

# ANIMATED TALES — OF THE — WORLD™

## Poland: The Flower of Fern



### Background

In the northern hemisphere, during the summer solstice, the sun reaches its northernmost point. This is a time of many cultural celebrations, particularly throughout Europe. Many observed traditions are pre-Christian in origin. In some cultures, herbs and flowers are believed to have magical powers. In this tale, a young man finds one of these magical flowers and is granted a gift of great wealth. Folk literature terms relevant to this tale are provided below:

**folk literature/folklore** — Traditional tales, knowledge and beliefs handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth.

**folktale** — A type of folk literature that has grown from the lives and imaginations of people. Folktales often tell of the adventures of human or animal characters and sometimes attempt to explain the physical or spiritual world. Folktales can be organized into several different categories.

**magic and wonder tales** — A type of folktale. These stories contain some element of magic. This magic can be used for good or bad. The granting of wishes and animal-human transformations are common in this type of folktale.

**moral tale** — A story in which a lesson is learned or a message is conveyed. Sometimes, the moral is left for listeners or readers to determine for themselves, while at other times it is explicitly stated.

### Program Summary

With the approach of Midsummer's Eve, life is difficult at the home of Pawel and his family. With their harvest ruined and their chickens gone, Pawel decides that it is up to him to find food for his father, mother and sister in the forest. While in the forest, he happens upon a mysterious and magical flower that only blooms on Midsummer's Eve. The flower offers Pawel more gold than any man alive but he is to share it with no one. After reflecting on what to do, Pawel elects to pick the flower and receive great riches. Almost immediately, a carriage appears from nowhere to whisk Pawel away to a mansion staffed by servants and filled with expensive possessions. At first, this brings Pawel great happiness. Over time, however, his happiness fades. One day, while traveling, he comes across the village and farm of his family. He sees his family but acts coldly because he knows that sharing anything with them would cause him to lose his wealth. Pawel returns home to his mansion even more distressed. Time passes and Pawel decides to visit the home of his family once more to apologize for leaving them. However, only his sister is left. Regretful of his actions, Pawel decides to choose his sister over his wealth by offering her some bread. Reunited as a family, they live happily ever after.

### Pre-viewing Discussion

- Storytelling has been a means to entertain, educate and transmit history and culture since ancient times. Discuss the different functions of storytelling and then watch this tale to determine its function.
- Find Poland's location on a map. Discuss its Central European location and the countries that border it. Use the map and other geographical information to make inferences about the landscape and people of that place. How might this information be relevant to a story set in this location?
- What does happiness mean to you? Invite students to write and share their own definitions for this term. Then, they can generate a list of all the things that bring them happiness.

### Follow-Up Discussion

- "Money can't buy happiness" is a popular saying. Discuss the meaning of this saying and its relevance to this tale.
- Pawel experiences a range of feelings and emotions over the course of this tale. Recount the major events of this tale and determine Pawel's feelings during each one. When was Pawel the happiest and when was he most distressed? How would you describe his feelings at the very end of the tale?
- Recall the events and characters of this tale. Which parts were realistic? Which parts were magical?

### Follow-up Activities

- *Poland: The Flower of Fern* is an example of a moral tale — a story in which a lesson is learned or conveyed. Here, the tale's protagonist deals with the consequences of choosing wealth over family. Have students compare this tale to other moral tales. Consider watching *Wales: King March*, *Japan: Crossing the Snow*, and *Arabia: The Crown and the Sceptre*, and discuss the lesson associated with each tale. Do these tales share any common threads? Encourage students to get creative and come up with their own moral tales. Students can write and illustrate their stories or prepare for a dramatic storytelling.
- When Pawel decides to pick the flower, he disappears from his home and family for a long time. Consider how Pawel felt over time as well as how his sister and parents felt. Select a character and write a series of journal entries from that point of view. How does Pawel's absence affect life on his family's farm? How does Pawel feel about the people he meets in his new mansion? Do these characters' feelings change over time?
- At the end of this tale, Pawel is relieved to be rid of the riches granted to him by the flower of the fern. In addition, he is thrilled to be reunited with his younger sister, Krysia. Have students pretend that they are Pawel or Krysia and make posters warning people of the consequences associated with finding and picking the mysterious and magical flower in the forest. Give a detailed sketch of what the flower looks like and provide information and advice of what to do if faced with choosing the riches that the flower offers. Hang these posters around the classroom.
- Many traditions and celebrations are centered around the time of the summer solstice. For example, around this time in Poland, girls place wreaths of flowers and candles, called *wianki*, in a river. In addition, certain flowers and herbs, like the one Pawel finds, are believed to have magical powers. Engage students in an investigation of traditions and legends around the world that are linked to the summer solstice. Consult Ellen Jackson's *Summer Solstice* (Lerner Publishing Group, 2001) or visit [www.kidspoint.org/columns2.asp?column\\_id=783&column\\_type=kpholiday](http://www.kidspoint.org/columns2.asp?column_id=783&column_type=kpholiday). Students can share what they learned in the form of a classroom book. As an extension, include a few pages that describe the science behind the solstice.

(Continued)

- *Wycinanki* is a type of Polish folk art that consists of paper cut designs. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, they were used to decorate the interior walls of homes. The cutouts were symmetrical with nature designs and geometric shapes. Invite students to practice this traditional Polish art of paper cutting by visiting [www.info-poland.buffalo.edu/classroom/wycinanki/text.html](http://www.info-poland.buffalo.edu/classroom/wycinanki/text.html) for patterns. After trying the patterns, challenge students to make their own original paper cut designs, perhaps even creating designs that resemble the magical flower Pawel encountered in the forest.
- Act it out! Recreate this tale in your classroom. This can be done as a puppet show, a mime skit, a student play, etc. In preparation for the production, examine and critically think about the story's elements of characters, setting and plot. Consider how the story might change if the setting was a different time and place.
- Before folktales were written or turned into films, they were passed down orally, from one generation to the next. Introduce students to the art of storytelling. Discuss different ways in which the storyteller can engage listeners (e.g., using sound and gestures, giving vivid sensory details). Practice storytelling techniques by having each student retell a portion of this tale.
- Compare Poland today with the setting and people portrayed in the folktale. Organize these similarities and differences using a Venn diagram,

## Suggested Internet Resources

- [www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2875.htm](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2875.htm)  
This site, assembled by the U.S. Department of State, presents information on the geography, history, people, culture, government and economy of Poland.
- [www.poland.gov.pl/index.php](http://www.poland.gov.pl/index.php)  
This comprehensive site features up-to-date information about Poland's history, geography, culture people, politics and economy. Presented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the republic of Poland.
- [library.thinkquest.org/CR0212302/poland.html](http://library.thinkquest.org/CR0212302/poland.html)  
This ThinkQuest site highlights Poland. Discover what a kid's daily life there is like.
- [www.darsie.net/talesofwonder/](http://www.darsie.net/talesofwonder/)  
This archive of folk and fairy tales from around the world presents a sampling of the many stories that make up our world's oral tradition.

## Suggested Print Resources

*To learn more about the land and people of Poland:*

- Dell'Oro, Suzanne Paul. *Poland*. Capstone Press, Mankato, MN; 2006.
  - Grajner, Paul, Pawet Grajner & Jay Heale. *Poland*. Benchmark Books, Tarrytown, NY; 2005.
- If you are interested in other tall tales from Europe, you might also enjoy:*
- San Souci, Robert D. *Brave Margaret: An Irish Adventure*. Aladdin Paperbacks, New York, NY; 2002.
  - Sierra, Judy. *The Beautiful Butterfly: A Folktale from Spain*. Clarion Books, Boston, MA; 2000.
  - Sturges, Philemon and Anna Vojtech. *Marusbka and the Month Brothers*. North-South, New York, NY; 1996. A Slavic folktale.

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| • China: The Magic Paintbrush            | • Ireland: Fionn                                 | • Russia: The Two Brothers                             |  |



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