



## Representation of 21st Century Literacy (4C) in the Folklore Ular N'Daung by Dian Kristiani

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the representation of 21st-century literacy, which encompasses four main competencies: critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication (4Cs) in the folktale "Ular N'Daung" by Dian Kristiani. Folklores, as a form of cultural literacy, serve not only as entertainment but also as educational media that instill moral values and character in the younger generation. In the context of 21st-century education, literary works should be studied through a literacy perspective to foster the development of critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and effective communication skills. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a content analysis approach. The data source, the text of the Ular N'Daung story, is analyzed through intensive reading and systematic recording of narratives, quotations, and dialogues that represent aspects of 21st-century literacy. Data analysis follows the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and concludes with theoretical triangulation validation. The results of the study show that critical thinking is reflected in the ability of characters and readers to interpret the theme of struggle and moral messages, creativity is seen through the potential for adapting the story into digital media, collaboration is realized through the actions of the Youngest Princess who are full of empathy and responsibility, and communication is depicted in the dialogue between characters that convey human values. Thus, Ular N'Daung is not only a cultural heritage but also an effective literacy tool to develop character, empathy, and 4C skills in students in the digital era.

*Keywords: representation, 21st century literacy, folklore*

## Representasi Literasi Abad 21 (4C) dalam Cerita Rakyat Ular N'Daung Karya Dian Kristiani

### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan representasi literasi abad ke-21 yang mencakup empat kompetensi utama *critical thinking*, *creativity*, *collaboration*, dan *communication* (4C) dalam cerita rakyat *Ular N'Daung* karya Dian Kristiani. Cerita rakyat sebagai bentuk literasi budaya tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai hiburan, tetapi juga sebagai media edukatif yang menanamkan nilai moral dan karakter bagi generasi muda. Dalam konteks pendidikan abad 21, karya sastra perlu dikaji melalui perspektif literasi agar berkontribusi terhadap pengembangan kemampuan berpikir kritis, berkreasi, berkolaborasi, dan berkomunikasi secara efektif. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan analisis isi. Sumber data berupa teks cerita *Ular N'Daung* dianalisis melalui pembacaan intensif dan pencatatan sistematis terhadap narasi, kutipan, dan dialog yang merepresentasikan aspek literasi abad 21. Analisis data mengikuti model Miles dan Huberman yang meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan dengan validasi triangulasi teori. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa berpikir kritis tercermin dalam kemampuan tokoh dan pembaca menafsirkan tema perjuangan dan pesan moral, kreativitas tampak melalui potensi adaptasi cerita ke dalam media digital, kolaborasi diwujudkan lewat tindakan Putri Bungsu yang penuh empati dan tanggung jawab, serta komunikasi tergambar dalam dialog antartokoh yang menyampaikan nilai kemanusiaan. Dengan demikian, *Ular N'Daung* tidak hanya menjadi warisan budaya, tetapi juga sarana literasi yang efektif untuk menumbuhkan karakter, empati, dan kecakapan 4C pada peserta didik di era digital.

*Keywords: representasi, literasi abad 21, cerita rakyat*

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## INTRODUCTION

Folktales are a form of cultural heritage that hold profound moral, social, and spiritual values. Values such as honesty, hard work, responsibility, and cooperation are passed down through stories from generation to generation (Hayati & Utomo, 2022). Folktales are often used to convey moral messages to their readers (Ferando et al., 2025). Folktales serve not only as entertainment but also as educational tools that instill moral values and character in the younger generation (Turyani et al., 2024). Therefore, preserving and integrating folktales into modern education is a crucial strategy for strengthening cultural identity and national character.

Each folktale reflects noble life values. These values include social norms, ethics, and good behavior that can serve as guidelines in daily life (Riyanta Lestari & Setiawan, 2019). These values exist within society as a form of social communication. According to Maulidianto and Rokhmansyah, folktales live within society and are passed down orally, reflecting a community's collective outlook on life (Maulidianto et al., 2021). Thus, folktales are a cultural literacy medium that can instill empathy, morality, and social awareness in students.

The challenges of social awareness in the 21st century require students to possess skills beyond mere content mastery. Globalization and digitalization necessitate higher-order thinking skills to adapt to rapid change (Octavia, 2021). The 4Cs concept of critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication is at the core of 21st-century literacy (Kivunja, 2015). These four skills are interrelated and need to be developed comprehensively in education so that students not only master knowledge but also think critically, creatively, collaborate, and communicate effectively to face the dynamics and challenges of the 21st century (Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023).

Skills are crucial for students to adapt to changing times, think critically, generate new ideas, collaborate with others, and communicate effectively

in various social contexts, especially digital ones. Critical thinking enables students to analyze information rationally, while creativity fosters the ability to generate new and innovative ideas (Susantun, 2023). Collaboration emphasizes the importance of cooperation, empathy, and effective communication to achieve shared goals (Chiruguru, 2020).

In the digital context, 4C skills are becoming increasingly important because students must be able to interact intelligently and ethically in digital spaces (Dinihari, Sulistyaningsih, et al., 2025). Continuous technological advancements and digital demands have led to the 4C concept also being linked to digital skills and their integration into today's more modern learning (Hafizha et al., 2022). In line with technological developments, the literacy paradigm is shifting. Literacy is no longer limited to reading and writing skills, but also encompasses the ability to interpret digital information, think critically about online discourse, and understand its social implications (Pribadi et al., 2025).

This shift demonstrates that 21st-century literacy is multidimensional, combining digital literacy, cultural literacy, and character literacy (Neilsen, 2015). Therefore, combining folklore with modern learning is relevant because traditional values align with the needs of 21st-century competencies. Through folklore, students can learn critical thinking when understanding moral messages, foster creativity, learn collaboration in group projects, and practice communication skills through classroom presentations. Therefore, modern learning must combine cultural values with technology, enabling students to interpret information critically and in context.

The integration of cultural values in modern literacy-based learning also supports the strengthening of students' character and empathy. According to Dinihari et al., empathy-based literacy can reduce negative behavior in the school environment and foster the development of a humanistic character (Dinihari et al., 2025; Abdurrohim et al.,



2024). In the context of folklore, the value of empathy can be found through interactions between characters that represent social solidarity and respect for others.

Folklore can also be developed through innovative approaches such as gamification and modern pedagogy to increase student learning motivation. Innovative gamification-based teaching materials can foster active engagement, while fostering creativity and communication in literacy classes (Dinihari, Rafli, et al., 2025). Thus, the application of folklore in the context of 21st-century learning can be strengthened with digital strategies and creative pedagogy.

The folktale *Ular N'Daung* by Dian Kristiani is one text that represents the integration of traditional values and modern learning. This story features characters who demonstrate reflective, communicative, and collaborative skills in dealing with conflict. It contains the values of critical thinking, empathy, and creativity, which align with the 4C skills. Therefore, this work deserves analysis to reveal how elements of 21st-century literacy are represented through narrative structure and characters.

Based on this background, this research focuses on the following questions:

- 1) How is critical thinking represented in the folktale *Ular N'Daung* by Dian Kristiani?
- 2) How does creativity manifest in the story?
- 3) What forms of collaboration are demonstrated by the characters?
- 4) What forms of communication between the characters reflect 21st-century skills?

This research has several objectives aligned with the problem formulation. First, to describe the representation of critical thinking in the folktale *Ular N'Daung* by Dian Kristiani. Second, to describe the manifestation of creativity in the story. Third, to describe the forms of collaboration demonstrated by the characters. Fourth, to describe forms of communication between the characters that reflect 21st-century skills.

This research is expected to provide theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, this research enriches the study of cultural literacy and 21st-century literacy, linking local values with global skills (Burhan Nurgiantoro, 2018). Practically, the results of this study can serve as a reference for teachers and curriculum developers in designing folklore-based teaching materials that support character building and the 4Cs skills in the digital era. Thus, literature learning can function not only as a vehicle for cultural appreciation but also as a critical literacy strategy to shape an adaptive and empathetic generation.

## METHOD

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method. Qualitative descriptive research methods are commonly used in social science research. (Milles & Huberman, 1984; Sugiyono, 2008; onhaji, 1994). This research used a qualitative descriptive method with a content analysis approach to describe the representation of 21st-century literacy (4Cs)—critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication—in the literary work "Legend of the Snake N'Daung" by Dian Kristiani (2023).

The research was conducted in the English Language Education Study Program at Esa Unggul University from April to July 2025. Data sources included text excerpts, narratives, dialogues, and character actions depicting the four 4Cs. Data were collected through intensive reading and systematic note-taking, highlighting relevant sections of the text, and then grouping them into four categories according to indicators for each aspect of 21st-century literacy.

Data analysis was based on the Miles & Huberman (1992) model in Sahid, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification (Sahid, 2011). Data reduction was carried out by sorting and organizing data according to the 4C categories, then presenting them in an analysis matrix to

demonstrate the relationship between the story context and dimensions of 21st-century literacy. Data validity was maintained through theoretical triangulation and peer discussion, comparing the findings to the 4C theory, character theory in literature (Nurgiyantoro, 2018), and the concept of 21st-century literacy. The analysis was supported by simple descriptive statistics using the principles of mean, median, and mode to illustrate the frequency trends of each 4C aspect in the text. This approach yielded an in-depth and measurable analysis of the representation of 21st-century skills in Ular N'Daung, with dominant findings centering on critical thinking and communication.

## RESULTS

### 1. Representation of Critical Thinking in the Folktale " Ular N'Daung"

#### 1.1 Critical Thinking Skills through Theme and Moral Conflict

The story " Ular N'Daung" demonstrates critical thinking skills through the theme of a child's struggle and sacrifice for her mother. The main character, Putri Bungsu, demonstrates a reflective and rational attitude in making decisions. This is evident in the quote: "However, Putri Bungsu's determination was very strong. She wanted her mother to recover. Armed with a little food, she went to the mountains. She traveled for days, regardless of heat or rain." This action illustrates the process of reasoning and moral decisions based on logic and responsibility.

#### 1.2 Critical Thinking in Intrinsic Element Analysis

The characters and traits serve as indicators of critical thinking because readers are encouraged to evaluate each character rationally. Putri Bungsu is depicted as compassionate and brave, the Prince as patient and wise, while the main character's two older brothers exhibit selfish traits. This analysis enables readers to evaluate the cause-and-effect relationship between the characters' actions and

their moral values. The mixed plot (forward and backward) also encourages readers to think analytically, interpreting the relationship between the Prince's past and the present situation.

### 1.3 Critical Thinking through Style and Message

The style used in this folktale is descriptive. This style helps present concrete situations that stimulate logical analysis of events. The language is easy to understand, yet still includes expressions that create a realistic and engaging image. The story's message emphasizes the value of overcoming envy and appreciating one's own efforts, teaching readers to judge morality based on reason rather than emotion.

### 2. Manifestations of Creativity in the Snake N'Daung Folktale

Creative skills in folklore extend beyond reading or retelling; they involve exploring, interpreting, and transforming the folktale into something more engaging and inspiring for the modern generation. In the Snake Ndaung folktale, this can be achieved through the creative process of depicting intrinsic elements on posters, making them more appealing and accessible to today's generation. Posters, as a creative medium, are not only visually appealing but also effective in conveying messages and values. In the context of education or preservation, posters become an engaging medium. In the following folktale, a creatively created poster is shown:



Figure 1  
Poster for the Snake N'Daung Folktale“a. Author's Creativity in Processing Traditional Elements

This story combines mythological and realistic elements. The cursed snake symbolizes the connection between humans and nature. This combination of myth and humanitarian messages demonstrates the author's ability to adapt traditional culture to remain relevant in a modern context.

## 2.2 Creativity through Learning Visualization

The analysis reveals that this story can be effectively adapted for visual media, such as a digital poster that conveys the values of struggle and compassion. Poster creation helps students develop visual creativity and the ability to convey moral messages in a visually appealing manner.“c. Creativity in Narrative Style“Dian Kristiani uses a mixed plot to create a dramatic effect and stimulate the reader's imagination. The use of a third-person perspective makes the story flexible and open to various moral interpretations. This demonstrates narrative innovation in reviving the classic tale to appeal to a younger generation.

## 3. Forms of Collaboration in the Snake N'Daung Folktale

### 3.1 Collaboration through Family Relationships

Collaborative skills emerge through the interaction between the youngest daughter and her mother. The Princess's struggle to find medicine for her mother illustrates the value of cooperation within the family. The following quote reinforces this: "The Youngest Princess's determination was very strong. She wanted her mother to recover. Armed with a little food, she went to the mountains. She traveled for days, regardless of rain or heat.

### 3.2 Collaboration Between Human Characters and Other Creatures

Cooperation is also reflected in the interaction between the Youngest Princess and the Snake Prince N'Daung. Their relationship is not simply mutual assistance, but collaborative, as both play an active role in achieving the common goal of healing her mother and freeing the prince from the curse. This collaboration emphasizes the importance of solidarity, mutual trust, and empathy.

### 3.3 Collaboration as a Social Value

This story emphasizes the importance of mutual cooperation and caring for others. By selflessly helping others, the characters demonstrate that cooperation is the foundation of civilized human character in social and spiritual life.

## 4. Forms of Communication in the Snake Folktale N'Daung

### 4.1 Verbal Communication through Dialogue

Dialogue between characters is the primary means of conveying the moral message. One important dialogue is when the Prince says: "For years I lived alone here, there was no hope for me to meet the person who burned my skin, but God has brought me together with you." This sentence demonstrates empathetic, sincere, and humanitarian-oriented communication.

## 4.2 Nonverbal Communication through Actions and Symbolism

In addition to dialogue, the Youngest Princess's actions in helping her mother and saving the Prince are a form of unspoken communication of affection. These actions convey a strong moral message about empathy and sacrifice, reflecting moral and emotional communication.

## 4.3 Intergenerational Communication.

This story also functions as a medium for cultural communication, transmitting moral values from generation to generation. Through its easy-to-understand narrative and strong descriptive language, Ular N'Daung serves as a means of cultural literacy that teaches the ethics of speaking, listening, and understanding the meaning of the message.

## DISCUSSION

The research results demonstrate that the critical thinking aspect of the folktale "Ular N'Daung" by Dian Kristiani is represented through the main character, Putri Bungsu's, ability to analyze situations and make rational moral decisions. The theme of a child's struggle and sacrifice for her mother illustrates a reflection that aligns with the principles of logical and ethical thinking. This finding aligns with the view of Thornhill-Miller et al., who explain that critical thinking is a core 21st-century skill, requiring individuals to evaluate information rationally and make accountable decisions (Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023). Furthermore, critical thinking in the context of literary education will only develop if the learning process involves an explicit analysis of values, logic, and morality (Stanikzai, 2023). Therefore, the story Ular N'Daung can be an effective reflective literacy medium for developing students' critical thinking skills, provided it is accompanied by teacher guidance in directing the interpretation and discussion of the moral values contained within.

The creative aspect of this story is evident in the author's ability to combine mythological ele-

ments with contextual human values. The use of the snake symbol as a symbol of curse and redemption illustrates the narrative's innovative and imaginative creativity. This aligns with Long et al.'s opinion, which explains that creativity in 21st-century learning serves to foster divergent, exploratory, and solution-oriented thinking skills in various contexts (Feyza & Seyda, 2023). However, research by Hapsari and Prasetyarini found that creativity only develops optimally when students are given space to create through product-based activities such as digital posters or visual literacy projects (Hapsari & Prasetyarini, 2025). Based on these two perspectives, it can be concluded that the element of creativity in Ular N'Daung is not only found in the text but can also be implemented in creative learning activities to strengthen students' cultural and aesthetic literacy. "Other findings indicate that the collaborative aspect of the Ular N'Daung story is depicted through interactions between characters that emphasize the values of empathy, mutual assistance, and cooperation in the face of adversity. The relationship between the youngest daughter and her mother, as well as the collaboration with Pangeran Ular N'Daung, demonstrates synergy and interdependence in achieving a common goal. These findings reinforce Cambridge Assessment's view that 21st-century collaboration is not just about working together, but also encompasses the ability to listen, manage conflict, and negotiate to achieve collective outcomes (Child & Shaw, 2016). However, representations of collaboration in literary works tend to be symbolic and need to be translated into project-based learning practices so that students can experience collaborative processes in a real-life setting. Therefore, integrating collaborative values from folklore into Project-Based Learning (PBL) models can be an effective strategy for building solidarity and social skills in students in the digital age..

The communication aspect was found to be the most prominent dimension in Ular N'Daung. The dialogue between characters and symbolic



actions conveying messages of compassion, sacrifice, and honesty are powerful forms of moral and emotional communication. This finding aligns with Panorama Education, which explains that communication in the 21st century demands the skills to convey ideas clearly, listen empathetically, and adapt messages to the social context. Meanwhile, literacy in modern communication must include multimodal and digital skills so that students can actively participate in the global communication environment (Chourio-Acevedo et al., 2024). Based on these two perspectives, the communication skills depicted in Ular N'Daung can be developed into a digital literacy learning model based on folklore, such as storytelling podcasts or animated reading activities, which allow students to practice creatively expressing moral messages through modern media.

In general, the results of this study indicate that critical thinking and communication are the most dominant aspects in the text, while creativity and collaboration play a role in complementing the narrative meaning. These findings align with the often central focus of 21st-century education, where thinking and communication skills are often prioritized before moving on to collaboration and creative innovation (Long et al., 2024). From a pedagogical perspective, this suggests that folktales can be a strategic literacy tool for strengthening students' moral reasoning and reflective communication skills. However, to broaden the learning impact, a more exploratory approach is needed to ensure balanced development of all four 4C skills.

This study's strengths lie in the depth of content analysis and the clarity of the categorization used to identify representations of the four 4C aspects. The use of the Miles and Huberman model in the data reduction, presentation, and verification stages provides a systematic and repeatable analysis structure. A multidimensional approach is needed to evaluate representations of 21st-century literacy in literary and cultural contexts (Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023). However, this study

also has limitations, as it only analyzed a single literary work and did not include empirical data from direct learning. A more comprehensive assessment of 21st-century literacy would be achieved by combining it with measurements of student participation in real-world contexts (Long et al., 2024). Therefore, further research is recommended to expand the scope of study by comparing various folkKLORE from different regions and implementing the analysis results into project-based classes or digital media.

Considering these results and limitations, it can be concluded that Ular N'Daung is not only a folktale containing traditional moral values, but can also be used as a contextual model for 21st-century literacy learning. This story integrates critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication skills into a cohesive narrative and demonstrates how local literature can support character development, social empathy, and life skills in students in the digital age.

## CONCLUSION

The story of Ular N'Daung by Dian Kristiani represents four 21st-century literacy skills (critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication) in an integrated manner through the themes of struggle, humanitarian values, and contextual moral messages. The critical thinking aspect is evident through the ability of the characters and readers to analyze the logic of actions and the underlying moral values, while creativity is reflected in the processing of mythological elements into innovative narratives relevant to modern reality. The value of collaboration is demonstrated through interactions between characters that emphasize empathy and mutual cooperation, while communication is also evident through dialogue and symbols of action that convey humanitarian and spiritual messages effectively. Conceptually, these results reinforce the view that 21st-century literacy encompasses not only the ability to read and write, but also the capacity to think critically, be creative, collaborate, and communicate effec-

tively in social and digital contexts. Thus, Ular N'Daung functions not only as a cultural heritage but also as a transformative learning medium that can foster life skills, character, and cultural appreciation in students during the global era. This study has limitations in its scope of analysis, which only covers one text. Therefore, it is recommended that further research expand the object of study or implement the findings within the context of project-based learning and digital literacy, so that the 4C values can be applied more widely and effectively.

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