

## 4.1 WELL-KNOWN TALE: THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN



### FOCUS QUESTIONS:

- What can we learn about people and their cultural values from literature?
- Are promises important to keep?
- Should there be “punishment” if people don’t keep the promises that they make to others?

### STANDARD #1 CULTURE.

#### LESSON OVERVIEW:

This lesson focuses on the classic German folktale, *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, as an example of the influence of the Grimm Brothers’ stories on world culture and values. After reading the tale, students will demonstrate their understanding through the creation of tableau.

#### TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Jakob (1785-1863) and Wilhelm (1786-1859) Grimm, or the Brothers Grimm, are best known for their collection of folk and fairy tales. Their original purpose for collecting these tales was both scholarly and political. As linguists, they were interested in the study of the German language and spent many years compiling a definitive German dictionary, including etymology, which was not completed until 1960! As part of the romantic nationalist movement of the early nineteenth century, they were focused on the study of medieval Germany and saw language as a vehicle for the cultural unity of the politically separated German people. In 1812, The Brothers Grimm published the first collection of tales:

*Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (*Children’s and Household Tales*). They were based on stories collected by the brothers from tales of peasants and villagers. Reflecting the hard lives of these people for generations, the stories depicted gruesome events and cruel characters. Although they did not originally publish their stories



for children, they made changes from edition to edition as they realized that children were an important (and lucrative) audience for their collected tales. For more detailed biographical information on the lives of the Brothers Grimm, teachers might want to read *The Encyclopedia of World Biography* online: <http://www.notablebiographies.com/Gi-He/Grimm-Brothers.html>

Historians agree that the tale of the *Pied Piper of Hamelin*, recorded in the 19th century by the Brothers Grimm, is based on an actual occurrence in 1284 in which most of the children in Hamelin disappeared. To this day, no one knows for sure the exact reason for the disappearance, although numerous theories have been presented over the years.

In the Grimm Brothers’ version of the story (drawn from eleven different sources) the Pied Piper, known in German as the *Ratten-*



*fänger*, or rat catcher, appears in the town of Hamelin in the middle of a rat infestation and offers to rid the town of them. He uses an enchanted pipe to lure the rats into a river, where they all drown, but the townspeople refuse to pay him as promised. He leaves Hamelin, but returns a few weeks later to seek revenge. On his second visit to Hamelin, the Pied Piper uses his magic pipe on the children of the town, leading them into a hole in a mountain on the edge of town and sealing them inside. Only a disabled boy remains in the town, because he could not follow the piper.

### TIME:

2 (45-minute Class Periods)



### INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES:

- *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* (**Handout 4.1 A on Resource Disc**)
- *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* Chart (**Handout 4.1 B on Resource Disc**)
- Robert Browning Version of *The Pied Piper* (**Handout 4.1 C on Resource Disc**)
- *Hamelin Rattenbrot* Recipe (**Handout 4.1 D on Resource Disc**)
- *The Bremen Town Musicians* (**Handout 4.1 E on Resource Disc**)
- Grimm Brothers Fairy Tale Chart (**Handout 4. F on Resource Disc**)

### PROCEDURE:



#### DAY 1:

- **Anticipatory Set:** The teacher should ask the students if they can share a situation in which someone took advantage of others in order to get what they wanted. Are there circumstances when it's all right to back out on a promise that one has made? In our society, how do we deal with these circumstances?
- The teacher should explain that they are going to read a classic folktale regarding this topic of broken promises and the consequences of such actions - *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*. The teacher should explain that folktales, like most aspects of culture, reflect the values and beliefs of the society and time in which they were produced/written. These tales (oral before they were actually written) were related not only to entertain, but also to teach lessons and to transmit societal values and morality. Folklorists in their research have discovered that many cultures around the globe have produced similar tales and so they conclude that there is a certain universality of the themes. An excellent example is the story of Cinderella, which appears in many parts of the world and has no direct connection with any original source.
- *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, one of Germany's best known folktales, is based on a 13th century legend in the town of Hamelin (Hameln) on the Weser River in Lower Saxony. According to an inscription on the *Rattenfängerhaus* (Pied Piper's house): On June 26, 1284, 130 children were led out of Hamelin by a piper wearing multi-colored clothes and disappeared forever. This information, when coupled with the prevalence of rat infestations and epidemics, found its way into local folklore. The Grimm Brothers' version is the one that most people are familiar with. The teacher should point out that the word "pied" is not used very often today, but is an archaic English word, which means "multi-colored."
- The teacher should explain to the students that Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm, usually referred to as the Brothers Grimm, as part of their research on the German language began to collect old stories, most of which had been passed down from generation to generation orally, and wrote them down word-for-word. One of their major sources, farmer and storyteller Dorothea Viehmann, provided them with over 40 tales. The Brothers Grimm published the first series *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (*Children's and Household Tales*) in 1812. Since most of these stories were not intended for children and were based on the hard lives of the German peasants, they were often violent and not like the more sanitized Walt Disney versions that students may know.

- The teacher should distribute *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* (**Handout 4.1 A on Resource Disc**) and *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* Chart (**Handout 4.1 B on Resource Disc**). The teacher should then instruct the students to read the story independently and highlight or underline key words and phrases that address the different categories in the chart as well as fill in the chart. Then the teacher should divide the class into groups of four or five. Each group should discuss the setting, the characters, the basic problem(s), solutions, values and beliefs using their individual charts. Afterwards, the teacher should facilitate a whole class discussion.

#### DAYS 2-3:

- The teacher should inform the students that each group will create a dramatic tableau based on an assigned section of *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*. Depending on the size of the class, the teacher should predetermine how many groups and which section of the tale each group should be assigned. The entire tale should be assigned, so that in the end, when presented the tableau will reflect the entire story.
- A dramatic tableau is a strategy in which students create a scene and freeze the action. Using physical poses, gestures, facial expressions, and a few carefully selected props, students convey the characters, action, and significance of a moment in the story. Throughout the duration of the display, the students do not speak or move. This “freeze frame” invites students in the audience to identify the scene, its importance, and the significance of the characters, their actions, and reactions.
- The teacher should review with the students the procedure they should follow in preparing the group’s tableau:
  - a. What does the group believe to be the *most crucial* aspect of the section assigned?
  - b. Which characters, setting, and other details need to be visually communicated?
  - c. How will characters move and what will they visually do to depict the details, emotions etc. of the specific scene? How will the students portray these character traits while standing still and not speaking?
  - d. What props are needed to enhance the scene?
- As the students work on their tableau, the teacher should assist them in planning out the scene as if it were action. Then the students need to decide how they will freeze the scene to create a human statue.
- Each group should present its tableau to the class. As each group presents its tableau, the teacher (or a designated student) may photograph the scene using a digital camera. After all the groups have presented their tableau in the sequence of the tale, the teacher (or a designated student) should then take the digital images and create a PowerPoint. In the end, the class has created a series of images of the entire story of *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*.

#### WHOLE GROUP REFLECTION:

- The teacher should return to the questions of the Anticipatory Set and re-examine these in light of the reading and dramatization of *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*: Are there circumstances when it’s all right to back out on a promise that one has made? In our society, how do we deal with these circumstances?

#### MODIFICATIONS:

- One variation in the presentation of the tableau: After the students have “frozen,” the teacher should take a microphone (or an object that substitutes for a microphone) and say the following: “Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I am \_\_\_\_\_ of W/KTV reporting from the German city of Hamelin where (and describe briefly the scene)” and then approach one of the characters in the scene, in order to hear what they have to say. This expansion of the activity would be a spontaneous way for the students to demonstrate their connection with the characters, conflicts, and plot of the folktale.
- Rather than having the students create tableau for the Pied Piper, the teacher may assign a shoebox diorama project. Dioramas are re-creations of a setting or a scene and could serve the same purpose as the tableau, i.e. show a particular moment in the story. Shoeboxes are a good choice to use for making dioramas because they give the dioramas a three-dimensional feel, and they are readily available to most students.

- In groups of three or four, the students should design and draw a poster to illustrate a scene in the story (rather than create a tableau). After the students have completed their posters, each group should present its drawing to the class.
- The teacher might assign an essay for the students to write in which they address the theme of greed in the story of the Pied Piper.

### EXTENSIONS:

- For older students, the teacher might have the students complete a dramatic reading of 19<sup>th</sup> century British poet Robert Browning's *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* (**Handout 4.1 C on Resource Disc**). The teacher should also facilitate a discussion comparing and contrasting this version and that of the Brothers Grimm.
- The city of Hamelin has capitalized on the story of the Pied Piper. In addition to the usual tourist memorabilia (magnets, rat figurines, posters, etc.), rat-shaped pastries (*Hameln Rattenbrot*), not all edible, are on sale in Hameln's many bakeries; some are coated with a special glaze for longevity as souvenirs. Students could create these following a simple recipe for salt-dough sculpture and then varnish these to preserve them (**Handout 4.1 D on Resource Disc**).
- The teacher may assignment students to complete Internet research on the following topics:
  - The life of the Brothers Grimm
  - The facts and legends surrounding *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*
  - The Children's Crusades
  - The Plagues of the Middle Ages
  - The city of Hamelin today and its programs regarding the Pied Piper story
  - Troubadours/*Minnesänger*
- The teacher might ask the students to consider what things would look like in Hamelin from the point of view of the rats. The students could rewrite the story. Terry Pratchett's novel, *The Amazing Maurice and His Educated Rats* (HarperCollins, 2003) presents the story of the Pied Piper from the rats' perspective; teachers might want to read sections aloud to the students.
- Students enjoy conducting mock trials, so one possible activity is to put the Pied Piper on trial for the abduction/kidnapping of the children of Hamelin. The students should "investigate" the mysterious disappearance of the children. Since there may not be sufficient information in the story to provide an "outcome," the students may need to both research the different historical theories and also create their own answers. This may depend on the age of the students.
- The teacher should assign another Grimm Brothers' fairy tale *The Bremen Town Musicians* (**Handout 4.1 E on Resource Disc**) and use the story to facilitate a discussion on why it is important that people work together to solve problems. After the students have read and discussed the story, the teacher might ask them to re-write the story using four different animals.
- Students in groups of three or four should select another Grimm Brothers' story to read and present to the class as a tableau or as a dramatic skit. The teacher should assign one of the familiar tales: Rapunzel, Hansel and Gretel, Sleeping Beauty, Snow White, Little Red Riding Hood, or another of their own. The students should complete the Grimm Brothers' Fairy Tale Chart (**Handout 4.1 F on Resource Disc**). After the presentations, the teacher should facilitate a discussion about the themes of these tales (depending on the age of the students).