The Ballad of Mulan: A Close Reading Activity

In this lesson, students will read and reread a classic Chinese folktale, The Ballad of Mulan. They will ask and answer text-dependent questions and will recount the events in the story using a story map. Students will determine the central message of the story and analyze Mulan’s actions, thoughts, and feelings and how they contribute to the sequence of events and, ultimately, the moral of the story.

Learning Objectives: What should students know and be able to do as a result of this lesson?

Students will be able to:

- ask and answer questions about the text, The Ballad of Mulan, referring to the text for answers.
- recount the important events and details in the story to determine its central message.
- describe the character of Mulan and how her actions contributed to the sequence of events.
- use vocabulary strategies (such as context clues) to determine the meaning of unknown words in the text.
- write an opinion piece that includes support from the text, using grade-appropriate organization, grammar, and conventions.

Prior Knowledge: What prior knowledge should students have for this lesson?

Students should know:

- the elements of a story: characters, setting, problem, solution, major events.
- strategies for determining the meaning of words: context clues, word parts, and dictionary use.
- how to determine the central message or moral of a folktale.
- how to analyze characters based on their response to events in the story.
Guiding Questions: What are the guiding questions for this lesson?

- How does reading a text closely help us better understand the text?
- What strategies can we use to determine the meaning of words in the text?
- What elements do we need to include when we recount, or retell, a text?
- How does analyzing story elements help us determine the central message in a story?
- How does a character's actions, thoughts, and feelings contribute to the sequence of events in a story?

Teaching Phase: How will the teacher present the concept or skill to students?

Introduction:

Ask students to share a time when they were brave. Allow them to share with a partner, then call on several students to share aloud. Then ask them to share examples of jobs that people have that require bravery, such as firefighters, police officers, etc. Tell students that the text they will be reading is about someone who was considered brave. Ask, “How does reading a text closely help us better understand the text?” Discuss.

First Reading:

1. Display (or provide copies of) The Ballad of Mulan retold by Song Nan Zhang (540L, 3.7ATOS). Ask students to raise their hands if they have seen the Disney version of Mulan. Tell students that the movie and this text are retellings of a folktale that has been told and retold for a long time in the country of China. Remind students that folktales are old stories that have a central message, or moral, and have been passed down through many generations. Give examples of other folktales that students have read: The Three Little Pigs, The Little Red Hen, Cinderella, etc.

2. Provide students with a copy of the Vocabulary Graphic Organizer. Tell students that, as they read the story the first time, they are going to focus on words in the story that they may not know. Ask, “What strategies can we use to determine the meaning of words in the text?” Discuss vocabulary strategies: context clues and parts of a word. Note: There are two options for this task:

   Option 1: Provide students with preselected words that you would like them to focus on (see attached sample for examples). You can type in the words and the contextual sentence in advance and have students complete the rest of the graphic organizer. Explain that, after the story has been read once, they will predict the meaning of each word using either context clues or word parts strategies and will tell which strategy they used. When they have completed those two columns, then you will provide the meaning of the word (or allow them to look it up in the dictionary to confirm its meaning).

   Option 2: Explain to students that, as the story is read, they will write down words that they don’t know from the story. After the story has been read, they will share out words that they did not know and the teacher will create a list, then choose the 5-6 words that most students did not know to complete the Vocabulary Graphic Organizer. They will write the selected word in the first column, the sentence that it was used in from the text in the second column, their prediction of its meaning in the third column, what strategy they used to determine its meaning in the fourth column (context clues or word parts), and confirm its meaning in the last column (teacher directed or through dictionary use).

3. Remind students of their task and read the story aloud as students follow along. When finished, provide students with time to complete the vocabulary activity. Circulate and provide feedback as needed.

4. Go over the Vocabulary Graphic Organizer as a class, making corrections as needed.

5. Provide students with a sticky note and allow them to write a question they have about the text. Collect the questions, then go over each one and discuss the answers from the text (if text-dependent) or where the answers could be found (if not text-dependent).

Guided Practice: What activities or exercises will the students complete with teacher guidance?

Second Reading:

1. Ask, “What elements do we need to include when we recount, or retell, a text?” Tell students that they are now going to read the text again to identify the important story elements. Review the elements by displaying a story map (see related CPALMS resources - Story Mapping). Then read the story.

2. Ask the following text-dependent questions once the text has been read, reminding students to refer to the text for their answers:

   - Where does this story take place? When does it take place?
   - Who is the main character? What other characters are in the story?
   - What is the problem in the story?
   - Why is the Emperor calling for troops?
   - Why is the health of Mulan’s father an important factor in the story?
   - What are the events in the story, in order?
   - How is the problem solved?
   - Why did Mulan’s glory spread throughout the land?

3. Provide students with a copy of the story map. Pair them with a partner and have them complete the story map, recording the story elements. Circulate and provide feedback and guidance as needed.

4. Once the maps have been completed, ask “How does analyzing story elements help us determine the central message in a story?” Discuss. Review the events in the story, then have students turn to their partner and discuss what they think the central message or moral of the story is, explaining to their partner the key details that support the central message. After a brief discussion, have students write their answer on the back of the story map page. Allow students to share their responses and give examples of the details in the text that support their central message; provide feedback and guidance as needed.

Third Reading:

1. Ask, “How does a character's actions, thoughts, and feelings contribute to the sequence of events in a story?” Discuss. Explain to students that they are going to focus on the character of Mulan when they read the text this third time. Tell them that, as the story is read, they will look for Mulan’s thoughts, feelings, and actions throughout the story. (NOTE: If students have copies of the text, allow them to mark the text or place sticky notes as they read it independently or with a partner. If there is only a teacher's copy, then have students stop you as you read to place sticky note markers in the text.) Read the text (or have students read), noting Mulan’s thoughts, feelings, and actions. Once finished, discuss what the students noted in the text. Examples include:

   - sorrowful sighs
Father is old and frail
I must fight in Father's place
purchasing items from different markets
dressing in men's armor
sad farewell
thought she heard mother calling her name
longed to hear father's voice
rode ten thousand miles to fight a hundred battles
crossed peaks and passes
endured hardship
knowing her father was safe warmed her heart
returned as a great general
praised by Emperor
no need for honors or gold
asked to go home
smiled, removed armor and put on dress
brushed hair and pasted yellow flower on face
smiled in mirror
happy to be home
loved her family
served her country
asked for nothing in return

2. Put students into four groups. Give each group a set of text-dependent questions (see attached) to discuss and answer as a group. Remind students to refer to the text to support their answers. Allow students time to answer the questions. Repeat, rotating the sets of questions until each group has an opportunity to discuss and answer all four sets of questions. Circulate and provide feedback and guidance as needed.

3. Provide students with copies of Character Analysis Worksheets (see related CPALMS resources - Character Consideration - Pages SS1 and SS4). With a partner, have students complete the worksheets using examples from the text to analyze the character of Mulan. Circulate and provide feedback and guidance as needed. Once students have completed the two pages, discuss their responses and provide feedback as needed. Ask, “How did Mulan's actions contribute to the sequence of events in the story?” Discuss. Ask, “If Mulan had acted differently, would the outcome of the story be the same? Why or why not?” Discuss.

Independent Practice: What activities or exercises will students complete to reinforce the concepts and skills developed in the lesson?
Students will write an opinion piece in response to the following prompt:

   In The Ballad of Mulan, how did the character's actions contribute to the central message of the story? Use examples from the text to support your opinion.

Students may use their graphic organizers from the previous activities. The opinion piece will be evaluated using the attached rubric. Note: The rubric should be shared with students prior to their writing to ensure understanding of the expectations for the written piece.

Closure: How will the teacher assist students in organizing the knowledge gained in the lesson?
1. Allow students to share their opinion writing.
2. Review guiding questions.

Summative Assessment
Students will write an opinion piece in response to the following prompt:

   In The Ballad of Mulan, how did the character's actions contribute to the central message of the story? Use examples from the text to support your opinion.

The opinion piece will be evaluated using the attached rubric.

Formative Assessment
Students will complete a variety of graphic organizers as they engage in close reading of the text. The teacher will be able to ascertain student understanding of the reading skills and comprehension of the text based on the students' written and oral responses.

Feedback to Students
Students will receive oral feedback throughout the lesson. As they are completing the graphic organizers, the teacher can circulate and provide guidance through questioning, such as:

   What do you think that word means?
   How did you determine the meaning of the word? Does that make sense in the context that the word is being used?
   Where in the text did you find the answer to that question?
   What does the text tell us about ____________? What do we have to infer?

Accommodations & Recommendations

Accommodations:

   Students can work with a partner for the guided practice activities.
   Reduce the number of words that students will need to define in the vocabulary activity. Fill in the first two columns in advance with preselected words to reduce the amount of writing needed to complete the task.
   Ask fewer questions, choosing the ones most important for overall comprehension.
   The events can be pre-written for the story map and students can sequence the events instead of determining the events on their own.
Aligned Standards

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>LAFS.3.L.3.4:</td>
<td>Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning word and phrases based on grade 3 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.</td>
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<td>b. Determine the meaning of the new word formed when a known affix is added to a known word (e.g., agreeable/disagreeable, comfortable/uncomfortable, care/careless, heat/preheat).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c. Use a known root word as a clue to the meaning of an unknown word with the same root (e.g., company, companion).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>d. Use glossaries or beginning dictionaries, both print and digital, to determine or clarify the precise meaning of key words and phrases.</td>
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<td>LAFS.3.RL.1.1:</td>
<td>Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.</td>
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<td>LAFS.3.RL.1.2:</td>
<td>Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.</td>
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<td>LAFS.3.RL.1.3:</td>
<td>Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.</td>
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<td>LAFS.3.W.2.4:</td>
<td>With guidance and support from adults, produce writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task and purpose. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)</td>
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