Preview Unit Snapshot of "My Story, My Halqa" so students can see where the unit is going and why ("The forest" and "The trees" slides).

Lesson 2→ slides 24-31

This introduction Lesson is designed for students to learn some important terms for the unit and practice using an anthropological lens in a way that is ethical. Students should begin to understand that everyone has a culture and that their own home culture and cultural practices can sometimes be invisible which is demonstrated in the texts.

- Opener: Without giving context to the texts, tell students they are going to learn about a culture viewed through an anthropological perspective. Have them read the texts individually or in pairs and answer the questions to prepare for discussion.

Options: "Body Rituals of the Nacirema" or "The Sacred Rac" (use as modified text)

- Questions:
 1. What are the most important values, beliefs, and behaviors of the culture and how do you know?
 2. What questions would you want to ask a member of this culture?
 3. (Answer this after learning that these texts are describing Americans). Describe the style and purpose of this text.
- Tell students that viewing the world with an anthropological perspective means thinking about new terms. Show students the "What is Culture?" video which addresses the definitions.
- emic→from within the social group (from the perspective of the subject) and
- etic→from outside (from the perspective of the observer)
- culture→set of shared meanings or the ways people agree to be
- Have students work in small groups to come up with a collective definition in their own words and a hypothetical example for each term.

- Review the other unit vocabulary and tell students these are terms we will use as they deconstruct texts as well as terms they will use to reflect on in their own cultural contexts. Terms include: values, beliefs, behaviors, norms, and ethnocentricity.
- Have students complete an anonymous Exit Ticket on a poster, on white boards, note cards, or post-it notes. The goal is to open up new perspectives about these new terms. Have students answer the following:
 - What is one social norm that is illogical but that you choose to abide by?
 - Why do you abide by it?
 - What would be the consequences of *not* meeting that expectation? What do you stand to lose?

II. INQUIRIES (lesson 3, 4, 5)

Lesson 3→ slides 32-47

Opener: Begin the lesson by reading a few of the exit tickets from the previous day. Reiterate that while norms and customs are subjective and might not always be logical, they are certainly consequential. It also means that different cultural practices reflect different value systems. We live in a world with innumerable social norms and much variation even within communities. Now that the class has completed “Part I: The Foundation,” they are ready for “Part II: Inquiries” where they will consume and interact with texts, complete informal writing, and participate in informal sharing. This is designed to develop writing and speaking stamina and build a collection of potential stories to choose from as they prepare for the final halqa (storytelling event). Click through the first few slides which walk students through what this part of the unit will entail.

Remind students that by the end of the unit, they will tell a story about a value they hold by zooming in on a ritual, place, or person of significance--what we will refer to as “lenses” through which to view that value. Therefore, we will practice thinking about each lens by connecting with texts viewed through each lens. They will follow the same pattern over the next few days as each lens rotates. Today will be about rituals of belonging.

Rituals of Belonging

- Definition of “ritual”: A ritual practice you partake in a certain cultural space. One example of a ritual practice in Moroccan culture is having tea. Have students do the cold analysis exercise on the slideshow first and then walk through the “Context Matters” slide to help them understand the significance of tea in Morocco. Have students watch the videos again with this new knowledge and discuss. Emphasize that an abundance of context is essential for conveying and understanding cultural significance.
- To get students thinking about rituals in America, have them watch S. Fry's "In America" - Bama vs. Auburn in which the British host attends a college football game in America. Seeing rituals from Frye's perspective should help students imagine what American cultural practices look like from an outside perspective. Again, context is warranted to understand the significance of the practice. Engage with the following questions and activities.

- Question: What do we mean by “culture”? Watch the following video and be prepared to discuss these ritual practices.
- Have students have small group discussion regarding other cultural practices in America that may seem strange from an outside perspective. They should now be prepared to read a Moroccan text about the ritual of gifting a host.
 - Mentor text: “The Red Lantern” by storyteller Moulay Mohamed El Jabri, chosen for its significance in Moroccan folklore, highlights the ritual of generosity (as a host, offering your home to a stranger and as a visitor, offering a gift to your host). Read and respond to get students thinking about the significance of these rituals.
- Questions: How does the story reflect fears and hopes? What is the moral of the story? Use text evidence. How does this reflect an important value held in Moroccan culture? What is hard to relate to? What is easy to relate to?
 - Free write #1: Students will list rituals they partake in. They will “Story” one of the items on the list and then share their response with a partner or in a small group.
 - Share: Before sharing their stories informally, review the “Note on Sharing” slide which outlines the rules and responsibilities of sharing stories as a teller and listener. After sharing, they will journal about their experience as story-listener.

Lesson 4→slides 48-55

Remind students about the order of operations from last class and let them know they will repeat the same cycle, but with a different lens. Today will focus on places of belonging with the goal of emphasizing the need for context of culturally significant places or objects in stories. Use the slideshow to guide each activity below.

Places of Belonging

- Definition: A place you share with a community or that represents a community. This may also be an artifact in that place. We call this an “object of belonging”
- Show the Moroccan Example of the souk. Allow students to try another cold analysis by using the images and videos on the slideshow to try to understand what is going on in this place called the “souk”. Then show the “Context Matters” slide which defines and describes the souk and helps students understand its significance in the Moroccan life and economy.
- Mentor texts: Read “The Birth of the Sahara” told by Marrakech storyteller Ahmed Temiicha which is an important creation story of the landscape of Morocco but also an observation on human nature. Have students respond to the questions on the slide which ask about their interpretation of the meaning and their reaction to that meaning. This should help students understand that a place can serve as a symbol for creating an argument about the human condition and that in this way, even a fictional story can reflect “truths.”
- Mentor Text: Follow this with “A Lost Motorcycle in Marrakech” written by a European travel blogger Sebastian Buchner. Use this piece to examine point of view, purpose, agency, and descriptive writing. This should help students think carefully about representing other places if they are writing

from an outside perspective. It is also a great example of writing which *shows* instead of *tells* which will be essential for their developing their own stories in this unit.

- Free write #2: Have students list a few places of significance and then zoom in. “Story” one of the items on their list. Then have students consider their stories in proximity to the stories they just consumed centered in Morocco.
- Share: Then begin sharing free writes in a small group and have students journal as a story-listener.

Lesson 5→slides 56-62

Introduce the final lens through which values may be reflected: persons. The goal of this lesson is to find ways that we are shaped by people of importance in our own lives. Since students will be representing other people in their writing they also need to understand the pitfalls and caveats of representation which the activities are designed to address. Use the slideshow to guide each activity below.

Persons of Belonging

- Definition: A person of significance--consider:
 - Who shapes your emotional experience?
 - Who is a prominent figure in your community or an important figure you met at a crossroads in?
 - Who has impacted your belief system?
 - Who is someone who keeps the circle together?
- Mentor texts: Photographs and quotations and captions located on slideshow. Images included on these slides include various individuals I met on my own journey in Morocco. Each person has a picture and a brief quotation. Allow students to read each and ask what they can learn from each person’s quote.
 - How can they read a person through their visual representation?
 - What can they observe about the diversity of responses and images?
- Then use these images to contrast with representations of Morocco through the use of postcards on the next slide. View the images, read the captions, and make a list of observations of each.
 - They should ask who created the postcards, what the purpose was, and consider why they are poor or incomplete representations of Morocco given their new knowledge about Morocco and individuals who reside in Morocco.
 - Review the “Case in Point” slide as a cautionary lesson before writing begins. This addresses the power poor representation has to minimize identity and tell false or incomplete stories (this is a preview to the last lesson “Challenging the Story”).
- Free write #3: Have students list a few persons of significance in their lives and then zoom in. “Story” one of the people on their list by walking through a formative experience with that individual making sure to represent their person of significance with full complexity and dignity.
- Share: Then begin sharing free writes in a small group and have students journal as story-listener.

Lesson 6→slides 63-73

This is the final lesson before students begin workshopping their final story to share. This offers a different take on the unit lenses by posing the concept of un-belonging. As a case in point, students will learn a little about the history and legacy of immigration and colonization in Morocco as well as the African continent. Use the slideshow to guide each activity below.

Challenging the Story

- Build a Collective Definition: Allow students to create a brainstorm idea web that contains terms that might signify “unbelonging” like racism, imperialism, border closure, etc. Decide on a working definition as a class.
- One example of unbelonging might be immigration status. Begin with the “Context Matters” slide to learn more about immigration in Morocco and what motivates people to attempt to cross the border before reading the mentor text.
- Mentor text: Francis Ngannou is a famous UFC champion but many fans do not know about his life as a refugee. Read the article [“The Francis Ngannou Immigration Story that Should be a Hollywood Movie”](#) and have students discuss how knowing one person's story adds texture to the raw information about immigration in Morocco. Emphasize that a single story can never represent a nation or a people because unlike Ngannou, most immigrants do not make the passage and even if they do, they are likely to face ongoing hardship, discrimination, and fear in a new country.
- Then click through the next “Context Matters” slide which outlines another example of un-belonging. This next topic will cover the legacy, scope, and consequences of imperialism in the African continent and the importance of the repatriation/rematriation of artifacts to their countries of origin. It is important to take time to unpack this with students in order to paint a picture of the lasting outcomes of imperialism in countries today and to begin to imagine what reconciliation means and what it might look like for the many countries throughout the world who have lost artifacts to colonizers. This also connects back to the dangers of ethnocentrism from the beginning of the unit. As a way to prepare for the texts about repatriation, allow students a few moments to consider their own physical object of belonging and to meditate on the value and significance of those objects in their own lives.
- Mentor Text: Show the clip of the video and/or read the full article [“Adichie Wants Unlawfully Acquired Artifacts from Africa Returned”](#) which tells the story of a single stolen artifact (the Ikenga) and the significance it holds. (Encourage students to return to the object of belonging they meditated on and think about what it would mean to lose that item so they can feel a personal connection.)
- Have students respond to one of the four quotations from the video provided on the “Respond” slide. Allow for small or whole group discussion. Quotations are as follows:
 - “I was struck by this story this man facing the possibility of never seeing his home again choose the thing that mattered most to him. Of course he cared about his material possessions but he believed that those could eventually be replaced while his ikenga was irreplaceable. There are ikengas in various museums all over the world today and it is easy to forget as we stare and admire them behind cold and clinical glass barriers that these are objects that are religious. Spiritual. Sacred art lives in history and history lives in art. Much of what we call African art are also documents that tell stories.”
 - “To tell only one part of a story is to lie.”

- “It is a story that basically says, ‘yes, colonialism happened but’ and whatever comes after the but is the focus of the story. What the focus on the but does is that it absolves. It frees Europe of responsibility of a significant and traceable connection to the African present and it allows Europe the glow of charity.”
- “Obviously I don’t think everything should be sent back to the countries from which they came. Not everything was stolen, but those things that are sacred. Those things for whom people were killed. Those things that have the stain of innocent blood should be returned.”
- Mentor Text: Then show an example from Morocco by having students read either the article “Morocco to Recover 35,000 Pieces of Stolen Heritage from France from Morocco World News” or “‘This is historic’: France gives back Moroccan art seized from traffickers”.
- Question: How can they trace those articles back to the “stories European countries tell themselves” Adichie mentions?
- Free Write #4: Ask students to think about their own stories of unbelonging from the past or present, resolved or ongoing. Have them consider the following options:
 - A ritual you were/are not allowed to participate in
 - A place you were/are not welcome or safe
 - An object or information that you did/do not have access to
 - A group you didn’t feel you had right to have membership in
 - A person who seemed missing in your life
- As a final thought, have students consider what reconciliation looked like or could look like. What would it look like to move peaceably forward without reconciliation? Would it be possible? Keep in mind (and if applicable, remind students) that experiences of unbelonging will feature more prominently in some student’s lives. Do not attempt to minimize their experiences by encouraging inauthentic solutions or perspectives. It is their story. Some issues cannot be reconciled. Allow the tension to exist.
- Optional Share: Then begin sharing free writes in a small group and have students journal as story-listener.

III. RECITATION (lesson 7 and beyond)

Lesson 7→slides 74-78

This lesson is the beginning of the revision process which pushes students toward their final storytelling performance. Begin by modeling what a final story looks like. While you may use my Example Story from my own experience in Morocco linked in the slideshow, it is encouraged that you share your own workshopped story with students so you can undergo the same process. Once students see an example of a polished story, they should return to their 4 free writes and consider one they wish to develop into a final story to share with the class in the halqa. This may take more than one day to workshop. Use the slideshow to guide each activity below.

- Review the “Workshopping Your Story” slide as a guide for revising. Each step is fleshed out in the slides but emphasize the following--stories should...
 - Have a beginning, middle, and end

- Show versus tell & engage 5 senses (consider mentor texts and whether or not it would serve them to bring in an object)
- Demonstrate a level of practice means by saying the story out loud--they may use writing but should avoid reading *at* the audience (refer back to “story-listener neural coupling”--storytelling is different than just reading!)

End of Unit Products: *Factor at least an additional day for each--these are not outlined in the slideshow so that you can tailor to your own classroom.*

- **Practice for Final Storytelling: Review the definition of the halqa**, set an specifics for the standards of evaluation you have selected (see options for standards above) and time parameters (about 5 minutes each), and modify for students’ learning needs (see differentiation). Decide if you want students to do this with or without notecards.
- **Final Storytelling Day:** Form a circle and have each student share their story, pause every few stories and have students add some story-listener reflections as they have done throughout the unit. This will prepare them for the final reflection and discussion.
- **Reflection Writing** and final **Socratic Seminar** (see assessment)

ASSESSMENT

The end of unit performance is when students share their final, workshopped story of belonging with the class. The final assessment is two components, one reflective writing piece and one whole or small group discussion. Students will demonstrate their learning by including the drafting stages of their story and complete an end-of-unit one-pager (one, single spaced typed document). Once those are complete, students may use all of their work as reference for the socratic seminar regarding the unit’s essential questions.

The one-pager: Students will complete two parts:

- 1) Provide a **rationale** which walks through their drafting and revision process for their final story and considers how their story reflects their own home culture (values, beliefs, behaviors);
- 2) Provide a **reflection** which accounts for what they have learned about Moroccan culture through storytelling (values, beliefs, behaviors) and cite specific examples from the unit that helped inspire their final story.

Socratic Seminar Discussion: Have students engage in dialog by preparing to answer at least one question thoroughly and responding thoughtfully to a peer in discussion by building on an idea or respectfully disagreeing. Students should draw upon specific examples from the unit texts and their own writing, reflections, and experiences.

- ➔ What can we learn about a person and a people through story (specifically how do stories reflect fears, desires, and hopes) and how are they observable through values, beliefs, and behaviors?
- ➔ What can we learn about a person’s individual story (from various contexts, including Morocco) as well as our own through rituals, places, and persons of significance? What do those stories have the power to *do*?

→ What happens when someone’s story is told by someone else? What are the real world consequences for *dis*-stories and incomplete stories (consider media, false histories, fake news, stereotyping, “single” stories, etc.)?

→ When one learns about a culture outside of one’s own, is it possible to ever get at emic perspectives? What does it mean to tell a story so that your interlocutors/listeners get at *your* emic perspectives?

DIFFERENTIATION FOR DIVERSE LEARNERS

Writing Goals	Reading Goals	Speaking and Listening Goals	English Language Learners
- Modified free writes many include graphic organizers or idea maps - may select a free write of choice - may use voice dictation tools - may submit half page for final one-pager	- Students have choice over readings - students may select only one model writing to read - option for transcripts on all videos included - option to have readings read aloud	- Students may self-select a partner /small group with which to share - may use notes on final performance - may rely on visuals and artifacts to guide story - small group socratic seminar and may write responses ahead of time	- Students may self-select a partner/small group with which to share - may complete final performance in preferred language - Modified freewrites many include graphic organizers or idea maps - may focus on only one lens (place, ritual, or person) of their choice - small group socratic seminar and may write responses ahead of time

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