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King Cake Pourquoi Tales

GRADES 4–8**TYPE
NARRATIVE****COMMITMENT
1 SESSION: 1 HOUR**

This Spark from 826 New Orleans uses king cake, a cake that is served during Mardi Gras and holds historical and regional significance, as an entry point for students to write origin stories. We recommend using a dish that is tied to regions and cultures relevant to your students. A few examples include:

- Mooncakes
- Pan de Muertos
- Deep dish pizza
- Halo-halo

Throughout the lesson the instructions will directly reference king cake. Please substitute your chosen dish accordingly.

SESSION:

YOU WILL NEED

- [Why the Sun and the Moon Live in the Sky](#) (This article from the Smithsonian begins by providing some context for this folktale, but the full story can be found at the bottom.)

- King cake (or other local dish)
- Paper Plates
- Napkins
- Pencils
- Paper
- Dry Erase Board
- Markers
- Computers (optional, for research)

BEFORE YOU START

Make sure that the chosen food is prepared and proportioned for enough students in your class. Gather your materials and either print or link [*Why the Sun and the Moon Live in the Sky*](#). If you aren't already familiar with the history of your chosen dish, take some time to research notable facts and origins of the dish. In Step 2, you will assist students in researching the origin of the dish, so it may be helpful to have background knowledge on the subject.

STEP 1 (10 MINUTES)

Purpose of the Day – Writing Pourquoi Tales

Inform students that today we'll be learning about how food is connected to culture and storytelling. Introduce the terminology "Pourquoi Tale". Pourquoi is the french word for "why," and pourquoi tales, or origin stories, explain why something *is* in a fictional way. Today we are writing a pourquoi tale about how the king cake came to be, or, why the baby is in the king cake. Let's look at another pourquoi tale as an example. As a group, read [*Why The Sun and the Moon Live in the Sky*](#) and discuss the "why" behind the story.

STEP 2 (10 MINUTES)

The Traditional Origin of King Cake

Ask the group if anyone knows the traditional origin behind the king cake. If not, give students time to research the history of the dish. After a few minutes, have students share out what they've found and help them fill in the blanks using the information below:

- The king cake tradition is based in Christian belief. Mardi Gras season officially starts on January 6th, also known as 12th night, or the Epiphany.
- The Epiphany is the day Jesus showed himself to the wise men, and the world. The plastic baby in the king cake represents baby Jesus.
- It is decorated in purple (justice), green (faith), and gold (power) to resemble a jeweled crown, honoring the wise men who came to visit.
- Today, when people eat the king cake, whoever gets the baby is crowned “King for the Day” and has to host the next party, or buy the next king cake.

STEP 3 (10 MINUTES)

Describing King Cake

On the board, draw a T-chart. On one side of the chart, ask students to describe the attributes of king cake. On the other side of the chart, ask students to describe how king cake is different from other sweets/cakes. As a group, students contribute answers to fill in the chart, and paint a picture of what makes king cake so unique.

STEP 4 (15 MINUTES)

Independent Writing

Finally, present students with the prompt: *What could be a fictional reason behind what we know of the king cake?*

Students will use the details they generated in Step 3 to write their own pourquoi tale explaining how the king cake came to be. Encourage students to get creative! A few questions they can answer in their pourquoi tale include:

- Why does king cake look like it does (colors, shape, texture)?
- Where did king cake come from?
- How did king cake become so popular?

STEP 5 (15 MINUTES)

Share Your Cake Story & Eat It Too!

Pass out slices of king cake to each student. Students share their final stories as they dig into the cake and celebrate all they've learned!