

How can I best use these materials to support the Social Studies TEKS for Grade 8?

The activities in “Ghosts and Cucuis” strongly support the vertically aligned Social Studies skills but seem at first to include primarily 4th and 7th grade content. And the TAKS looms before us!

So how can I use these materials to support my goals for 8th grade?

Answer: By building on students’ present knowledge. Students know much more about ghosts than they do about American history, and they probably know more about local ghosts that you do. Local haunting legends often derive from the “sins” of the past in much the same way as the living lore transmitted orally about the Salem Witch Trials, the slave trade and human slavery, Andersonville, and even September 11.

Consider using the “Haunting Legends” activities at a time when a high-interest topic is most needed, such as before a major holiday or toward the end of the school year (after textbooks have been taken up!). Utilize the activity not as filler, but as a way of reflecting upon the impact of legends which have arisen from our common heritage and history, such as the Salem Witch Trials (<http://www.salemwitchmuseum.com/learn2.html>) or Andersonville (<http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/11andersonville/11andersonville.htm>). To explore the condition of slavery and slave-holding, use the thrilling and haunting African-American folktale retold by Virginia Hamilton as the title story of her collection *The People Could Fly*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1985. ISBN 0-679-84336-1; <http://web.utk.edu/~bledsoe/courses/fall2000/flying.pdf>. The depression-era folktale collected in Texas by Dr. J. Mason Brewer offers further evidence of the resilience of the African Americans as they moved beyond oppression. Contrast the folktale which gave hope to slaves with the cucuis which frighten Borderlands children into good behavior, and consider the purposes served by imaginative oral narrative.

Two major objectives of the TAKS as administered in Grade 8 (10, and 11) are:

Objective 2: The student will demonstrate an understanding of geographic influences on historical issues and events.

Objective 3: The student will demonstrate an understanding of economic and social influences on historical issues and events.

Use the Ghost Town discussion question to elicit locally known information which corroborates the geographical, economic, and social influences on communities across the land. Compare ghost towns in your area with ghost towns such as Dodge City, Kansas, a once-thriving destination for cattle drives, or Deadwood, South Dakota, a gold-mining boomtown. Why do you think each developed into successful towns; why did each fade? Consider nearby Texas communities which became ghost towns as a result of one too many hurricanes or droughts, the end of an oil boom, or being bypassed by a railroad or interstate highway.