Irish Folklore

Discussion Time:

1) What is ‘folklore’?
2) Do you know any stories or legends from your country or culture that you can share?
3) What themes often appear in these legends?
4) How important is folklore in defining your cultural identity?

Folklore is the expressive body of culture shared by a particular group of people; it encompasses the traditions common to that culture, subculture or group. These include oral traditions such as tales, proverbs and jokes.

Irish folklore, when mentioned to many people, conjures up images of banshees, fairy stories, leprechauns and people gathering around, sharing stories.
Before Reading:

1) Explain the title of the story to your partner.
2) Can you describe what you see in the pictures to your partner?
3) What do you think the story is about?
Can you recreate the story using the words and phrases below?

1) A beautiful woman on horseback
2) The land of eternal youth
3) They fell in love
4) Oisín promised he would return one day
5) Loneliness / missed his homeland
6) ‘Take my magical white horse but do not step foot on the ground’
7) The place was deserted
8) 300 years had passed...
9) Oisín stepped down off the horse..
10) A frail, old man...
11) Broken-hearted and lonely
12) He passed away soon after..
13) Stories and legends still survive today

A real Irish postal stamp with the image of Oisín and Niamh on horseback
The story of Tír Na Nóg

Student A: 
Read the first half of the story and summarise the main points for your partners.

The Legend of Tír Na Nóg is a famous old Irish story.

Once upon a time, Fionn and his son, Oisín, were hunting and stopped to take a rest on a hill overlooking the Atlantic ocean. They often did this to watch for invaders but this day, it wasn’t invaders they saw.

A beautiful woman on horseback was riding towards them. She had long golden hair down to her waist and rode a majestic white horse. The vision was breath-taking. She was the most beautiful woman Oisín had ever seen and Fionn knew that Oisín had fallen in love at first sight.

‘My name is Niamh from Tír Na Nóg’ she said. Niamh means ‘brightness’ in Gaeilge and she was from ‘the land of eternal youth’. Niamh and Oisín fell in love on the spot.

‘Will you return to Tír Na Nóg with me, Oisín?’ she asked him. ‘We can then be together forever in a land that knows no sorrow and where nobody ever ages.’ Oisín didn’t want to leave his father and family but he couldn’t resist the offer this beautiful woman made him. Oisín promised he would return one day.

Niamh and Oisín spent many happy years together but Oisín never forgot his roots and sometimes experienced loneliness. He missed his homeland and especially his father.
Student B:
Read the second part of the story and summarise the main points for your partners.

If this story were a fairytale, the couple would live happily ever after and raise a beautiful family together, but this isn’t a fairytale.

They lived happily for three years before Oisín began to miss his life back home in Ireland. He wanted to see his father again and tell him about the land of eternal youth.

'I'd like to borrow the white horse and return to Ireland to see my father and friends for a few days.' He said to Niamh.

'If you leave Tír Na Nóg, you will never return’ she replied.

Oisín was confused by her reluctance to allow him to see his father and promised her he would return.

'Take my magical white horse but do not step foot on the ground’.

Oisín didn’t understand but he was so excited about seeing his father, he didn’t ask questions.

As Oisín approached the village where he grew up, he noticed that it was completely overgrown. His family home was now a ruin and the place was deserted.

Oisín rode away on his horse in search of someone to help him find his family. He came upon a group of men, struggling to move a large rock. They had only heard of his family in stories from the past. How long had he been away?
Student C:
Read the last part of the story and summarise the main points for your partners.

In Tír Na Nóg, the land of eternal youth, only three years had past but in Ireland, 300 years had passed. Everyone he knew and loved had passed away and now there was nothing left for him there.

Oisín was so shocked and deeply saddened by the news he had just received, that the men asked him down from the horse.

'I'll come down to help you move the rock and then I'll return to Tír Na Nóg, to my wife who is waiting for me.' He explained.

Oisín had forgotten about the warning that Niamh had given him and stepped down off the horse. The second he touched the ground, he aged 300 years in front of the other men. He suddenly became an old, frail man.

He told the men about his life, his father and all about Tír Na Nóg. He passed on stories and legends from the past that still survive today.

Oisín had lost everything he knew and loved and now, he would never see his wife again. He was now broken-hearted and lonely.

He passed away soon after meeting the men but his tale lives on today in Ireland’s folklore.
The story of Tír Na Nóg

Work with your partners to answer the following questions:

1) Why were Oisín and his father looking out across the Atlantic ocean?
2) Why did Oisín decide to leave Ireland and return to Tír Na Nóg with Niamh?
3) What warning did Niamh give Oisín before he left for Ireland?
4) When Oisín reached his family home, what did he see?
5) Can you explain why everyone he knew was no longer alive?
6) Why did he step down off the horse?

What’s your opinion?

7) Do you think Oisín made the right decision leaving his homeland for love?
8) What would you do if you had the opportunity to live in a land where nobody grows old?
9) Do you think Niamh should have told Oisín what would happen if he returned with her to Tír Na Nóg?
10) How would you describe Niamh? (3 adjectives)
Teachers Notes:

Discussion Time:
Assign students to groups and give them time to discuss the 4 questions. Encourage them to tell legends from their own cultures and countries. This will work great in a multi-lingual group.

Short Text on ‘Folklore’
Nominate one or two students to read the short text on the meaning of ‘folklore’. There are some words in bold. Can students explain them to you? What do the words have in common? (verb + preposition)
Ensure students ‘notice the chunk’ and not just the verb.

Tír Na Nóg – Before Reading:
Students take a few minutes in pairs or small groups to look at:
A) the title of the story and predict what the story is about.
B) the two pictures and take note of words that spring to mind such as ‘in love’, ‘beautiful’, ‘white horse’, ‘princess’ – students then share their thoughts with the group.

Recreate the story of Tír Na Nóg
In the same pairings/groupings, students work together to recreate the story, using their skills of deduction (you could also practice modal verbs of deduction such as ‘it might be’, ‘it could be’, ‘it must be’…)

Students go through the 13 main points from the story and using them, they again predict the story and retell to their classmates. (You could also carry out a writing task instead of a communicative task here)
The story of Tír Na Nóg – Jigsaw Reading

Assign students either A, B, C and provide them with the corresponding text only.

Student A – reads the first part of the story
Student B – reads the second part of the story
Student C – reads the final part of the story

Once students have read their parts of the story, form groups with one A student, one B student and one C student. (If you have an odd number and have an additional ‘A student’ for example, they should join one of the weaker groups so that they will have two ‘A students’ so they can help each other out’.

Students now summarize their parts of the stories to their group mates and together they put together the story.

Once they are sure they understand the plot of the story, they can focus on the BOLD vocabulary, helping each other out with the meaning.

Questions:

Now, students work together to answer the 10 questions. Gather feedback from around the room before moving to the ‘What’s your opinion?’ questions.

Allow some time for opinions towards the end. You might be surprised how much your students have to say!