

The Girl Who Saved Yesterday

Julius Lester, illustrated by Carl Angel

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Careful Reading:

Lester has written a story that feels like a folktale or legend. What are the qualities that give it that flavor?

Questions to ask:

1. Does the story happen in a particular place, at a particular time?
2. How are characters introduced and named? Are there other characters besides people?
3. Why do the villagers send Silence out of the village?
4. Why do the trees adopt her?
5. Why do the trees send her back?
6. Who or what is Yesterday?
7. How does Silence save Yesterday?
8. Who else does Silence save by her actions?
9. The villagers see Silence as a dangerous to them at first. How do they see her in the end?
10. Silence doesn't know what she's supposed to do at the start of the story. How does she see herself at the end, how does she understand the job the trees have given her by the end of the book?

Use of Language, Metaphors, Similes:

One of the things that gives the story its power is the rich use of similes and metaphors. Lester creates ones that are especially evocative, conjuring up visual images that provide a mood for the scenes described.

1. List the similes and metaphors in the book. How many deal with sounds? Images? Feelings? Discuss which ones work the best, which are your favorites. Why?
2. Draw pictures to go along with the metaphors.
3. Come up with your own metaphors for;
Sadness
Fear
Happiness
Quiet

Loudness
Love
Hate
Speed
Slowness
Tired
Energetic
Red
Yellow
Blue

4. Draw pictures for your favorite metaphors.

Writing

Write your own folktale.

What elements do you need to include to make a story feel like a folktale? Here are some that Julius Lester has used:

Personifications of Things (like Sun, Moon, Wind)

Sense of timelessness (not taking place at a particular time, but could be any time)

People identified by their job or clothes or personality, not by name (again, making them more universal than specific)

The problems faced are big, happening to an entire community rather than one or two people.

Unlike many other stories, folktales feel like legends. They can start with problems or questions, such as how did the camel get its hump, how do trees tell stories, how can people and animals live together. This is part of what gives them their timeless feel. Pick a question, a what-if (like what if cats ran the world?) and write a folktale that answers your question.

In other folk tales there is something wrong, and the hero(ine) is the one who uncovers what's wrong and corrects it. Sometimes there is a drought in the land, or the Queen cannot bear a child, the King or his heir falls sick for no apparent reason.

Is something going on that you think is wrong (in your family, school, city, country)? Try to write a tale that would solve the problem.