



MYTH & MAGIC: L

THE ARTWORK OF
**GERALD
McDERMOTT**

Educator's Guide

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Myth & Magic: The Artwork of Gerald McDermott

Dream weaver, tale spinner, portrayer of visions, interpreter of the human spirit, Gerald McDermott is all of these and more. Through his bold, graphic renderings of timeless tales from around the world, McDermott communicates his deep understanding of the transformative power of myth. His work is an evocation of the human quest for unity and completeness. Mythology and folklore have been the foundation for most of Gerald McDermott's creative work. His goal has been to render these ancient tales in ways that are vital and engaging.

McDermott's color magic, stylized figures and abstract motifs, combine ancient imagery with contemporary design. For McDermott, the creation of the artwork is physically involving. After the initial sketching with pencil and pastel, he tears and reassembles the various sketches with tape and glue. Then he transfers those images to a larger surface and begins working in color, using gouache and fabric paint, then pastels and colored pencils to darken, shade, and modulate the illustrations.

What are folklores, myth, and mythology? What are trickster tales?

Folklore is the body of expressive culture, including tales, music, dance, legends, oral history, proverbs, jokes, popular beliefs, customs, and so forth within a particular population comprising the traditions (including oral traditions) of that culture, subculture, or group.

Mythology refers to a body of myths- stories that a particular culture believes to be true and that use the supernatural to interpret natural events and to explain the nature of the universe and humanity.

Storytellers have delighted their listeners with animal tales throughout the ages. Across the world these stories have entertained and instructed as parables of human nature. The heroes - and villains - of this earliest and most widespread form of the folktale were often mischief-making rogues known as tricksters. The comic nature of the trickster as troublemaker, resourceful champion, and sometime fool is explored in these tales from different cultures. The trickster has special appeal for children because of its ability to triumph over larger foes not by physical strength but by wit and cunning. In addition, tales of the trickster still speak to us in a gentle, humorous way about the strengths and weaknesses of humankind.

To provide a literary connection in the classroom, most of these stories can be classified into two groups:

- A) *"Pourquoi" or "why" stories*: Stories that describe particular traits or characteristics of animals are popular with young children, e.g. Jabuti the Tortoise and Zomo the Rabbit. These are stories that seek to explain natural phenomena.
- B) *Transformation Stories*: Many folktales have stories of transformation; some show human-animal transformations, while others illustrate people becoming transformed into geographical features, e.g. Anansi the Spider and Raven.

This guide has been designed to broaden the educator's scope of knowledge for the classroom. To make the guide a valuable instrument for instruction, please use the following guidelines.

- Before reading a book, the educator can introduce the book, and then let their students brain storm what they think the book might be about.
- When reading the book, first read it for its story line; then highlight the art elements. Encourage the students to look for these details such as the cover similarities in Zomo, Coyote, Jabuti and Raven. Students can find out more about Gerald McDermott and his work. Focal point is the main element of the book, framed in geometric mosaic. The TEKS connection to art elements is provided when each student learns to be creative by cutting a symmetrical shape and decorating it. This will also be a wonderful opportunity for the children to experiment with stylized landscapes and animals.
- Classroom connections have been provided for some books with several follow up activities. The stories are made of significant details arranged into significant patterns. At the beginning of the week, the teacher can discuss what a folktale is and read an American folktale to the class. The teacher can celebrate a multicultural week with the students and read a folktale from a different culture each day. At the beginning of each class, the teacher can

introduce the culture of the day, locate it on the map, and introduce new vocabulary to go with the folktale. At the end of the week, the students will enjoy a festival of the cultures, with various decorations, music, and food from each culture. Most stories imitate other stories. Teachers can have students make a family of stories chart, among other suggested activities at the end of the unit. After discussing characteristics of different cultures and reading folktales from them, the students will be able to identify specific characteristics from various cultures, identify and define what a folktale is, identify and use new vocabulary words in a different language, and locate different countries on the map.

This educator's guide satisfies the following TEKS objectives

§110.6. & Grade 4 TEKS 4.12 (H) English Language Arts and Reading

§113.6. Social Studies

§111.16. Math

§4.2 and §4.4. Art



©Gerald McDermott, 1974

Arrow to the Sun- A Pueblo Indian tale

“The Boy’s journey is the hero’s journey, the same journey that we all undertake, in one form or another, every day of our lives. Glowing, intense color is my way of conveying the emotion of that journey”. Gerald McDermott’s thought on this Caldecott award- winning book retells an ancient legend of an outcast child who proves his special qualities and becomes a hero within his society. With vibrant colors and bold geometric forms, Gerald McDermott brilliantly captures the stylization of Pueblo art. A young boy searches for his father, but before he can claim his heritage he must first prove his worthiness by passing through the four ceremonial chambers: the kiva of lions, the kiva of snakes, the kiva of bees, and the kiva of lightning. Striking in its simplicity and grace, Arrow to the Sun evokes the Native American reverence for the source of all life - the Solar Fire.

Coyote: A Trickster Tale from the Southwest, and Raven: A Trickster Tale from the Pacific Northwest, can also be introduced as an accompaniment to this book in order to widen the scope of the unit.

Classroom Connections:

Language Arts

OBJECTIVE: Students learn to appreciate the use of words to build sensory images for the reader.

Transformation Stories: Students write their own story that show either human-animal transformations, or people becoming transformed into geographical features. Students can add sensory images through words. E.g. “Long ago the Lord of the Sun sent the spark of life to earth.....entered the house of a young maiden”, or “The Boy became the arrow”.

What’s in a name? Native Indian names often reflect a characteristic of the person. Students can think of names for themselves that would reflect something about them and write a funny story.

Social Studies and Science

OBJECTIVE: To introduce children to the culture of Southwest and a variety of Native American tribes through literature and related activities.

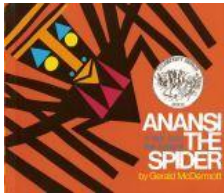
Native Americans: Educators can help children learn about the cross cultural myths in a classroom setting. Children can research many tribes of Native Americans and how they differ from each other. Several Native American Indian legends are present. Reading through, students can learn the importance of plants and animals, and experience the arts and crafts of some Native American tribes. Sun and Corn are important symbols used by Gerald McDermott; students can look for these and other symbols in the pages of this book. E.g. notice the sun-corn symbol on the cover.

Topography, animal and plant life: Students can take this opportunity to learn about the Southwestern part of our country.

Art Connections

OBJECTIVE: Students learn to appreciate different stylized illustrations. Comparing and contrasting the works of art and learning these new drawing techniques will increase appreciation of art among children.

Arrow to the Sun uses symbolic designs. Color, design, and details communicate the changing status of the Boy from social outcast to celebrated leader. Notice the gradual introduction of a full spectrum of color from the middle of the story. In *Coyote* the anti hero, coyote’s adventure and his annoying abrasive character is depicted through color. Orange and blue, two complementary colors clash and these embody the tensions and conflicts in the story. In *Raven*, two different worlds are expressed, one dull and the other bright through the use of colors. The two colors balance and complement each other in the final illustration, a reflection of the fact that Raven has succeeded as a mediator between the two worlds.



©Gerald McDermott, 1972

Anansi the Spider- A Tale from Ashanti

Anansi the Spider, Gerald McDermott’s first picture book, had originally been created as an animated film. In this Caldecott Honor Book, Anansi the spider is a wise, funny, mischievous, and loveable folk hero. He is often found in traditional Ashanti tales from Ghana, in West Africa. This story, told and illustrated by Gerald McDermott, recounts the tale of Anansi and his six spider sons. When Anansi sets out on a dangerous journey and gets into all sorts of trouble, each son does one thing to help, and all their efforts together save their father. He finds a mysterious, beautiful globe of light in the forest, and decides to make it a gift of thanks. But which son should receive the prize? Even with the help of Nyame, the God of All Things, he can't decide, so Nyame takes the great globe up into the sky, and that's where it has stayed ever since--the moon, for all to see. In adapting this popular folktale, Gerald McDermott merges the old with the new, combining bold, rich color with traditional African design motifs (Adinkra symbols) and authentic Ashanti language rhythms.

As a *pourquoi* tale, it explains the reasons for the moons being in the sky. Much of the cultural and general meaning is incorporated visually. Vivid colors were chosen to create a sense of vibration, of energy. The intensity of the hues makes the images appear to jump off the page. Symbols are used as identifying marks for the characters. The idea came from the Adinkra symbols. The book deals with a family theme; the web is a symbol of the interconnectedness of each member of the family.

Classroom Connections:

Language Arts

OBJECTIVE: Students to develop skills necessary for strong, logical arguments and produce an effective composition.

Critical thinking: “To whom would you award the silver disk and why?” Have students write a concise paragraph to support their assertion of who does or does not deserve the prize.

Journal Writing: Have you ever been rescued /rescued a family member from trouble? Give students an opportunity to tell their stories in their own words.

Creative Writing: Using the sheet provided of Adinkra symbols, have students write their own *Ashanti* tales.

Social Studies

OBJECTIVE: Students learn to say a simple greeting in a language other than their own, and develop awareness for visual arts

Where in the world is Ghana? Students locate and learn about different countries of Africa, and West African culture and language in particular. Students also get an opportunity to learn more about the Adinkra Symbols.

Math

OBJECTIVE: Students learn to classify and give attributes to various objects. Chart the Anansi family.

Symbols	Name of the son	Actions in resolving the conflicts	Adjectives indicating his character and personality













Adinkra Symbols

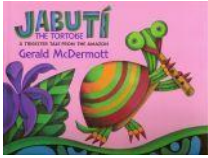
Adinkra (sometimes andinkra) symbols are small, symbolic pictures used to decorate colorful patterned cloth by fabric designers in Ghana. Designs are made by cutting patterns into pieces of calabash gourd, then stamping them on fabric with black ink made from iron oxide. The fabric is created in varied colors and patterns, and used in funerals, weddings, and other special occasions. Adinkra cloth is not used for everyday purposes because it cannot be washed.

The name Adinkra comes from the legendary King conquered by the Ashanti people, who, according to legend, wore luxurious patterned fabrics. Adinkra means "goodbye," and the special cloth was reserved for funeral garments.

Adinkra fabric is now used for a variety of special occasions, and there are dozens of adinkra symbols used to impart a variety of meanings to the finished cloth. Many symbolize virtues, folk tales and proverbs, animals, and even historical events, and most are very old, having been passed down through generations of craftspeople.

The list below shows some of the more popular symbols and their meanings.

Symbol	Name	Meaning
	Aya, fern	defiance, independence, resourcefulness
	Gya Nyame	Presence of God
	Fihankra, house	Security, safety
	Osrane ne nsoroma (Ram's horns)	Wisdom, learning, humility
	Ohene (king)	Foresight, wisdom
	Funtunfunafu (crocodiles sharing one stomach)	Need for unity, working together
	Gyawu (Hair of the hero Kwatakye)	Valor, Respect, leadership
	Pagya (flint for fire making)	Bravery, striking out
	Sankofa (return and get it)	Mistakes can be rectified, look to the past for solutions
	Odenkyem (crocodile)	Defense, protection
	Akoban (war horn)	Akoban (war horn)
	Kramobone	One bad makes all look bad



©Gerald McDermott, 2001

Jabutí the Tortoise- A Trickster Tale from the Amazon

“The story of Jabutí is more than simply a *pourquoi* tale of ‘How tortoise got his cracked shell.’ At its heart, it is a story of friendship and betrayal, compassion and rebirth.” Gerald McDermott retells an age-old myth from the Amazon with vibrant, colorful, and dazzling illustration. Of all the animals in the rainforest, Jabutí (pronounced as zha-boo-CHEE) was the favorite. His shell was smooth and shiny, and the songs he played on his flute were sweet. But his music was also a reminder of the mischievous pranks Jabutí sometimes played. His song reminded Tapir of being tricked, Jaguar of being fooled, and time and again it reminded the vulture that he had no song at all. When a concert takes place in heaven, Vulture offers to fly Jabutí there, and he plays a trick of his own! Notice the change in his shell after his bird friends help him! During McDermott’s research on Amazon he noticed that all the books on the Amazon had a green color, so he decided to do something different: be a trickster and use Brazilian pink as his dominant color.

[Papagayo the Mischief Maker is another book by Gerald McDermott. This trickster bird is often found in Brazilian folktales. The book is recommended and can be used for supplemental reading.](#)

Classroom Connections:

Language Art

OBJECTIVE: Students will learn to write essays to argue their cases and write their own *pourquoi* stories. Students will also demonstrate appropriate organization of ideas in written text. Students will learn the use of descriptive phrases that use figurative language such as similes (Blue as...) and personification (flowers lifted their faces to the sun).

Why is it pourquoi? Creative writing has never been this interesting! Educators let students write their own *pourquoi* stories, “Is there a man on the moon?”, “How many spots does a leopard have?”, or “Why does the moon change its shape?”

Save the rainforest: Students will enjoy writing a persuasive essay to the newspaper on why it is important to save the rainforest.

Antonyms Galore! Jabutí the Tortoise is organized around a series of contrasting words. Children will enjoy pairing up the antonyms in the book and hunting for more.

Social Studies, Geography and Science

OBJECTIVE: At the end of this unit, children learn the geographical location of the rainforest, its importance and animal and plant life.

Myth Busters: Students pick a myth of their choice from around the world. Then they go about in a scientific manner to prove or disprove it.

Around the world: Students learn about ecosystems, and locate the rainforest and Amazon valley on the map. This unit can help children understand the topography, animal life and World Wildlife Fund. After their research they can write an essay on how they can raise funds to save the delicate ecosystem.

Art Connection

As with all other books, we recommend that students compare and contrast art in this book and other books recommended in this Educator’s Guide.