

## **Methodology and Resources for Integrating Roma Culture in Education (EURROM)**

*Name of organisation:*  
**Intercultural Institute of Timisoara**

### **EURROM Guide - Excerpt**

#### **Module 10: The Tale**

1. Argument
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The tales are for a long time part of the curriculum of primary schools. They represent an excellent instrument for learning fundamental knowledge and skills through motivating and interesting activities that are also stimulating the creativity of children. This module suggests teachers that have Roma children in their class to also use tales for valuing Roma culture and developing a positive cultural identity at Roma children as well as attitudes based on respect and openness to cooperation at all children.

The tales have, without any doubt, a fundamental dimension touching the deep sensitivity of any human being. They have a common structure, as well as contents and messages that go beyond cultural specificities but they also represent an important part of the heritage of each society. Indeed, by describing initiatic journeys of heroes that are accomplishing a fabulous destiny, overcoming traps set by mythical characters such as witches, monsters, dragons, etc., being helped by fairies or other magic positive characters, the tales say a lot about the cultures where they are circulating and in which they are rooted. Tales have played an important role in the socialisation process in the traditional societies, where they have been transmitted orally from one generation to the other. This is still the case in some traditional Roma communities, where oral communication and group cohesion are still defining cultural characteristics, but in most cases their social character has been lost in the current post-industrial societies. Tales are now published in books and read individually and have become objects of study for ethnologists, linguists and even psychoanalysts. Roma traditional tales have also been collected, analysed and published.

Of course, wherever there is a living tradition of storytelling and where traditional tales are still part of the community life, it is very useful to include them in the learning process as they can represent valuable tools for enhancing the self-esteem of Roma children, too often confronted with situations that put them in an inferior position, and for stimulating the other children to overcome the stereotypes and prejudices regarding Roma.

However, this module is recommended also in the cases where there is no Roma traditional tale transmitted in the community, nor access to published Roma tales, with the same positive impact on the identity of Roma children and on the relations and attitudes towards Roma in the school.

The activity consists in the joint writing by all the children in a class of a tale whose hero is a young Roma, and where other characters and elements of the story can be linked with the Roma culture. The tale is then transformed in a theatre performance and presented in front of an audience, as a separate event, or as part of a wider school festivity.

Thus, by allowing Roma and non-Roma children to work together on such a topic, not only that they develop their creativity and learn about tales, as the curriculum requires, but they also develop better mutual relations and attitudes, as well as respect for cultural diversity in general, better communication and relational skills, and awareness of the importance of respecting everyone's rights.

2. Objectives	
General objectives	Specific objectives focus on:
Developing knowledge of various aspects concerning tales	O1: identifying a tale among other literary texts; O2: identifying the structure of a tale and comparing different tales based on their structure; O3: identifying in a tale specific cultural elements, particularly elements of Roma culture.
Developing communication, cooperation, democratic decision-making and conflict management skills	O4: active listening and oral communication skills; O5: written expression and transfer from oral to written communication and vice versa; O6: creativity and artistic expression skills; O7: processing information (extracting key ideas, reformulating without changing meaning, prioritizing and structuring ideas) and identifying the most appropriate ways to communicate (orally, in written and nonverbally); O8: working as a team and making decisions in a democratic way; O9: dealing with disagreement and finding constructive and win-win solutions;
Developing self-esteem and respect for ones own cultural identity and for the cultural identity of others	O10: increase self-esteem of Roma children; O11: positive attitudes towards Roma and overcoming stereotypes and prejudice; O12: openness towards people with different cultural background, interest in knowing about other

	cultures; O13: sensitivity towards combating inequality and discrimination.
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### 3. Planning of activities

This activity should be planned for a wider period of time, a semester or even the whole school year. The module is envisaged to be implemented in a cross-curricular perspective, in connection with several curriculum topics, as it aims at developing a variety of competencies.

Some activities (points 4.2. and 4.3. or 4.3 and 4.4.) can be implemented either in parallel or successively.

### 4. Description of activities

#### **4.1. Introducing the topic and initial planning with the pupils**

The teacher introduces the activity as aiming at creating a tale having as main hero a young Roma and that the tale will be transferred into a performance presented during a school celebration. Then asks pupils to reflect on what will be needed for this.

This will lead to the need to understand what is a tale and knowing more about Roma. An overall plan is established, included the steps described below and taking into account the local constraints. (O4, O7, O8)

Pupils will be asked to define some key rules and procedures that everybody should respect during the activities and to agree on what procedures should be used in case of disagreement or if someone does not accomplish the tasks assigned or does not comply with the rules. These rules will remain displayed in the classroom so that it will be easy to refer to them anytime during the activities. (O8, O9)

Duration: 1 hour

#### **4.2. Understanding the structure of a tale**

Reading of various tales (classic, traditional, modern). These can be suggested by the pupils. Identifying the characteristics and the structure of tales, by analogy and contrast with other types of texts. (O1, O2, O3)

Elaborating a grid for describing the main elements of a tale (see the annex to this module) (O2, O7)

Duration: 4 weeks

### **4.3. Getting information about Roma culture**

Discussion in the class on what children know about Roma culture and how they can learn more. Ideas will come out to talk with Roma parents, leaders of the Roma communities, members of Roma organizations or organizations that work with Roma, specialists, etc. (O4, O7, O9)

Research done by small groups (discussions, interviews with various sources of information). (O3, O4, O7, O8, O9, O10, O11, O12)

Inviting a Roma adult in the classroom to tell a tale, or talk about Roma traditions and/or answer the questions of the pupils (this should be carefully prepared according to the recommendations included in the previous sections). (O3, O4, O7, O8, O9, O10, O11, O12)

Synthetic discussion on Roma culture, putting together the information obtained. Discussion comparing what was obtained with the stereotypes of Roma and raising awareness on the negative impact of stereotypes in communication. (O3, O7, O9, O10, O11, O12, O13)

Duration: 4 weeks

### **4.4. Creating a tale**

Deciding on the hero and the main characters, places, situations, etc. Filling-in the grid with all the necessary details. Here the role of the teacher is essential in supporting the pupils to identify meaningful elements to be included in the tale and to make a parallel between the social reality that pupils have got to know through investigations and contacts with the Roma guest, key principles of justice, equality, equity, solidarity, and the situations and decisions included in the tale. Attention should be given at this stage to gender equality. Some specific formulas, names or words in Romani language can also be used. (O1, O2, O3, O5, O7, O8, O9, O10, O11, O12, O13)

Writing the final version of the tale. (O3, O5, O9)

Duration: 4 weeks

### **4.5. Preparing the performance**

Transforming the text of the tale into a script. (O5, O6, O7, O9)

Dividing the roles and tasks. At this stage it is important to make sure that there is a balanced distribution of Roma and non-Roma as well as of boys and girls, among both positive and negative characters, in order to avoid a tendency of opposition. Rehearsal. (O9, O10)

Creating the scenery and costumes. Special attention should be given to finding appropriate tasks, corresponding to their personal interests, skills and

competencies, for all Roma children in the class in order to put them in a successful position and recognise their achievements. (O6, O8, O10, O11)

Duration: 4 weeks

#### **4.6. Organising the performance**

Detailed planning of the performance and division of tasks among pupils. (O5, O6, O10, O11, O13)  
Making invitations and delivering them, posters, possible contacts with local media, etc. This is another opportunity to support Roma children with lower self-esteem, for instance by giving them the task to deliver invitations to the school principal, etc. (O5, O6, O10, O11, O13)  
Making the performance. (O6, O8, O10, O11)

Duration: 2 weeks

#### **4.7. Reflection and evaluation**

Reflection with the class on what has been learned throughout the whole process. Identifying strengths and weaknesses. What could have been done differently? Discussion on what can be done next and on how the tale and/or the performance can be used, promoted, disseminated. Allow expression of feelings and opinions related to all phases of the activity. (O4, O7, O9, O10, O11, O12, O13)

Duration 1 hour

#### **Notes, comments, suggestions**

Children should be involved as much as possible in all decisions taken while implementing the activities. This is why it is important to pay enough attention in the initial phase to the agreement on a set of rules. During implementation the teacher should refrain from interfering to impose a specific solution and should mainly act as a mediator and facilitator of the communication among the children in the class. Whenever necessary, teacher should encourage going back to the rules and checking if they are respected or if they need some amendments.

When working on such a topic with a mixed class (including Roma and non-Roma children), it is important to maintain a balance in the allocation of tasks and speaking time. This will be a good opportunity to recognize the interventions of Roma children, their abilities, their knowledge on their own culture, and, in general, their contribution to the activities. However, it is important to respect the right of the children to assert or not their ethno-cultural background.

While participation of parents or other members of the community is very important, the teacher should be careful that they do not do the work instead of

their children. To avoid misunderstanding and ensure support of all the parents, the whole process should be presented in a meeting with parents before the start of the activities.

The preparation of the performance and its organization can be done with low costs by appealing to the creativity of the children and using easy to find materials.

By using the computer for some activities (for instance, for writing the final text of the tale, for distributing the lines corresponding to each character in the script, or for preparing invitations and posters) the children will also develop useful computer skills.

#### 5. Materials needed for the module

Books with traditional tales or printed tale texts, paper (including big sheets for posters and paperboard for invitations); materials for scenery, computer (optional). Any materials related to Roma culture, history, traditions, language, etc., can also be useful.

#### 6. Outputs, follow-up, evaluation

This module includes a complex set of diverse activities that will be motivating for children, but also for parents and teacher. There are two concrete outputs resulting:

- the text of the tale created by the children, inspired by Roma culture and portraying the qualities of the hero (a young Roma);
- the performance prepared by the children.

The second one will also have a visible impact outside the class, and can contribute to a general improvement of attitudes towards Roma in the school and to an improvement of school-community relations, as the performance will be attended by pupils of other classes and by parents.

The evaluation should take into account both these outputs and the involvement of the children in the process that led to them.

#### Annex: Example of grid for analyzing a tale

Title of the tale

General comments (where was it found? who wrote it? is it connected to a specific cultural group? if yes, how can you tell this? etc)

Main characters

- the hero

- other characters (names and brief description)

Place(s)

Structure of the story

- introduction
- action (plot development, complication, climax, resolution)
- closing

Type of structure

- based on error (error and savior)
- based on search (tests and enemies)

Specific linguistic elements

- used in introduction and conclusion
- used to place the story in space and/or time
- used for designating the hero and some other characters
- others (standard or repeating formulas, key phrases)