

## Tricksters

The Trickster has a long history and a sizable mythic presence in many cultures. Tricksters push boundaries, and often reside outside of the boundaries of a society's norms. He has a certain freedom and nonchalance, illustrated by the tarot card entitled "The Fool," in which a jester is happily walking along, about to step off the cliff. Of course, no one can predict what he will do, or how things will turn out in response to his actions, his life does not follow any path that can be foreseen.

Many of us are familiar with several Trickster characters that live here in our own back yard. West African stories were brought to the Southern United States, long ago. Storytellers tell us about a trickster called Brer Rabbit, immortalized by Joel Chandler Harris in his "Uncle Remus" tales. His modern incarnation, Bugs Bunny, has been part of U.S. culture for decades. Coyote is the most prominent Native American trickster.

The European tradition of Court Fools and Jesters is part of a larger tradition of harlequins, puppets, jugglers, comedians, magicians, clowns and such, found everywhere from ancient China to the corporate world to the wrestling ring.

A cross-cultural helping of tricksters would also include (among many others) Mamo the Fool, Exu: The Divine Messenger (from Brazil), Legba (from Haiti), Native American's Raven and Glooscap, Germany's Tyl Ulenspiegel, France's Renard the Fox, Cuba's Eshu-Elegbara, and Anansi. (or Anancy, or Ananse), from West Africa. Learn about the Trickster of the Nordic gods, Loki the misunderstood trickster, and his adventures such as the binding of the Fenris Wolf and the theft of Idun's apples.



A great deal of information about The Trickster's many faces and talents can be found on-line (see our links page for some tips), and in the library. Discuss the qualities of a Trickster the students are familiar with, such as Bugs Bunny. Have the students research another Trickster character, from here or abroad, in small groups. Then have some fun!

They could act out a Trickster story, make up their own Trickster character, and create a story around him or her. You could have a Trickster day at school. Be creative and have fun!!