

Teaching Philippine Legends Through Dialogue: Cultural Meaning, Ethical Inquiry, and Evidence-Based Writing

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Abstract

Local legends can make literacy instruction culturally recognizable, but familiarity alone does not make a lesson culturally responsive or intellectually demanding. This conceptual article analyzes the use of The Legend of the Guava in Reading Enhancement for the Development of Learners, a Grade 6 teacher's guide and module, and develops a dialogic reading-to-writing design for cultural and ethical inquiry. The analysis focuses on how prompts position learners in relation to the story: as retrievers of information, recipients of a fixed moral, interpreters of evidence, or participants who can examine perspective, power, and cultural meaning. A five-move cycle is proposed: locate the story in cultural context, interpret character and consequence, complicate the apparent moral, deliberate across perspectives, and recompose understanding in writing. The cycle extends the module's literal and evaluative questions by requiring textual evidence, attention to voice and omission, respectful comparison with community knowledge, and revision of claims after discussion. It also addresses risks in teaching folklore, including presenting culture as uniform, reproducing stigmatizing descriptions, treating supernatural causation as uncontested fact, and using opinion questions without evidentiary standards. Two tools are provided: a question architecture for dialogic inquiry and an analytic guide for assessing cultural grounding, evidence, reasoning, perspective, and written communication. The article argues that legends are most educationally powerful when learners are invited to appreciate cultural inheritance while also examining how narratives construct values and social relations. The proposed design is a classroom-ready scholarly proposition; its effects must be established through future implementation research.

Keywords: Philippine legends; dialogic teaching; critical literacy; culturally responsive pedagogy; ethical inquiry; reading-to-writing

Introduction

Folklore enters the classroom with unusual pedagogical force. A legend can explain a familiar object, carry remembered values, and invite learners into a narrative world that feels closer than a generic textbook passage. Yet local content does not automatically produce culturally responsive teaching. A story can be familiar while the lesson remains teacher-dominated, treats culture as fixed, or permits only one acceptable moral. Culturally relevant pedagogy requires academic learning, cultural competence, and the capacity to examine social arrangements critically (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally sustaining pedagogy further asks whether education supports the continued presence and development of community languages and practices rather than merely using them as decoration (Paris & Alim, 2017).

Reading Enhancement for the Development of Learners uses The Legend of the Guava as the central text of a five-day Grade 6 sequence (Talan, 2021). Learners

encounter vocabulary, listen to and reread the story, answer literal questions, discuss the king's treatment of an old woman, choose between contrasting ways of life, complete oral and written assessments, and summarize the narrative. The sequence creates several openings for cultural and ethical inquiry. It also illustrates a common design challenge: prompts can move from recall to personal opinion without requiring learners to interpret how the story constructs its moral, whose perspective is centered, or how textual choices influence judgment.

A dialogic approach treats meaning as something developed through accountable interaction among text, reader, teacher, peers, and cultural knowledge. Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theory rejects the idea that literary meaning is simply extracted as a fixed object; meaning emerges through a reader's engagement with the text under particular purposes and conditions. Dialogue does not imply that every interpretation is equally warranted. Productive discussion asks learners to offer evidence, listen to alternatives, revise claims, and distinguish appreciation of cultural heritage from uncritical acceptance of every representation.

Purpose and Central Argument

This article examines how a Grade 6 legend-based module can support cultural interpretation, ethical reasoning, and evidence-based writing. It asks: How can classroom dialogue move learners beyond recall and ungrounded opinion while preserving respect for the cultural text? The central argument is that legends should be taught through a five-move reading-to-writing cycle that locates, interprets, complicates, deliberates, and recomposes meaning. The cycle makes room for cultural connection and critical examination within the same lesson.

Conceptual Orientation and Analytic Procedure

Dialogue, Culture, and Critical Literacy

Dialogic teaching organizes classroom talk so that contributions are collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative, and purposeful (Alexander, 2020). Its educational value depends on more than increasing the amount of student talk. Murphy et al. (2009), in a meta-analysis of discussion approaches, found that structured discussion can improve text comprehension and high-level thinking, but outcomes vary by approach and alignment. Talk must be connected to an intellectual object and governed by norms that make reasoning visible.

Critical literacy adds questions about representation and power. Janks (2010) describes literacy as involving domination, access, diversity, and design; readers need opportunities both to enter valued texts and to examine how those texts position people. Luke (2012) argues that critical literacy joins textual analysis with attention to social consequences. In a legend, this may involve asking how wealth, hunger, age, embodiment, authority, and punishment are narrated. Such questions do not require dismissing the story. They invite learners to understand more fully how a narrative produces sympathy, blame, and moral closure.

Artifact Analysis

The source module was analyzed as a sequence of reading positions. Each prompt was classified according to whether it primarily invited retrieval, interpretation, evaluation, cultural connection, perspective taking, or transformation through writing.

The analysis also examined whether claims required textual evidence, whether multiple defensible readings were possible, and whether learners were asked to revise understanding after hearing peers. No classroom data or learner responses were available, and none were constructed. The output is a pedagogical design grounded in the module's text and tasks.

What the Legend-Based Sequence Makes Possible

Cultural Recognition Can Become Cultural Inquiry

Beginning with a guava image and learners' experiences creates an accessible cultural entry. The fruit may connect to gardens, markets, food, language, or local knowledge. A stronger inquiry does not stop at recognition. Learners can ask what kind of story a legend is, what the story claims to explain, where they have heard similar explanations, and how versions may differ. Gay (2018) emphasizes that culturally responsive teaching uses cultural knowledge and experiences as resources for meaningful learning. That use should avoid implying that all Filipino learners share one experience or that one written version represents the whole tradition.

Teachers can invite community knowledge carefully: learners may share a version they know, identify a language used for the fruit, or compare the written account with another authorized source. Participation should remain optional, since learners should not be required to represent a culture or disclose family knowledge. The teacher's role is to recognize variation and help learners distinguish personal memory, community account, and textual evidence.

The Apparent Moral Should Be Interpreted, Not Announced

The story links the king's selfishness to isolation, illness, death, and the emergence of the guava. The source questions appropriately focus attention on his refusal to help a hungry woman and invite judgment. However, ethical inquiry becomes thin if the expected conclusion is supplied in advance. Learners can instead trace how the narrative builds judgment: what the narrator tells directly, what the king says and does, how other people respond, and how the ending connects bodily and social consequences to character.

This evidence makes room for genuine questions. Is the story mainly about generosity, the duties of leadership, abuse of power, social memory, or the consequences of contempt? Does the punishment fit the wrongdoing? What alternatives were available to the characters and community? Which details are necessary to the moral, and which rely on associations that deserve examination? Freire (1970) contrasts education that deposits conclusions with problem-posing dialogue. A problem-posing lesson does not remove moral commitments; it makes the grounds for those commitments discussable.

Description Requires Ethical Mediation

The module's story uses bodily condition and appearance in constructing character and transformation. Terms connected to body size, posture, age, illness, dirt, and disgust can be read as straightforward narrative details, yet they may also reinforce harmful associations between appearance and moral worth. A teacher should not silently reproduce such associations or turn individual learners into examples. Critical mediation can separate the defensible judgment of selfish conduct from stigmatizing

descriptions of bodies or disability. Learners can revise a sentence so that moral criticism rests on action, decision, and consequence rather than appearance.

This move is consistent with critical literacy because it asks what language does socially. It also improves close reading. Learners must identify whether an adjective provides necessary plot information, shapes emotional response, or substitutes for evidence about character. The purpose is not to sanitize every difficult text. It is to make language choices visible and ethically discussable.

Opinion Must Become Accountable Judgment

Questions such as whether learners would act like the king or whether they prefer wealth with loneliness or poverty with happiness can prompt engagement. Their either-or structure, however, narrows possibilities and can reward quick personal responses. Dialogic inquiry asks learners to challenge the premise, propose alternatives, and support judgment. A learner might argue that wealth and generosity are not opposites, or that happiness and poverty should not be romanticized. Peers can test the claim against the story and lived social realities without requiring disclosure of personal economic circumstances.

Mercer and Littleton (2007) describe how shared reasoning can support the development of thinking when participants explain, challenge, and build on ideas. Teachers need discussion norms that protect dignity: disagree with claims rather than persons, request evidence, paraphrase before challenging, and permit revision. The goal is not a debate with winners but a cumulative interpretation that becomes more precise through encounter with alternatives.

Table 1

Question architecture for dialogic inquiry into a local legend

Inquiry lens	Prompt form	Expected evidence	Facilitation caution
Cultural location	What does the legend explain, and what versions or related stories are known?	Text features plus identified source of community knowledge	Do not treat one learner or version as representative of all
Character and motive	Which choices establish the king's character, and what alternatives were available?	Actions, dialogue, and consequences	Keep judgment focused on conduct rather than appearance
Narrative construction	How does the narrator guide sympathy, blame, and surprise?	Word choice, sequencing, voice, and omitted perspectives	Distinguish textual observation from unsupported speculation
Ethical judgment	What duty did leadership create, and was the consequence proportionate?	Claim, criteria, counterclaim, and relevant details	Allow disagreement while protecting dignity
Power and perspective	Whose voice is heard, and how might another character narrate the event?	Comparison of perspectives grounded in the plot	Avoid inventing cultural facts not supplied by a source
Contemporary connection	Which issue remains relevant, and where does the analogy stop?	Explicit similarity and difference	Do not require disclosure of poverty, hunger, or family experience

Note. The prompts are adaptable examples. Teachers should choose a small sequence that builds cumulative reasoning rather than ask every question in one sitting.

A Five-Move Reading-to-Writing Cycle

Locate

Learners first identify genre, source, cultural object, and the explanatory work of the legend. The teacher distinguishes the module's written version from the existence of other tellings and acknowledges the named developer and cited source. Learners record what they know, how they know it, and what remains uncertain. This supports cultural connection without converting memory into unquestioned fact.

Interpret

Learners build a shared account of setting, characters, motive, conflict, causal sequence, and resolution. Literal comprehension is necessary here, but answers are paired with evidence and explanation. A story map can show how the king's decisions alter the condition of other people and how the ending resolves the narrative problem. The map becomes a common object for later disagreement.

Complicate

Learners inspect word choice, perspective, binaries, and omissions. They may examine whether the story equates bodily appearance with character, whether leadership obligations are explicit, or whether supernatural punishment is the only possible vehicle for justice. Janks's (2010) concept of redesign is useful: readers can imagine how changing a phrase, narrator, or event would alter meaning and power.

Deliberate

Small groups compare defensible interpretations under accountable-talk norms. Each group prepares a claim, two supporting details, a counterclaim, and a possible revision. Nystrand (1997) showed the importance of authentic questions and uptake, in which subsequent talk responds to what learners actually say. The teacher therefore follows promising ideas rather than using discussion as recitation disguised as conversation.

Recompose

Learners convert discussion into writing: an evidence-based interpretation, an alternative ending with commentary, a retelling from another viewpoint, or a concise ethical argument. Writing is not an afterthought. Graham and Hebert (2010) found that writing about texts can strengthen reading by requiring learners to record, connect, analyze, and organize ideas. The Grade 6 summary in the source module can remain one option, but it should be complemented by a task that makes interpretation and revision visible.

Assessment for Dialogue and Writing

Assessment should recognize both product and process without rewarding conformity to one teacher-approved moral. A strong response identifies the question at issue, selects relevant evidence, explains the relationship between evidence and claim, engages another perspective, and communicates respectfully. Language accuracy matters, but it should not erase evidence of substantive thinking. Graham et al. (2012) recommend explicit instruction in writing processes, strategies, and foundational skills; these supports can be provided while maintaining an intellectually demanding task.

Table 2*Analytic guide for legend-based reading and writing*

Dimension	Strong evidence	Developing evidence	Instructional response
Cultural grounding	Identifies genre, source, and variation without overgeneralizing	Names culture broadly or treats one version as definitive	Model source language and compare authorized versions
Textual evidence	Uses relevant details from more than one part of the story	Offers a claim with vague or copied support	Return to a short passage and annotate claim-evidence links
Reasoning	Explains why evidence supports a qualified judgment	Restates evidence or gives an unsupported opinion	Use because, therefore, unless, and however frames
Perspective	Represents an alternative fairly and revises when warranted	Mentions another view only to dismiss it	Require paraphrase before response and invite counterexamples
Ethical language	Critiques actions and systems without stigmatizing persons	Repeats harmful associations without examining them	Contrast action-based and appearance-based descriptions
Written design	Organizes a purposeful response with appropriate voice and control	Lists ideas with weak connection or unclear purpose	Provide planning, sentence combining, and targeted editing

Note. The guide supports feedback and revision. It is not a standardized scale and should be adapted to the selected writing task.

Discussion

Respect and Critique Are Compatible

The proposed cycle rejects a false choice between celebrating a local legend and criticizing it. Respectful literacy recognizes the story's cultural value, attributes its source, and listens for community knowledge. Critical literacy examines how any text, including a cherished one, constructs social relations and moral judgment. Learners can appreciate the imaginative explanation of the guava while asking how the narrative represents hunger, authority, generosity, embodiment, and memory. Such questions deepen rather than diminish engagement.

This compatibility matters in culturally responsive education. Gay (2018) cautions that cultural responsiveness is not a collection of festivals or familiar artifacts; it is a way of reorganizing teaching through learners' cultural knowledge and communication. Paris and Alim (2017) likewise emphasize sustaining dynamic cultural practices. A legend lesson should therefore allow multiple languages, versions, and contemporary meanings to enter, while maintaining clear distinctions among memory, interpretation, and evidence.

Dialogue Requires Deliberate Architecture

Inviting learners to share is insufficient. Questions, turn structures, evidence norms, and teacher uptake determine whether talk becomes cumulative inquiry. Murphy et al. (2009) show that discussion approaches differ in their effects; more talk does not automatically mean better comprehension. The five-move cycle gives dialogue an object and direction. Learners first establish a common reading, then complicate it, deliberate across perspectives, and write a revised account.

The sequence also protects quieter learners. Private annotation and paired rehearsal precede whole-group contribution. Written claims can enter the discussion even when a learner does not speak publicly. Teachers can monitor who is heard, invite paraphrase, and prevent a small number of confident speakers from defining the cultural meaning of the text for everyone.

Writing Makes Revision Visible

A dialogic lesson needs a durable product. Recomposition allows the teacher to see whether a learner merely repeated a peer's idea or integrated evidence into a changed interpretation. The product can preserve uncertainty: a writer may state what the text supports, what remains ambiguous, and which cultural claim would require another source. This is stronger scholarly practice than forcing closure where the evidence does not warrant it.

Writing also expands the module's existing summary task. A summary checks selection and organization, but an interpretive paragraph, counter-narrative, or reflective commentary reveals perspective and reasoning. These products should not replace foundational instruction; they provide a purpose for applying vocabulary, sentence construction, and textual evidence.

Implications for Teachers and Developers

Teachers adapting the source module can begin with modest revisions. Replace one opinion question with a claim-evidence-counterclaim prompt. Ask learners to compare two sentences that judge conduct in different ways. Use a story map as evidence during discussion. Invite an alternative viewpoint without requiring personal disclosure. End with writing that records how the learner's interpretation changed or remained stable after dialogue.

Material developers should document story provenance, avoid presenting one version as the only authentic account, and review language for stereotypes or stigmatizing associations. Teacher notes can identify culturally sensitive issues, discussion norms, and options for multilingual participation. Permissions should be verified when adapting or republishing a sourced story, and acknowledgment should extend to original storytellers, writers, illustrators, and module developers as applicable.

Research Agenda

The five-move cycle can be examined through classroom discourse analysis, learner writing portfolios, teacher interviews, and design-based research. Useful questions include whether learners cite evidence more precisely after structured dialogue, whether alternative-perspective writing improves causal and ethical reasoning, and how multilingual resources influence participation. Studies should document the exact text version, facilitation moves, participation patterns, and revision process. Ethical safeguards are especially important when discussion touches poverty, hunger, disability, body image, or community identity. The present article offers an analytically grounded design for such inquiry and does not claim tested classroom effects.

Conclusion

Philippine legends can do more in literacy education than provide familiar content or a ready-made moral. They can become sites where learners locate cultural knowledge, interpret narrative evidence, examine language and power, deliberate across perspectives, and write a more accountable understanding. The source Grade 6 module already supplies a practical reading sequence and several openings for evaluative response. The proposed cycle strengthens those openings by making dialogue evidentiary, culturally careful, and revision-oriented.

Locate, interpret, complicate, deliberate, and recompose: these five moves preserve the pleasure and cultural recognition of the legend while extending its intellectual work. They position learners neither as passive recipients of a moral nor as detached critics of tradition, but as readers responsible to text, community, peers, and the consequences of language.

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