

# LESSON PLAN: "BECOMING A LEGEND"

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**OBJECTIVE:** To have students write a poem that retells an old myth/legend in a way that relates to their own personal experience.

<p><u>KEY TERMS:</u></p>	<p><b>Mythology</b> – A body of stories belonging to a people and addressing their origin, history, deities, and heroes.  <b>Allusion</b> – A reference to another work, designed to call something to mind without mentioning it explicitly.</p>	
<p><u>STANDARDS:</u></p>	<p><b>Virginia</b>            9.1 C, 10.1 D, 9.4 A, 9.4 H, 10.4 H,            11.4 E, 9.7-12.7 E</p>	<p><b>Common Core</b></p> <p><i>Reading</i>            Grades 6-8: 2, 4, 6            Grades 9-12: 2, 4</p> <p><i>Writing</i>            Grades 6-8: 3.b-d, 4, 5            Grades 9-12: 3.a-d, 4, 5</p> <p><i>Speaking and Listening</i>            Grades 6-8: 1.b-d            Grades 9-12: 1.c-d</p> <p><i>Language Standards</i>            Grades 6-8: 3, 5            Grades 9-12: 3, 5</p>

<u>INTRODUCTION:</u>	<p>Have students brainstorm a list of myths, legends, or folktales with which they're already familiar. Have each student provide a brief explanation of the story when they share.</p> <p>Ask students to discuss what all the stories they've listed have in common. Use their ideas to write down a list of what kind of characters and story elements are typical to a myth/legend; examples could include gods, heroes, magic, princesses, etc.</p>
<u>STEP ONE:</u>	<p>Have students read the poems "Persephone, Falling" by Rita Dove and "Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing" by Margaret Atwood.</p> <p>After they finish reading, have a brief discussion. Can they identify which myth each poem references?</p> <p>Ask them how each author translated the myth into a modern telling of their own story.</p>
<u>STEP TWO:</u>	<p>Return to the lists created at the beginning of the workshop and stress the idea of commonality again. To inspire their writing, ask the group to consider where they've played the role of "hero" in their own myth—or even "god" or "monster" in their own lives.</p> <p>Have the students select a myth that they would like to be the basis of their poem. Instruct them to write their poems in a way that makes the myth unique to their own experience.</p>
<u>STEP THREE:</u>	<p>Have the students write their poems for 10-20 minutes, then share upon completion.</p>



## **ADDITIONAL MATERIALS**

### **“Persephone, Falling” by Rita Dove**

One narcissus among the ordinary beautiful  
flowers, one unlike all the others! She pulled,  
stooped to pull harder—  
when, sprung out of the earth  
on his glittering terrible  
carriage, he claimed his due.  
It is finished. No one heard her.  
No one! She had strayed from the herd.

(Remember: go straight to school.  
This is important, stop fooling around!  
Don't answer to strangers. Stick  
with your playmates. Keep your eyes down.)  
This is how easily the pit  
opens. This is how one foot sinks into the ground.

**“Helen of Troy Does Countertop  
Dancing” by Margaret Atwood**

The world is full of women  
 who'd tell me I should be ashamed of myself  
 if they had the chance. Quit dancing.  
 Get some self-respect  
 and a day job.  
 Right. And minimum wage,  
 and varicose veins, just standing  
 in one place for eight hours  
 behind a glass counter  
 bundled up to the neck, instead of  
 naked as a meat sandwich.  
 Selling gloves, or something.  
 Instead of what I do sell.  
 You have to have talent  
 to peddle a thing so nebulous  
 and without material form.  
 Exploited, they'd say. Yes, any way  
 you cut it, but I've a choice  
 of how, and I'll take the money.

I do give value.  
 Like preachers, I sell vision,  
 like perfume ads, desire  
 or its facsimile. Like jokes  
 or war, it's all in the timing.  
 I sell men back their worse suspicions:  
 that everything's for sale,  
 and piecemeal. They gaze at me and see  
 a chain-saw murder just before it happens,  
 when thigh, ass, inkblot, crevice, tit, and nipple  
 are still connected.  
 Such hatred leaps in them,  
 my beery worshippers! That, or a bleary  
 hopeless love. Seeing the rows of heads  
 and upturned eyes, imploring  
 but ready to snap at my ankles,  
 I understand floods and earthquakes, and the  
 urge  
 to step on ants. I keep the beat,  
 and dance for them because  
 they can't. The music smells like foxes,  
 crisp as heated metal

searing the nostrils  
 or humid as August, hazy and languorous  
 as a looted city the day after,  
 when all the rape's been done  
 already, and the killing,  
 and the survivors wander around  
 looking for garbage  
 to eat, and there's only a bleak exhaustion.  
 Speaking of which, it's the smiling  
 tires me out the most.  
 This, and the pretence  
 that I can't hear them.  
 And I can't, because I'm after all  
 a foreigner to them.  
 The speech here is all warty gutturals,  
 obvious as a slab of ham,  
 but I come from the province of the gods  
 where meanings are liting and oblique.  
 I don't let on to everyone,  
 but lean close, and I'll whisper:  
 My mother was raped by a holy swan.  
 You believe that? You can take me out to  
 dinner.  
 That's what we tell all the husbands.  
 There sure are a lot of dangerous birds around.

Not that anyone here  
 but you would understand.  
 The rest of them would like to watch me  
 and feel nothing. Reduce me to components  
 as in a clock factory or abattoir.  
 Crush out the mystery.  
 Wall me up alive  
 in my own body.  
 They'd like to see through me,  
 but nothing is more opaque  
 than absolute transparency.  
 Look--my feet don't hit the marble!  
 Like breath or a balloon, I'm rising,  
 I hover six inches in the air  
 in my blazing swan-egg of light.  
 You think I'm not a goddess?  
 Try me.  
 This is a torch song.  
 Touch me and you'll burn.