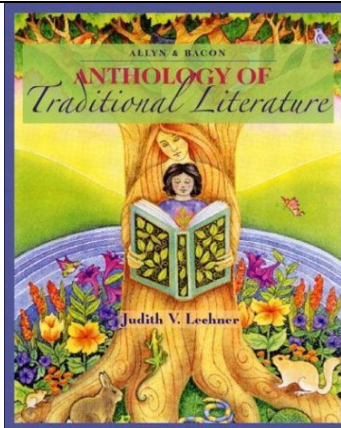


*Anthology of Traditional Literature*  
Lechner, J. V. (2004)  
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Judith Lechner's *Anthology of Traditional Literature* provides graduate and undergraduate students of literature with a valuable collection of oral stories for children gathered from all over the world, through which they can explore and survey children's literature. The book is an informative and instructional source with a quite simple language that does not need any background in the field. The collection of stories-- including fables, legends, myths, folktales, and trickster tales with definitions given for each, their originations, the reasons for their popularity among people, a discussion on their genres, plus examples of each -- has made the book a user friendly source. Some beautiful illustrations, though not many in number, have added to the effectiveness of the book and can be considered as good motives and reminders for the readers. The book is designed in six chapters with Chapter One as an introduction and chapters two to five to dissect the stories introduced in Chapter One and the Chapter Six which is a teaching guide.

Chapter One, which is an introduction to traditional literature, starts with a definition of stories in general and how they are placed in our literature. A short description is presented for folk literature and oral literature at the beginning of the chapter, and then it follows with describing fables, folktales, myths, and legends, separately. The author then makes a thorough investigation on folktales specifically, and looks at them from a historical perspective while giving an account of the theories -- functionalism, psychoanalytic, and structuralism -- which are used in studying the folktales. Retelling tradition is also introduced by comparing traditional and contemporary storytelling. Lechner then provides the reasons for retelling the traditional literature for children and why they are the real beneficiaries of this type of literature.

Chapter Two is specified to fables. The writer introduces the Native American, the African, and the Indian fables as examples to indicate what their characters represent, where they originated from, when they were recorded, why they were used for educating children, and when they have changed from oral to written stories.

Chapter Three deals with the folktales introducing the wide range of stories they cover and what they express. According to the writer, the written form of the folktales was criticized because of its difficulty level, which was the result of ignoring the oral nature of stories. Lechner indicates quite frankly that a good written folktale should meet the criteria of having a purpose, a good definition of a folktale, and a good reason for restating the oral folktale into the written forms. She mentions that folktales have universal themes, plots, casts of characters, and that all of them deal with teaching everyday life. Then she continues with the patterns for categorizing the folktales. The chapter ends with famous examples of folktales from different countries.

Chapter Four introduces the myths and religious stories, how they differ from other types of stories, stating that they all have the same approach in introducing things people can sense but cannot understand. The writer then mentions about the vast coverage of myths to include political, social, psychological, and spiritual issues. A distinction is also made between classical and contemporary myths and between traditional literary and oral myths. It has been mentioned that in myth the factor of time is more important than the theme, because even the same culture tells different myths at different times and under different circumstances in response to cultural needs or political realities. This chapter, also, as the previous ones ends with famous and beautiful examples of myths gathered from different countries.

Chapter Five is about legends, hero tales, and epics, and begins with an interesting introduction for legends stating where they originated from and what they want to express. This chapter talks about the diversity and the large scope of legends that extend from local stories to national epics and how they travel across the boundaries and gain popularity among children of other nations. This issue is well exemplified by "Robin Hood," which was brought from England during colonial times and gained popularity among children all over the world.

Chapter Six is the most beautiful part of the book and, as a guide chapter, is designed to:

1. Introduce websites for sample application;
2. Explain how fables can be used for activating critical thinking of children; and
3. Illustrate how to teach positive thinking practically, rather than giving lectures.

The chapter goes on to introduce approaches for reading the stories and participating in discussions. With the responsibility of a teacher, the writer introduces different approaches for teaching the stories, such as brainstorming and story telling, each followed by five steps. Other strategies for using storytelling in children's classes are also introduced. They include discussing and writing story structures, plotting maps by children, identifying the sequence of events, and looking for cause and effect relations. Children can then be motivated to find motifs of the story such as magic numbers, to take tests of courage and tests of kindness. This chapter gives insights on how to compare the culturally specific details of stories with international variants of the tale with the purpose of motivating children to find similarities and differences among cultures and, ultimately, to be able to compare stereotypes of characters with those of real life in order to discuss the functions of the stereotypes.

While an admirable work, *Anthology of Traditional Literature* could be improved. A good organizational pattern for Chapter One would be to limit it to the introduction alone and let the folktales, like fables, myths and others, be introduced in a separate chapter. The book would also be more useful text for teaching and learning if each chapter was followed by some thought provoking questions and tasks to activate what has been introduced in the chapter. Most of the literature books lack such an important issue. Stories, as has been mentioned well by the author, deal with everyday life of people. Children and their teachers need some practical application which could be accomplished by such tasks. Nonetheless, the book is a usable and practical one for use in children's literature classes and an informative source for teachers.

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