

The Use of Myths and Legends in Teaching Ecological Preservation

Romeo B. Telesforo

The world abounds with famous legends, and today, people can visit the modern-day locations where these stories originated to explore their rich historical and cultural significance. Unlike purely fictional myths, legends are often rooted in a seed of truth, emerging from historical events, notable individuals, or real-life experiences that became part of collective cultural memory (Banda et al., 2024). As Valentine (2023) explained, these stories evolve through generations, often acquiring embellishments or distortions that make them more memorable, relatable, and entertaining.

In the Philippines, myths and legends remain integral to cultural expression, often shared as a means of instilling moral values in children. For example, the well-known tale explaining why pineapples have multiple “eyes” reflects ancestral practices and daily life, while also imparting lessons relevant to Filipino values. Storytellers emphasize that such legends carry meaningful insights into the lives of Filipinos. By learning these narratives, individuals gain a deeper understanding of the mindsets and perspectives of their forebears, thereby enriching cultural identity and self-

awareness (Sevilla-Pavón & Alcantud-Díaz, 2021; Pastera, 2024).

Legends also hold particular significance for the people of Antique. One of the most enduring stories recalls the arrival of the ten Bornean Datus and Datu Sumakwel's landing in Malandog, now part of Hamtic, Antique. Many legends from the province also explain the origins of local place names. Jocano (1965), for instance, documented twenty-six place-name legends from Antique to examine their functions within local communities, underscoring the cultural relevance of storytelling traditions.

In Culasi, origin stories tied to place names such as the legends of Mararison and Batbatan continue to be shared by local elders, with multiple versions reflecting the richness of oral tradition. Despite growing academic attention to Antique, the cultural role of storytelling in shaping Culasi's identity, particularly through the narratives surrounding Mt. Madja-as, remains underexplored. While Culasi is increasingly recognized as a premier destination in Antique, limited scholarly focus has been placed on the origins and cultural meanings of its places, especially in relation to events such as the Madja-as Festival.

The legend of Madja-as continues to thrive in the collective consciousness of Culasinos through narratives passed down across generations. Younger members of the community still value the stories shared by elders, sustaining awareness of Madja-as's historical and cultural importance. Today, the legend is further celebrated through the municipality's annual foundation observance, during which Mt. Madja-as is honored as a symbol of heritage and identity.

Myth and Legend: Philippine Context

Defining the terms myth and legend is essential in literary studies,

as the two are often used interchangeably, creating the misconception that they are identical. A legend is generally understood as a traditional or historical story about people, places, or events of ancient times, while a myth is a traditional narrative that explains the origins of customs, natural phenomena, or societal practices. To contextualize these concepts, previous scholarship has examined how myths and legends function within their respective societies. Marín-Dale (2016), for instance, observed that many Peruvian myths, legends, and short stories portray characters without personal names referred to simply as “the boy,” “the girl,” or “the skunk.” This narrative technique emphasizes collective identity over individuality, reflecting the communal orientation of native Peruvian cultures in contrast to the more individualistic traditions of Western Europe (Marín-Dale, 2016, as cited in Walsh, 2020). Similarly, Nichols and Rine (2012) argue that folk narratives articulate a community’s shared worldview, shaping expected behaviors and reinforcing collective identity. Agonos (2018) further suggests that these stories influence how individuals think and feel, motivating attitudes and responses within the community.

In the Philippine context, legends remain significant cultural and moral instruments. Ogdock-Gascon’s (2015) study of Cebuano legends classified them into three categories: living human beings, mythical creatures (subdivided into human-looking, animal-looking, and mysterious beings), and dead souls. A striking finding was that among characters with identified gender, 71.43% were female an imbalance that may reveal gender biases, perpetuating stereotypes such as women-as-witches or women-as-victims. Similar issues arise in studies of the Yawa phenomenon, where ambiguities in character identity and the scarcity of pre-Hispanic sources complicate interpretations of gender roles in legends (Talaguit, 2021).

Legends also function as explanatory narratives for local histories

and geographical origins. Cordero (2019) and Jocano (1965) both documented Philippine legends that recount how towns, barrios, or provinces acquired their names, as well as stories about the origins of plants, animals, and natural landmarks. This observation aligns with Mangarin and Bungabong (2024), who highlight that Philippine folkloric narratives share structural and thematic elements with established literary texts, including complete literary components.

The function of myths, meanwhile, extends beyond cultural or historical explanation. Garcia (2015) emphasizes that myths are not intended to rival science but instead offer moral and philosophical guidance. Much like films that evoke affective responses through a suspension of disbelief, myths shape perception and guide action, fostering a collective worldview rather than describing empirical reality.

Finally, indigenous myths and legends often encode local cosmologies and environmental beliefs. In Peru, for example, geographical diversity from coast to mountains to jungle, shapes narratives wherein mountains and rainforests are regarded as living, protective, and at times dangerous entities. While specific characters vary, recurring themes include animism, fauna, and mythological creatures, with narratives explaining both human origins and the formation of natural landmarks (Walsh, 2020).

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that myths and legends are not merely sources of entertainment. They function as vehicles of cultural transmission, moral instruction, and collective identity, linking individuals to both their social communities and their natural environments.

Integrating Myths and Legends of Mt. Madja-As in Teaching Ecological Preservation in Araling Panlipunan: A Case Study

This study examines the community significance of Mt. Madja-as by uncovering local myths and legends, fostering students' connection to their cultural heritage, and highlighting the mountain's role in the traditions of the Culasinos, thereby enriching the cultural understanding of Culasi.

Methodology

This study focused on collecting and analyzing myths and legends associated with Mt. Madja-as in Culasi, Antique. A qualitative narrative research design was employed to understand and interpret individuals' experiences, beliefs, and perspectives through the collection and analysis of stories. This design was particularly suitable for exploring the richness and complexity of personal accounts, as it allowed the researcher to uncover the meanings participants attribute to the myths and legends of Mt. Madja-as.

The study involved fourteen participants for in-depth interviews and ten additional participants for survey responses. The inclusion criteria required participants to be residents of the area, possess knowledge of local myths and legends, and express willingness to participate in interviews. Among the interviewees, ten were teachers (four males), aged 32 to 50 years, and three were tour guides to Mt. Madja-as, aged 42 to 63 years. The remaining Culasino participants included four teachers, three government employees, one day care worker, one housewife, and one mat weaver. Of this group, eight were female and two were male, aged 38 to 73 years.

Prior to data collection, interview questions and study protocols

underwent validation. Letters of consent were secured from all participants, including translated versions for those less comfortable with English, to ensure comprehension and voluntary participation. Participants were briefed about confidentiality measures, and pseudonyms were used to protect identities. A short orientation included securing permission to record interviews for accurate transcription and data management. Survey questions were administered, supplemented by informal interviews for clarification and elaboration, which lasted 15 to 20 minutes per participant. Formal interviews ranged from 40 to 50 minutes. All research records including written notes, audio recordings, and video files were securely stored in a locked cabinet accessible only to the researcher and the adviser.

The interview guide consisted of two sections: the first gathered demographic information (age, occupation, sex), while the second explored participants' knowledge and experiences of the myths and legends. After data collection, responses were coded narratively according to similar life events, then examined for patterns of similarity and difference across these coded blocks. Story structure codes were applied to segment and organize the narratives while preserving the overarching storyline. Finally, narrative blocks were collated and analyzed to identify patterns, divergences, and thematic consistencies.

Results

The legend of Mt. Madja-as unfolds in a serene yet tragic setting, centering on Madja-as, Kanlaon, and their three children Mararison, Batbatan, and Maningning. The story narrates how Baloy's envy disrupts the family's harmony. When the family embarks on a sea journey to search for Kanlaon, misfortune strikes, leading to their separation and the

drowning of the children. The islands of Mararison, Batbatan, and Maniguin are said to have emerged at the very spots where the children perished. Kanlaon, unaware of their fate, later passes away, giving rise to Mt. Kanlaon in Negros. In grief, Madja-as transforms into Mt. Madja-as, her sorrow immortalized in its perpetually flowing waterfalls, which symbolize her endless tears. Baloy's role, steeped in jealousy and malice, also introduces supernatural elements, including the intervention of Bulalakaw.

In Culasi, the legend highlights themes of family disharmony, envy, and the painful dispersal of loved ones. The waterfalls of Mt. Madja-as serve as symbols of separation between mother and children, while the volcanic fury of Kanlaon reflects Bathala's wrath. Through these enduring geographical features mountains and islands the tale conveys powerful lessons on family, envy, loss, and supernatural consequence.

Most participants viewed Mt. Madja-as and the three islands as cultural symbols that embody the myths and legends of Culasi. They emphasized that the majestic Mt. Madja-as and its surrounding islands symbolize strength, perseverance, and resilience, serving as sources of inspiration for the Culasiños in facing life's challenges. These cultural representations, they noted, extend beyond landmarks to influence the language, beliefs, traditions, and folkways of the community.

Although the narratives do not explicitly address ecological dimensions, they indirectly point to a connection between mythology and environmental preservation. Participants expressed deep admiration for the pristine beaches, crystal-clear waters, and lush greenery surrounding Mt. Madja-as and its islands, reinforcing the perception of these landscapes as treasures to be safeguarded. A more deliberate exploration of ecological considerations could further illuminate the intersection of myths, cultural identity, and environmental stewardship.

Local tour guides also play a pivotal role in linking cultural heritage with ecological advocacy. Karl highlights the dangers of destructive practices, promotes responsible tourism, and spearheads tree-planting initiatives. Luis adapts ancestral storytelling to modern platforms while preserving its wisdom, making the legends accessible to younger generations. Mar emphasizes the cultural role of storytelling, particularly during Holy Week, in sustaining heritage and identity. Together, these guides exemplify the balance between conserving the environment of Mt. Madja-as and keeping its myths and legends alive, ensuring both cultural continuity and ecological protection.

Conclusion

The legends of Mt. Madja-as and the three surrounding islands hold deep symbolic meaning, embodying both the resiliency of the people of Culasi and the enduring beauty of the natural environment. These landmarks serve as powerful cultural icons, inspiring the community with values of strength, perseverance, and pride, while simultaneously functioning as attractions that draw visitors to the town. The connection between the legends and the preservation of Mt. Madja-as's natural beauty reinforces a sense of value and significance, underscoring the synergy between cultural heritage and environmental stewardship.

Tour guides Karl, Luis, and Mar exemplify this balance through their active promotion of responsible tourism and conservation practices. Karl raises awareness of destructive practices and leads tree-planting initiatives; Luis adapts traditional storytelling using modern technology while preserving ancestral wisdom; and Mar highlights the role of storytelling in maintaining cultural heritage, particularly during Holy Week. Collectively, their efforts reflect a holistic approach to sustaining both the

cultural and ecological integrity of Mt. Madja-as.

To further strengthen the preservation and understanding of these legends, several recommendations are proposed. First, students should be introduced to the legends in schools, with technology serving as a tool to extend these traditions beyond oral storytelling. Second, Araling Panlipunan teachers should be well-versed in the legends, enabling them to address students' questions and provide accurate historical context. Developing educational programs or modules that integrate the legends into the local history curriculum would foster deeper cultural awareness among learners. Third, local and barangay officials should be oriented about the legends to ensure the consistent and accurate dissemination of information, thereby safeguarding the integrity of the community's cultural insights. Fourth, the municipal archive should be updated to include comprehensive documentation of the legends, incorporating both physical and digital resources to support reenactments, role-playing, and other educational activities. Finally, future researchers are encouraged to examine the multiple versions of the legends, tracing their origins and exploring their physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions to provide a richer and more nuanced understanding of their significance.

Overall, this study underscores the enduring role of the legends of Mt. Madja-as in cultivating cultural identity, promoting environmental stewardship, and inspiring the Culasi community. At the same time, it highlights practical pathways for education, cultural preservation, and further scholarly inquiry.

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