

Lesson Plan: Peer & the People of Norway

[Norwegian Geography and Culture]

Note to teachers: In the Hall of the Mountain King by Allison Flannery offers a perfect opportunity to extend students' understanding of the geography and culture surrounding both the story and the music it's based on. After reading the story, use the questions and information below to provide a lesson on both geography and culture. The questions following each section are designed to make connections between the story the children have just heard and the new information being presented.

1. Where is Norway?

Peer lives in Norway, which is in a part of northern Europe called Scandinavia. Long ago, Scandinavia was home to the Vikings, a seafaring culture of warriors and traders who explored and settled in lands for thousands of miles around them. In fact, the Vikings set up colonies in North America—in what today is Canada's eastern province of Newfoundland—more than 400 years before Columbus made his famous voyage across the Atlantic Ocean.

(Who can see someone who looks like a Viking in the picture at the beginning of the story?)

2. What is Norway like?

Norway is a long, narrow country—more than 1,000 miles long and, in many places, less than 100 miles wide. Norway borders Sweden on the west and touches Finland and Russia on the north. More than half of Norway's border is seashore, and most of the country is covered by mountains, which come right down to the sea. In many places, the sea reaches far inland in long valleys with steep mountains on both sides. These water-filled valleys are called fjords. (Do you see a fjord near Peer's house?)

3. What is it like to live in Norway?

The people of Norway are called Norwegians. Just like Peer, many Norwegians can always see the sea. In fact, more than three-quarters of Norway's 5 million people live within 10 miles of the coast. Living so near to the ocean means that fishing has always been an important source of food for Norwegians. Smoked salmon is a common dish, and *lutefisk*, a form of dried, raw cod that has been salted and soaked in lye, is popular at Christmas time among Norwegians and even Americans with Norwegian heritage.

In their free time, many Norwegians enjoy spending time outdoors, especially hiking (in summer) and cross country skiing (in winter) in their beautiful mountains.

(Does Peer seem like a typical Norwegian to you? How?)

4. What is special about Norway's culture?

Every country has a culture—or even several cultures. Culture is how people live and what they believe and value. A culture is formed by a group of people's history, by their environment (the natural world around them), and by their experiences. Every culture includes traditional stories that its people tell,

especially to their children. These stories, which are called folklore, are meant to be enjoyed, but they also are meant to teach lessons and to ensure those who hear them learn what's most valued and important in their culture.

Norway's stories include the adventures and actions of powerful gods, such as Thor, the ancient Scandinavian god of thunder, and his mischievous brother Loki. These characters are still found in movies and comic books that are popular around the world today. Norway's folklore also includes many mythical characters that over the years began to show up in stories in other countries and cultures. Among the creatures that originated in the folklore of Norway and the countries near it are:

- elves (magical creatures who lived in the forest)
- mermaids (half-woman, half-fish creatures who often warned sailors of danger)
- dwarves (short human-like creatures who lived underground and were masters at metalworking)
- trolls (big, ugly, hairy creatures that are often dangerous to people but who are not usually very intelligent and can be easily outsmarted; those who live in the mountains often hoarded gold)

(Which of these creatures does Peer encounter in the story? What lessons can we learn from Peer's encounter with these creatures?)

Activities:

1. Find Norway on a map or globe. Now find where you live. How far apart are they? What are the different ways you could travel there? Could you ride in a car all the way there? Which would be the best way to travel?
2. Write a paragraph explaining what is similar and different between the landscape/geography in Norway and where you live and why you would or would not like to visit or live there.
3. One day after school between now and next week eat some food or do an activity that is popular in Norway. Come back to class ready to share with the class about your experience.
4. Draw a picture of a troll (or other mythical creature from Scandinavian folklore). Write a story about a child your age encountering this creature. Make sure your story teaches a valuable lesson.
5. Visit the library and find a folk or fairy tale that includes a mythical creature that is found in Scandinavian folklore. Read the story (or do this at home and have a parent read the story to the child). Return to class ready to tell what the story was about, what creature was in the story, and what less readers could learn from the story.