

WRITING AN EPIC POEM WORKSHEETS

This activity helps your teen write his very own adventurous epic poem, featuring an imagined hero.

What You Do: Ask your child to choose an epic hero. They should work together to identify what each of the elements they have compiled symbolizes. Ask students to define "oral tradition" and "literary tradition. There should be some purpose to their adventure. Ask students to fill in the right side of the chart with the corresponding information from an example of a story that follows the epic hero cycle. Your child can write a poem that also has a secret sentence hidden within the words of the poem. With so much information and detail to remember, how was it possible for bards to memorize thousands of verses of poetry? These stories were originally passed on by bards, or professional poets who made their living by singing folk tales and epic poems to audiences. Ask students to work with their groups to come up with answers for why traveling bards might have localized elements of the stories they told as they traveled from one city or town to the next. Explain to students that epic poetry has its roots in oral, rather than literate tradition. They can either choose themselves, a family member, or a god or goddess from ancient history. Ask students to work together on reasons why there are similar elements in each of these stories. Brainstorm ideas about why your epic hero needs to leave home, what they're going to encounter along the journey, and how they will successfully complete the quest. When they're all done, invite them to decorate the borders of the epic poem with drawings of the characters or setting. While they may not all remember or agree on certain details of the stories they have discussed in class—was Cinderella's dress pink? If the teller can remember these markers, he or she can then elaborate and expand the details of the story for specific audiences, making the telling more personal to the audience. Ask students to think of examples of stories set in distant times and places that have been changed to bring the stories closer to contemporary audiences. Activity 2. The structure, length, and style are entirely up to them. Students will probably find that there is broad agreement on most of the elements on their list: why did most or all of the students in their group identify the same moments or elements in the story? Pass it On! Ask them to imagine memorizing a novel, which they would then retell. While the details of the poem often shifted from one telling to the next, the most important elements of the story always remained the same. Do they notice similarities in these lists? Divide students into small groups where they will work on definitions of "oral tradition" and "literate tradition. Tips for Parents: Writing an epic story or poem can be especially helpful for kids who might be experiencing a hard time or facing a move to a new city or state. How does the presence of these similar elements in the fables or fairy tales they have just discussed help them to remember the sequence of events in those stories? Examples might include movies such as *West Side Story*, *Troy*, or the recent modern telling of Cinderella in which the ball is imagined as a school prom. Next, ask students to compare their list of story elements with other groups in the class. More advanced students can be asked to complete a more extensive essay. Ask students to write an essay about the contemporary telling of an old story which answers the following two questions: Does changing the time, place, or details such as the style of dress in the "updated" story affect the main elements of the story, or the story's message? Ask students to identify elements such as the opening invocation in the opening lines of these poems or the connection of the hero to his homeland, which is the basis for many epic heroes as national figures. For example, a list of elements for Cinderella would probably include Cinderella, the wicked step mother and her two daughters, the prince, the fairy godmother, the glass slippers, the pumpkin coach, her banishment on the night of the ball, her running from the ball at midnight, losing her slipper along the way, and the moment when her foot fits the glass slipper. Why do story tellers including movie directors change the story to bring it closer in time and space to its audience? How might similar elements, or the presence of a predictable story cycle such as the epic hero cycle, helped bards in the memorization of much longer epic poems?