

Part 2: Julia Wolfe and Mountain Folklore

Prep Time:

Ten minutes to make copies of the “Transcript of Julia Wolfe’s Visit to Heaven” and “The Nunne’hi” and worksheet titled “Discussion Questions.”

Materials:

Narrative about Julia Wolfe and Mountain Folklore
Julia’s Trip to Heaven
The Nunne’hi -Cherokee Legend

Procedure:

1. Share the information in NCpedia about folklore.
2. Share the information NCpedia about angels.
3. Discuss the narrative about “Julia Wolfe and Mountain Folklore.”
4. Distribute “The Nunne’hi” and “Transcript of Julia Wolfe’s Visit to Heaven”.
Ask students to read each story and to consider how they might compare and contrast the views on the afterlife in the two stories.
5. Ask students to answer the Discussion Questions on the worksheet.

Narrative:

Julia Wolfe and Mountain Folklore

Julia Wolfe grew up in the Swannanoa area to a family with deep roots in North Carolina. She would have heard folklore and folktales from older neighbors and those in the community and passed them on to her children. North Carolina folklore has many roots, and many North Carolina oral traditions come from the Cherokee legends, Scots-Irish stories, and German tales. Because folklore is primarily spread orally, and is often not written down, the stories from each of these groups meld together. These stories often include elements of a farming lifestyle, which includes dependency on the crops and livestock. Oftentimes, folktales describe a moral or lesson that comes about from an extraordinary event. The hero of the story outwits the villain or uses a supernatural power against the foe.

The mountain region of North Carolina is comprised of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians, who are decedents of Cherokee who remained in the area while others were forced to move west along the Trail of Tears. Cherokee legends include creation myths, animal stories, and ghost occurrences. The Cherokee believed that the Great Spirit was the creator and watched over the universe and several spirits that watched over every aspect and thing on the planet. In Cherokee legend, there is no universal evil spirit that corresponds with Satan; instead, an evil spirit opposes the good spirits. Further, they believed that human disease and suffering came from animal spirits, witchcraft, or ghosts, and to cure these diseases, a Medicine Man made medicine from local plants and placed it on the suffering patient. Cherokee legends and myths have found their way into stories told by non-Native peoples.

Angels are perhaps one of the most recurring symbols in North Carolina folklore. Angels are seen as an intermediary between God and humans. They are known as “The Holy Ones” and “The Upper Ones”. From the third to fifth centuries images of angels took on specific characteristics and began to have distinct personalities. In Judaism and Christianity, angels have a specific hierarchy. In Judaism there are ten classes, while Christianity declares there are three spheres, with a few roles in each sphere. Most religions believe that angels are messengers from God, and their duties are numerous. They act as a guardian, guide, adorer, and messenger, among various other roles.

The Nunne'hi or immortals, the "people who live anywhere," were a race of spirit people who lived in the highlands of the old Cherokee country and had a great many townhouses, especially in the Bald Mountains, the high peaks on which no timber ever grows. They had large townhouses in Pilot Knob and under the old Nikwasi' mound in North Carolina, and under Blood Mountain, at the head of Notley river, in Georgia. They were invisible except when they wanted to be seen, and then they looked and spoke just like other Indians. They were fond of music and dancing, and hunters in the mountains would often hear the dance songs and the drum beating in some invisible townhouse, but when they went toward the sound it would shift about and they would hear it behind them or away in some other direction, so that they could never find the place where the dance was. They were a friendly people, too, and often brought lost wanderers to their townhouses under the mountains and cared for them there until they were rested and then guided them back to their homes.

Suggested Activities:

- Ask students to conduct a research report on other folk tales from your area. Perhaps their family has stories that have been passed down.
- Students could also write their own tale using several of the common elements of folk tales and mythology.
- Use the Discussion Questions worksheet for students to write about the readings in this lesson.