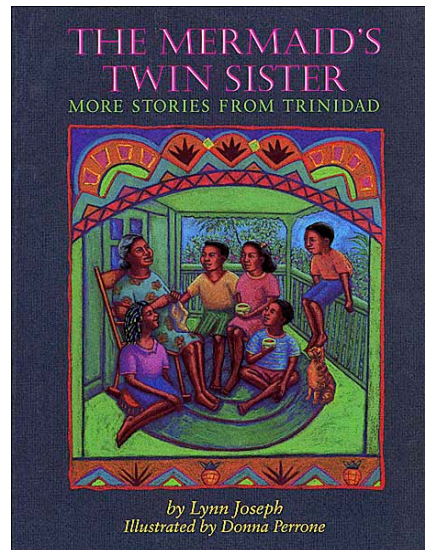


"Amber, if you swim in de sea on Easter, you go turn into a mermaid and you go never come back."

Lynn Joseph



The Mermaid's Twin Sister

Lynn Joseph
Donna Perrone [Illustrator]
Clarion 1994

Grade Levels

6-9

Curriculum Area

Language Arts • Social Studies

National Language Arts Standards

NL-ENG.K-12.8

DEVELOPING RESEARCH SKILLS

Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

National Social Studies Standards

THE WORLD IN SPATIAL TERMS

Students should understand how to use maps and other geographic tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective.

NSS-G.K-12.4 HUMAN SYSTEMS

Students should understand the characteristics, distribution, and migration of human populations on Earth's surface.

Objectives

To provide a range of culturally diverse literature meeting students' needs to understand themselves, understand worldviews and other cultures.

To provide meaningful, authentic opportunities to read vocabulary in a variety of contexts; language in a cultural context.

To gain knowledge of literature, art and history of the Trinidad culture.

Overview and Excerpt

Every Sunday, after Mama, Daddy, and me come back from church and eat lunch, we pack up the car and go to Maracas Beach. At the beach we find a good spot between two coconut trees and lay out the towels. Then Mama sits and reads a book and daddy and me carry the rubber raft down to the water and pretend we are sailing for a new island.

But one Sunday of the year we never ever go to the beach, and that is Easter Sunday. In fact, nobody I know goes to the beach on that Sunday. We go to church and then come back home and eat a big lunch, but we don't go anything else for the rest of the day. All we do is sit on the porch and watch the sun set. Every Easter I asked Mama why we can't go to the beach like other Sundays. But she would only shake her head and say, "Because I say so."

Then this Easter she told me why. She said, "Amber, if you swim in de sea on Easter, you go turn into a mermaid and you go never come back." I could see from her face that she wasn't joking.

When I asked Tantie about it later, she nodded her head. "Your mama didn't tell you before, cause she 'fraid you go want to try it and see

yourself. But is true, and those mermaids never come back from de sea."

"But Tantie, who all yuh know went swimming and turn into a mermaid?"

Tantie gave me a look that say, "You go doubt me?" I glanced away. But I was feeling doubtful. I mean it wasn't like I ever hear Tantie or Mama say they saw a mermaid. And I sure never did see one. But I didn't say another word. And Tantie went on inside the house to talk to Mama, leaving me outside watching the sun go down and wondering what would really happen if I went swimming on Easter Sunday.

Tantie, Amber's great-aunt, passes the traditions and values of their Trinidad culture to the many children in the extended family. She has chosen Amber to be her successor, and it is Amber who faithfully records the stories. All the stories have a tinge of the supernatural. For example, in the title story, Jill mourns her identical twin sister, Tilly, who, 50 years earlier, defied the prohibition against swimming on Easter and disappeared beneath the waves. Swimming out to save her, Jill, overcome by exhaustion, was saved when Tilly took hold of her hair and towed her to shallow water. Tilly had been turned into a mermaid, but the sea did not recognize Jill as a separate person, believing her to be Tilly's reflection. Tilly remained in the sea, and Jill never aged after that day.

[Joseph Lynn. *The Mermaid's Twin Sister* Clarion Books, New York 1994, Pages 10-17. http://www.humanity.org/voices/folklore/mermaids/twin_sister/]

Activity

Lynn Joseph, a writer from the Diaspora, incorporates the folk tradition in a very wide sense both in cultural content and in language. Joseph includes festivals, ceremonies, culinary features and rhythms of Caribbean Creole life, alongside supernatural tales in her depiction of oral and folk traditions.

Research Trinidad's Carnival and find out the roots and origins.

Trinidad's Carnival

The root of the distinctively explosive Trinidadian Carnival is undoubtedly to be located in the African claiming of space in the process of the struggle for liberation. The old name for this Carnival is Canboulay [cannes

brulee], which has been viewed as a reference to the burning cane characteristic of the "slave revolt".

Trinidad's Carnival departs from this living African spiritual energy released in resistance to colonial oppression, the struggle to define Selfhood, the defining of Landscape as "home".

Yet unlike Jamaica, Trinidad in its structuring is not a "slave" society, but an immigrant society. Africans came there from other Caribbean islands, mostly Grenada, Barbados and St. Vincent, bringing with them the legacy of struggle against enslavement and oppression, bringing with them their creative genius. Jamaican traditions are also evident. Africans also came in the post-emancipation period with living ancestral traditions direct from the Continent.

[Trinidad's Carnival: <http://www.trinidad-tobago.net/Article.aspx?PageId=80>]

Activity

"Colin's Island" and "Tantie's Callaloo Fête" are created out of Trinidad's oil wealth history and multiethnic composition, respectively. In "Colin's Island," during a drought a young man implores the sea to yield to him the treasures of its water, so that his grandmother's wish to see flowers before she dies can be fulfilled. Flowers surround his grandmother's bedside, but in addition, an island of oil emerges from the sea, which he alone can see. He subsequently wishes the island away when he becomes aware of the consequences of environmental pollution and greed that can accrue. Not long after Tantie, the grandaunt tells this story to the children, oil is discovered in the sea around South Trinidad. The children discuss the implications. Tantie leaves them to find answers on their own.

Infused in this folktale are (1) the need for responsible environmental practices to safeguard against pollution, and (2) that the history of the island is an on-going documentation.

In "Tantie's Callaloo Fête," the island cultural pot is threatened because the crab-man has migrated, and so a crucial ingredient of the cosmopolitan mix up endangers the holding of the feast for that year. It is the children who gather the crabs for the pot so that the feast can take place. The tale draws on Trinidadian values such as the importance of all racial groups and multiethnic tolerance in the Trinidadian society, composed of many races,

religions and cultures.

Discuss the importance of all racial groups and multiethnic tolerance in Trinidad. How has this come about?

Activity

By the end of the second folktale volume, *The Mermaid's Twin Sister*, Tantie, the storyteller has successfully passed on the gift of storytelling, oral features and all, to Amber the twelve-year old female narrator, so that she can continue the oral tradition that has sustained the family over generations.

What then are the major observations that can be made about the West Indian children's folk tradition in its passage from oratory to literature?

Activity

Have your students read and research the people uprooted by the slave trade from West Africa. Talk about the countries and groups most affected and have them list what the people there are like including their music, languages, occupations and lifestyles. Have them do the same for the places in the Caribbean such as Trinidad where many of the slaves were sold and discuss the idea of colonialism in the slave trading countries.

How different or the same are the people in the two places? Why are they the same or different? What other elements may have created a change in their culture?

Have your students locate the countries in the western "horn" of Africa on a map. Do the same for the main islands in the Southern Caribbean. Have them locate these areas with longitude and latitude. Find capital cities, rivers, mountain ranges, deserts, and discuss nearby countries and continents. Find out what hemispheres these places are in and how close to the equator they are. Discuss how their closeness to the equator and other geographical issues can affect these countries and the lifestyles of the people there.

Discuss the idea of the pre-lenten Carnival such as the ones held in New Orleans (Mardi Gras), Rio de Janeiro, and Trinidad. Have the students look up facts about the different traditional music, dress and customs at each Carnival on the Internet. Compare and contrast this same event that occurs in three different cultures through its music and visual arts. Have the students discuss which styles

they like best and why.

Resources

Joseph, Lynn. *Jump up Time: A Trinidad Carnival Story*. New York: Clarion Books, 1998.

Joseph, Lynn. *Island Christmas*. Sagebrush Education Resources. 1996.

Joseph, Lynn. *The Mermaid's Twin Sister: More Stories From Trinidad*. New York: Clarion. 1994.

Internet Websites

Mermaid Tales Around the World
<http://www.humanity.org/voices/folklore/mermaids/>

The Mermaid's Twin Sister
http://www.humanity.org/voices/folklore/mermaids/twin_sister/

Trinidad's Carnival
<http://www.trinidad-tobago.net/Article.aspx?PageId=80>

I Believe In Jumbies
<http://www.trinidad-tobago.net/Article.aspx?PageId=6>

Trinidad and Tobago Caribbean Child Folklore
<http://berdina.tripod.com/folklore.htm>

Callaloo
<http://chookooloonks.typepad.com/callaloo/>

The Best of Trinidad and Tobago
<http://www.bestoftrinidad.com>

A History of the Steel Drum
<http://www.magictree.com/steeldrums/about.htm>

Listen to Steel Pan Music
<http://www.panonthenet.com>