

## ***Monkey King: Journey to the West Lesson Plan 4***

### **The Trickster Figure in *Monkey King***

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#### **Overview:**

The fourth and final lesson will start with a brief lesson on archetypes. Students will be asked to consider how *Journey to the West* use of the trickster archetype allows for the episodic nature of the novel and its social critique.

#### **Objectives:**

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Define archetypes such as “trickster” and “picaro.”
- Better understand the structure of *Journey to the West* by writing a new episode for Monkey and gang.

#### **Class Structure:**

*10 minutes:* Introduction to archetypes

- Start the lecture by providing students with Murfin & Ray’s definition of archetype: “In literary criticism, those images, figures, character types, settings, and story patterns that, according to twentieth-century Swiss analytical psychologist Carl Jung, are universally shared by people across cultures” (24).
  - Examples of archetypes include: hero, villain, trickster, snake, flood, overcoming death
  - Explain to students that the idea of archetypes has considerable purchase with certain scholars. Northrop Frye, for example, argues that there are “images and symbols so prevalent in literature as to provide a common thread through the diverse literary experience of individuals” (Murfin & Ray 25).
- Ask students to provide examples of archetypes that they know. Keep a list on the board or PowerPoint. Once students have generated a few examples, ask them which of the archetypes seems to change based on context (time, place, culture, text).

*25 minutes:* Tricksters: Group Brainstorming Activity

- After students have a grasp on different archetypes and their cultural contexts, introduce them to another archetype: the trickster.

As Hongmei Sun observes, “Although the term ‘trickster’ was developed originally in non-Eastern mythology and folklore, it has been applied to characters from Asian mythology,” including Monkey King (Sun, 21).

- Now, ask the class to list any trickster characters they know, as well as characteristics of tricksters. Keep a list of what the students mention.

According to Sun: “Trickster figures breaks borders, and although tricksters are culturally specific, examples from different traditions share common characteristics that can serve as an initial guide or typology and can be used to measure their degree of ‘tricksterness’:

ambiguous and anomalous personalities; deception and trick-playing; shape-shifting; situation-inverting; serving as messengers for and sometimes imitating the gods; and a combination of sacred and lewd behavior” (22).

- Then, introduce the “pícaro” as a specific kind of trickster, providing students with the following definition from Murfin and Ray: “From the Spanish pícaro, meaning ‘rogue,’ a [picaresque] novel... recounts the adventures of a carefree but engaging rascal who always manages to escape by the skin of his or her teeth. The picaresque novel is episodic in structure, its unity resulting from the near-constant presence of the central character, who comes from low social class and generally lives by his or her wits rather than by honest, hard work. Pícaros, though adept at trickery, generally do not engage in serious criminal behavior; furthermore, they do not change, evolve, develop, or grow in the way conventional novelistic protagonists do” (Murfin and Ray 327).
- Ask students to list ways that Monkey fits the idea of the pícaro. Also ask students “what similarities do you see between the different episodes so far in *Journey to the West*?” and “Do we see Monkey growing in the ways we would expect from a novel’s protagonist?”

#### 15 minutes: Creative Writing Activity

- Break students into groups of 2-3. Then, ask them to write a new episode for Monkey and the pilgrims. Their new story can be as short as a paragraph or two, but should consider the following questions:
  - What trouble might the pilgrims find themselves in?
  - How do Monkey, Pigsy, Sandy, and Tripitaka respond to the situation at hand?
  - Where does this episode take place? Also, when does this story take place within the novel?

#### 25 minutes: Post-Activity Discussion

- After students have created their story, have the class come back together and ask groups to share their stories. Ask students:
  - In what ways is your story influenced by Monkey’s trickster antics?
  - In what ways was your story influenced by what Monkey, Pigsy, Sandy, and Tripitaka have done in other episodes?
  - What do you think our characters have learned in this episode?
  - In what ways does your story reflect or deviate from what we’ve read of *Journey to the West* so far?
- End class with a discussion of how Monkey’s trickster characterization allows for *Journey to the West*’s episodic nature. Discuss whether Monkey grows as a character and what his tricks reveal about his society.

#### Sources:

Knight, Sabrina. “Vernacular Drama and Fiction: Gardens, Bandits, Dreams” in *Chinese Literature: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford UP, 2011, pp. 69-83.

Lovell, Julia, translator. *Monkey King: Journey to the West*. By Wu Cheng’en. Penguin, 2021.

Murfin, Ross, and Supryia M. Ray. *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*. 4th ed. Macmillan, 2018.

Sun, Hongmei. "Who is Sun Wukong? The Image of the Monkey King in *Journey to the West*," In *Transforming Monkey: Adaptation and Transformation of a Chinese Epic*. U of Washington Press, 2018.