



# LESSON 6

## The Literature “Cornection”

*Concepts of Reading Comprehension,  
Writing and Fine Arts.*

### FOCUS

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Student Objectives – Kentucky Performance Standards

- 1.2 Students make sense of the variety of materials they read.
- 2.20 Historical Perspective (elements of folk tales)
- 2.17 Cultural Diversity (All cultures develop customs and beliefs reflecting their unique histories and situations.)
- 1.11 Students write using appropriate forms, conventions, and styles to communicate ideas and information to different audiences for different purposes.

### BACKGROUND

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Corn is a focus of several legends and folk tales, particularly among the Native American culture. One of these is The Dragonfly’s Tale by Kristina Rodanas, based on an ancient Zuni story.

### PREPARATION AND MATERIALS

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- Copies of the book, The Dragonfly’s Tale, or copies of the following synopsis. Provide one per student, one per group, or simply read aloud to class.
- Corn Husk Dragonfly Materials:
  - corn husks (two pieces of husk per dragonfly - approximately 10” x 2” and 6” x 6”)
  - glue
  - glitter, beads, straight pens with heads (optional)
  - string
  - water paint
  - scissors

## TEACH

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### Introduction

Explain that corn has always been important in many cultures for thousands of years. In the Native American culture, in particular, corn was a most valuable resource. Many legends and folk tales have been passed from generation to generation telling of the importance and respect for corn. One Abenaki legend tells of the *origin* of corn:

*A man who was very lonely saw a young woman with golden hair, unlike any he had ever seen. She told him she would stay if he did anything she asked of him. She led him to a place with much dry grass and she ignited the dry grass into fire. She told him to take her by the hair and drag her over the burned ground. With a heavy heart, he did as she instructed. Afterwards he saw a plant that looked something like grass with her hair coming from behind the leaves. These, she told him, would be seeds that could be used for food. To this day, when Native Americans see the silks on the corn, they know that these are from the hair of the young woman and that she has not forgotten them.*

A Mayan folktale entitled The Corn Grows Ripe, by Dorothy Rhoads, is a folktale about how man was created from corn, as well as the Mayan's relationship with corn. Mayans and their descendants have been eating corn for more than 2,000 years. It is virtually a religious experience to prepare the land and grow corn. Their way of farming was based upon their climate - months of burning sun, followed by months of penetrating rains.

*The Creator first tried other substances (mud and wood) but found them to be unsuitable. Mud had no firmness or consistency, wood was too hard-hearted and stiff to worship the gods. So the next choice was corn. Man was to be made of corn and also exist by eating corn for energy, understanding, and health.*

The Corn is Ripe is the story of a boy's journey into responsibility and his place in his culture and religion. His experiences learning to grow corn and dealing with the elements to provide for his family led him into manhood.

### Activities:

1. **Read The Dragonfly's Tale.** Discuss the following or have students write answers individually for follow-up discussion.  
(This may also serve as assessment.)
  - \* What is the "moral" of the story? (don't be wasteful, treat others kindly, etc.)
  - \* Explain the scientific role of the dragonfly in the story. (pollination)
2. **Research dragonflies!**
3. **Read other legends or folk tales** and compare/contrast using a Venn diagram or other graphic organizer.
4. **Research various cultural festivals/celebrations** of groups that celebrate food and harvests such as Thanksgiving.

5. Many tales and legends have been told or written to explain scientific phenomena. **Write a legend or tale** to explain some other scientific phenomena. Some suggestions are:
 

* Why we need to eat!	* Why dogs have tails
* The legend of thunder and lightning	* How rainbows came to be
* Legend of wheat	
  
6. **Also see: *Why Corn Dolls Have No Features*** in the Social Studies Connection lesson.
  
7. **Read the book The Corn Grows Ripe.** In addition to the folktale, the book contains recipes for corn, jobs associated with corn production, and a glossary. The book's forward is filled with interesting information about the Mayan culture and the value they placed on corn.

## CONNECT

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### Art

Make dragonflies from corn husks. (See directions following this lesson plan.)

### Literature Connections

Corn is Maize, the Gift of the Indians, Alike

Written on a 2/3 grade level, this book explains the parts of the corn plant, conditions necessary for growing corn, pollination, history of corn, uses, and various food products made from corn.

Too Many Tamales, Gary Soto & Ed Martinez

Christmas time in a Spanish family includes making tamales with masa (corn meal). The mother's ring gets lost while cooking the tamales. The book explains the steps in making tamales such as spreading the masa on the corn husks.

Use historical fiction/non-fiction books such as Sign of the Beaver, Little House on the Prairie, Eating the Plates, or American Girl Series to research foods made from corn such as Johnny cakes. \* See "A Cornucopia of Social Studies" or "Corny Creations" Lessons for recipes!