



Here's an excerpt from: "Tall Tales and World History"

Your students will enjoy this tidbit about familiar symbols.

Father Time

Keeper of the minutes, hours, days, & years



A Fun Fact

Traditionally, Father Time was always portrayed as carrying an hourglass to measure the passage of time.

He's changing with the times, however. Modern drawings often show Father Time carrying a pocket watch.

A Familiar Symbol...

You've heard of Mother Nature, the personification of our planet Earth. She's the perfect Mom – nurturing, caring, compassionate. You always want to be on her good side.

Sure, Mother Nature will get a little angry now and then, and the result will be an earthquake or a blizzard. But all Moms need to let off steam once in a while.

If Mother Nature is a "Mom," then Father Time must be a "Dad." He's steady as a rock, never wavering. He's firm, but fair. And you'd better not be late for curfew, because he'll be the first to know.

Father Time, of course, is the keeper of time. He's usually portrayed as an elderly man, dressed in a robe, with an hourglass (*or some other timekeeping device*) in one hand. In the other hand, he holds a stick with a long, curved blade at the end (*this reaping tool is called a "scythe"*).

Father Time carries this weapon because, as the keeper of time, he also sees to it that everything comes to an end. Or, to put it another way: *nobody lives forever.*

What it tells us about World History...

It might not seem like it, but the idea of “time” is an extremely difficult concept to grasp. This was especially true before there were watches and clocks, or days of the week, or months of the year. Time was just sort of an abstract thing that was always around, but could not be defined.

The advanced people of Ancient Greece were beginning to put their hands around the concept of “time.” They invented a character similar to our Father Time and called him “Chronos.” That’s where we get our word for “chronology,” which is the timely sequence of events.

The Romans took it from there. They worshiped Saturn, the God of time and agriculture (*obviously, agricultural harvests were closely associated with the passing of time*). Saturn was among the most powerful of the Gods, and a number of festivals and celebrations were in his honor.

Like our modern version of Father Time, Saturn held an hourglass in one hand and a scythe in the other. The hourglass was an obvious symbol, but the scythe, which sports a sharp blade at the end, might seem a little morose.

As scary as the curved blade seems, the scythe (*or sickle*) was not carried by Saturn to be a deadly weapon. Remember that he was a god of agriculture. The scythe is actually a harvesting tool used to cut down the outgoing crop to make room for the new one.

Of course, this cycle of old and new harvests hints to the more grim cycle of life and death. That is why Father Time, similar to the Roman God Saturn, is not only a symbol to be respected – but also one to be feared.

Excerpt from:

Bache, Ben. *What Can Tall Tales Teach Us about World History?* Greenville, SC: Homecourt Publishers, 2008.