



**WHYOHWHYOHWHY:
AFRICAN PORQUOI TALES**

Applause Series Curriculum Guide
October 23-27, 2017



CIVIC CENTER • STONER THEATER • TEMPLE THEATER • COWLES COMMONS

WHYOHWHYOHWHY: AFRICAN PORQUOI TALES

BY CHARLOTTE BLAKE ALSTON

Dear Teachers,

Thank you for joining us for the Applause Series presentation of *WhyOhWhyOhWhy: African Porquoi Tales* from master storyteller Charlotte Blake Alston. Stories are at the heart of who we are. They help us make meaning, remember where we come from, and find joy. While we engage in storytelling everyday, experiencing a master storyteller like Ms. Alston is an incredible treat. We hope that hearing her wonderful porquoi (or 'why') tales instills in your students a new appreciation for storytelling and respect for the rich traditions of African and African American cultures that Ms. Alston uplifts.



Storyteller Charlotte Blake Alston. Photo by Annie Cameron.

We thank you for sharing this very special experience with your students and hope that this study guide helps you connect the performance to your in-classroom curriculum in ways that you find valuable. In the following pages, you will find contextual information about the performance and related subjects, as well as a variety of discussion questions and assessment activities. Some pages are appropriate to reproduce for your students; others are designed more specifically with you, their teacher, in mind. As such, we hope that you are able to "pick and choose" material and ideas from the study guide to meet your class's unique needs.

See you at the theater,

Des Moines Performing Arts Education Team

Support for Des Moines Performing Arts education programs and the Applause Series is provided by:

American Enterprise Group, Arts Midwest, Bradford and Sally Austin, Bravo Greater Des Moines, Clive Community Foundation, EMC Insurance Companies, DuPont Pioneer, Ernest and Florence Sargent Family Foundation, Gannett Foundation/The Des Moines Register, Hy-Vee, Inc., Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, John Deere, Judith A. Lindquist Scholarship Fund, Richard and Deborah McConnell, Meredith Corporation Foundation, Nationwide, Polk County, Prairie Meadows, Principal, U.S. Bank, Union Pacific Foundation, Wells Fargo & Co., West Bancorporation Foundation, Windsor Charitable Foundation, and more than 400 individual donors.

This study guide was compiled and written by Lisa Norris-Lynner and edited by Karoline Myers. Adapted in part from "Charlotte Blake Aston, Master Storyteller/Narrator Teacher/Study Guide."

GUIDE CONTENTS

About the Applause Series
Page 3

**Going to the Theater and
Theater Etiquette**
Page 4

**Temple Theater Trip
Information for Teachers**
Page 5

Vocabulary
Pages 6

About the Performance
Page 7

About the Artist
Page 8

The Art of Storytelling
Page 9

Africa is Not a Country
Page 10

Pre-Show Exploration
Pages 12-13

**Post-Show Discussion
& Assessment**
Page 14

Storytelling Activities
Pages 15-16

Supporting Worksheets
Pages 17-18

Resources and Sources
Page 19

ABOUT THE APPLAUSE SERIES



TAKE THOUSANDS OF IOWA STUDENTS OUT OF THEIR CLASSROOMS, PLACE THEM IN A THEATER, SPRINKLE THE STAGE WITH WORLD-CLASS PERFORMERS, AND WHAT DO YOU HAVE? A RECIPE FOR LEARNING THAT REACHES NEW LEVELS OF POSSIBILITY—FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS.

WE CALL IT THE APPLAUSE SERIES.

BRINGING ARTS EDUCATION TO LIFE

The Applause Series is a flagship education program of Des Moines Performing Arts. Since its launch in 1996, more than a half million students and teachers have attended school-time performances as part of the series. You are joining us for the 22nd season of school performances!

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Each year, more than 55,000 students and teachers attend an Applause Series performance. The actual cost per person is \$8, but thanks to the caring contributions of donors, schools pay just \$1 per ticket. By removing the financial barriers to participation, donors introduce a whole new generation to the power of arts in action. That means stronger schools and communities now and in the future.

TICKET TO IMAGINATION

The Applause Series annually delivers 60 age-appropriate performances for pre-school to high school students. The impact stretches far beyond the Des Moines metro, reaching schools in over 35 Iowa counties. The theater becomes the classroom. One-hour matinees energize students to imagine new ways of creative expression, cultural diversity and even career opportunities.

BEYOND THE STAGE

For many Applause Series performances, we offer the opportunity for schools to go deeper by exploring an art form or theme that connects with what is seen on stage. Invite a professional teaching artist into the classroom or visit another cultural destination in Des Moines to help students make more meaning of a piece of theater.

ABOUT DES MOINES PERFORMING ARTS

Des Moines Performing Arts is central Iowa's premier not-for-profit performing arts organization.

More than 300,000 guests attend performances and events in our four venues each year:

- ◇ *Civic Center, 2744 seats*
- ◇ *Stoner Theater, 200 seats*
- ◇ *Temple Theater, 299 seats*
- ◇ *Cowles Commons (outdoor plaza)*

Guests experience a wide variety of art forms and cultural activities, with presentations ranging from Broadway, comedy, professional dance, to family programming.

Des Moines Performing Arts education programs serving more than 75,000 Iowans annually.

Programs for schools, such as the Applause Series and teacher professional development, help enliven students' learning. Public education programs such as master classes, workshops, Q&A sessions and summer camps allow audience members and aspiring artists to make meaningful and personal connections to the art they experience on our stages.

GOING TO THE THEATER



ATTENDING A LIVE PERFORMANCE IS A UNIQUE AND EXCITING OPPORTUNITY! UNLIKE THE PASSIVE EXPERIENCE OF WATCHING A MOVIE, AUDIENCE MEMBERS PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN EVERY LIVE PERFORMANCE.

WHAT ROLE WILL YOU PLAY?

YOUR ROLE AS AN AUDIENCE MEMBER

Artists on stage are very aware of the mood and level of engagement of the audience. As such, each performance calls for a different response from audience members.

As you experience the performance, consider the following questions:

- ◇ What kind of live performance is this (a musical, dance, or concert)?
- ◇ What is the mood of the performance? Is the subject matter serious or lighthearted?
- ◇ What is the mood of the artists? Are they happy and smiling or somber and reserved?
- ◇ Are the artists encouraging the audience to clap to the music, move to the beat, or participate in some other way?
- ◇ Are there natural breaks in the performance where applause seems appropriate?

REMEMBER....

THE THEATER IS DESIGNED TO MAGNIFY SOUND. EVEN WHISPERS CAN BE HEARD!

DID YOU KNOW?

ALTHOUGH NOT REQUIRED, SOME PEOPLE ENJOY DRESSING UP WHEN THEY ATTEND THE THEATER.

THEATER ETIQUETTE CHECKLIST

- Do not bring food, drinks or chewing gum into the theater.
- The use of cameras and recording devices are not permitted.
- Turn off and put away cell phones and other electronics before the performance begins.
- Do not text during the performance.
- Respect the theater. Keep your feet off of the seats and avoid bouncing up and down.
- When the house lights dim, the performance is about to begin. Please stop talking at this time.
- Talk only before and after the performance.
- Use the restroom before the performance or wait until the end.
- Remember that this is a special experience. The artists are creating something just for you. Appropriate responses such as laughing and applauding are appreciated. Pay attention to the artists — they will let you know what is appropriate.
- Open your eyes, ears, mind, and heart to the entire experience. **Enjoy yourself!**

GOING TO THE THEATER information is adapted from the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts study guide materials.

TEMPLE THEATER FIELD TRIP INFORMATION



WE WANT YOUR FIELD TRIP TO BE SAFE AND SUCCESSFUL!

PLEASE READ BELOW FOR IMPORTANT TIPS AND DETAILS TO ENSURE A GREAT DAY.

GET ORGANIZED

- ◇ Double-check that all students, teachers, and chaperones were included in your ticket order. Request an adjustment if your numbers have increased. We want to make sure we have enough seats for you!
- ◇ Tickets are not issued. Bring a copy of your invoice, which will serve as your group's "ticket".
- ◇ Schedule arrival for 30 minutes prior to the start of the performance. This allows time to park, cross streets, find your seats, and go to the restroom.
- ◇ Let drivers know that Applause performances are approximately 60 minutes, unless otherwise noted.
- ◇ Remind chaperones that children under the age of three are not permitted in the theater for Applause Series events.

DIRECTIONS/PARKING

- ◇ The Temple Theater is located on the second floor of the Temple for Performing Arts, 1011 Locust Street, Des Moines.
- ◇ Directions from I-235: Take Exit 8A (Downtown exit). Go south on 5th Ave. Turn west on Grand Ave. Turn south on 13th Street. Turn east on Locust Street.
- ◇ A police officer stationed at the corner of 10th and Locust Streets will direct your bus where to park. (Buses generally park on the south side of Locust Street in front of the Nationwide building.)
- ◇ Personal vehicles are responsible for securing their own parking on a nearby street or in a downtown parking ramp.



Exterior of the Temple for Performing Arts.

ARRIVAL/SEATING

- ◇ A Des Moines Performing Arts staff member will greet you at the door and ask for your school name.
- ◇ You will then be directed upstairs to the Temple Theater (second floor).
- ◇ Ushers will escort groups to their seats.
- ◇ Your school may be seated in multiple rows. Adults should position themselves throughout the group.
- ◇ Help us seat efficiently and start the show on time, by allowing ushers to seat your entire group before rearranging students or taking groups to the restroom.

IN THE THEATER

- ◇ In case of a medical emergency, notify the nearest usher.
- ◇ Adults are asked to handle any disruptive behavior in their group. If the behavior persists, an usher may request your group to exit the theater.

QUESTIONS?
education@dmpa.org

VOCABULARY

STORYTELLING

Storytelling: Storytelling is the social and cultural activity of sharing stories, often with elements of drama, poetry, and music. Throughout history, stories have been shared in every culture to entertain, educate, teach a moral lesson, and preserve cultural heritage. The stories you will hear in this performance come from African and African-American culture.

Teller:

A person who tells stories. A professional Teller like Charlotte Blake Alston spends many years studying the art of Storytelling.



Charlotte Blake Alston. Photo credit Deborah Boardman.

- ◇ Tellers are cultural detectives. They research their stories and the cultures that created them.
- ◇ They are writers. They often write their own version of a story to fit their personal style of telling.
- ◇ They are performers. Every Teller is an actor, but some also sing, play musical instruments, and even dance to make their stories come alive.

Pourquoi (POOR-kwah) Tale: also known as an origin story, a pourquoi tale is a fictional story that explains why something is the way it is, for example why a snake has no legs, or why a tiger has stripes. Many legends and folk tales are pourquoi stories. "Pourquoi" means "why" in French.

CHARACTERS

Anansi (ə-NAHN-see): an African folktale character. He often takes the shape of a spider and is



African Rain Spider by Thomas Scarborough. CCO 1.0 Universal.

considered to be the spirit of all knowledge of stories. Believed to have originated in Ghana, he is one of the most important characters of West African and Caribbean folklore. You might even think of Anansi as the original "Spiderman!"



Sungura by Masteraah. CC BY-SA 2.0 de.

Sungura (Soon-GOO-rah): an African folktale character who often takes the form of a rabbit or hare and often plays

jokes on people or other animals. In the Swahili language, Sungura can also mean "trickster." The Sungura character originated in Kenya, but is familiar in many African cultures. In African-American culture in the South, the character is called B'rer Rabbit. He is also thought to be one of the inspirations for Bugs Bunny.

INSTRUMENTS

Djembe (JEM-bay): a goblet shaped African drum, usually about 25



Djembe by ZSM. CC BY 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

inches tall. It has a body carved out of hardwood and a head (usually made from goatskin) that is "tuned" by adjusting the ropes that line the bowl of the drum. It is played by hand – never with a stick.



Kora by Steve Evans. CC BY 2.0.

Kora (KOR-ah): a 21-stringed African harp. It has a body

carved from a large calabash (a type of gourd) that is covered in cow-skin. It also has a long, hardwood neck, as well as two planes with 11 and 10 strings that run in notches at the sides of its upright mounted bridge. The playing style resembles the fingerpicking blues guitar, but the sound resembles that of a harp.

Mbira (Mm-BEER-ah): an African musical instrument consisting of a wooden board (often fitted with a resonator) and attached metal



Mbira. by Alex Weeks. CC BY-SA 3.0

"fingers" (called tines). It is played by holding the instrument in the hands and plucking the tines with the thumbs. It has many names in African cultures, but in English it is often called a Thumb Piano.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

In this one-woman performance, professional storyteller Charlotte Blake Alston shares stories that make you say, “Hmmm.” The common themes and lessons of these centuries old African folk stories reveal why they have stood the test of time. Often offering creative and funny ideas that explain the workings of nature (why the rain falls, why the sky is blue) and man’s relationship with the earth and the universe, these stories were created to make you think.

Run Time: 50 minutes

ABOUT THE STORIES

All of the tales in this performance are known as Pourquoi Tales from African and African-American culture. They are stories that answer a question and explain why something is, such as: Why do dogs chase cats?

At the center of many of these tales are characters you may know, such as Anansi the Spider from Ghana, or Sungura the Rabbit from Kenya. Not only may you find yourself asking, “What will Turtle do next?” you may also find yourself asking, “What would I do in that situation?” Hmmm.

These stories and storytelling traditions followed Africans to America where Br’er Rabbit, Br’er Fox, and company were born. Come listen, laugh, join in, tap your finger on your temple and say “Hmmm?” Then go back to your classroom (or back to your home) and TALK! No, don’t talk to your neighbor when you should be listening – talk about the ‘Why’ stories you just heard! Hmmm.

WHAT YOU WILL EXPERIENCE

Watching a storyteller is different from attending a play. There is only one “actor” – the Teller, Ms. Alston. She will be performing on the stage with minimal lighting and scenery. She may use a few props – objects that help illustrate the story. She will also play some musical instruments from African culture.

Ms. Alston knows hundreds of stories. As the only person on the stage, she has the freedom to change her performance to suit her audience. She does not decide exactly which tales she will tell until the day of the show, so what you will see is a one-of-a-kind performance, created just for you!

Unlike a play, where the actors often perform as though the audience isn’t watching, Ms. Alston will be telling her stories directly to you, as if you were sitting in her living room. If you’re sitting close enough, she may look you right in the eye! She may also encourage you to clap, sing, gesture, or participate in some way during the performance. If she does that, please join in – but only when she asks!



“[Storytelling] was something I was incorporating into my classroom to bring history and literature alive.... Then, I went to hear a storyteller and just with his voice, he transported us from the space we were into the western plains. I immediately understood its power....It was then that I began to explore and research my own African and African American oral roots and discovered a centuries-old tradition in west Africa of oral telling as the means of passing down history and culture. ”

-Charlotte Blake Alston
Toronto Storytelling Festival Interviews

WHILE YOU WATCH...

- ◇ Listen and observe the storyteller carefully. Participate when asked.
- ◇ Notice how the storyteller uses her voice. Take notice of any additional items that the teller uses to enhance the story.
- ◇ Visualize the setting and characters of the story using your imagination.
- ◇ Be aware of what in the stories makes you laugh, feel empathy, excitement, sorrow, fear or suspense. Did any of the situations in the story sound familiar to you? What were they?
- ◇ If the story has animal characters, pay attention to their behavior in the story. Do they take on any human characteristics?
- ◇ Notice if a character – human or animal – learns a lesson in the story. Is there an aspect of the story that the listener can learn from?

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Charlotte Blake Alston is a nationally acclaimed storyteller, narrator, instrumentalist, librettist and singer who performs in venues around the world.

STORYTELLING STYLE

Ms. Alston breathes life into traditional and contemporary stories from African and African American oral and cultural traditions. Her solo performances are often enhanced with traditional instruments such as djembe, mbira, shekere, or the 21-stringed kora.

In 1999, she began studying the kora and the West African history-telling traditions of Senegal, Mali, Guinea and Guinea Bissau. Her teacher was the highly respected Senegalese griot (jali), the late Djimo Kouyate. She has recently resumed her studies with Malian Virtuoso Yacouba Sissoko.



Photo by Deborah Boardman.

COLLABORATIONS & APPEARANCES

Ms. Alston is the host of *Sound All Around*, the Philadelphia Orchestra's Preschool concert series and has appeared as host or narrator on the orchestra's school and family concerts since 1991.

She has been a featured host, storyteller and narrator on the Carnegie Hall Family and School Concert series since 1995. She has made multiple appearances in such venues as the Smithsonian Institution, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the National Storytelling Festival and the National Festival of Black Storytelling.

Ms. Alston's international appearances include performances or festival appearances in Accra, Ghana; Cape Town, South Africa; Beijing, China; Basel, Switzerland and the Cape Clear Island Storytelling Festival in Ireland.

She has appeared as a narrator for several choirs and orchestras around the country including the Cleveland Orchestra, The Indianapolis Symphony and the Baltimore Symphony.

Ms. Alston has performed at both Presidential and Gubernatorial Inaugural activities. More recently she has been a commissioned librettist, creating texts for orchestral and choral works.

**For more information,
visit her website at:
charlotteblakealston.com**

STORYTELLING CAN BE A JOB!

Did you know that some people are such good storytellers, they actually make a living telling stories?

Being a professional Teller is not easy. It requires great talent, many years of study, creativity, discipline, and lots and lots of practice. Some Tellers have to practice their craft for many years before they can earn enough money to make a living.

But with hard work and determination, a professional Teller like Charlotte Blake Alston can have a career that takes them all over the world!

Do you think you could be a professional Teller?

AWARDS

Ms. Alston has received numerous honors and awards including a *Pew Fellowship in the Arts*, the Commonwealth of PA. *Artist of the Year Award*, the National Storytelling Network's *Circle of Excellence Award* and the *Zora Neale Hurston Award*, the highest award conferred by the National Association of Black Storytellers. Her latest libretto, *The Children's March*, commissioned by Singing City Choir for the 2013 Philadelphia International Festival of the Arts (PIFA Festival) premiered on April 26, 2013. She holds two honorary PhDs and received the Circle of Excellence Award from the National Storytelling Association.

THE ART OF STORYTELLING

Charlotte Blake Alston is a master storyteller. Learn more about the art form of storytelling prior to the performance.

THE HISTORY OF STORYTELLING

Storytelling is the world's oldest art form. Long before there were written – or even spoken – languages, people told each other stories around the fire. These stories were passed down from generation to generation, first by-word of mouth, then in writing.



Ancient Storyteller.
By E. Irving Couse, 1909. The
How and Why Library.

Today, stories are shared in books, on stages, on film, and even in video games. When you hear, read, or see a story on the stage or on a screen, remember that it may first been told hundreds – or even thousands – of years ago!

WHY DO WE TELL STORIES?

People are born storytellers. When you come home from school and tell your parents what you did that day, you are telling a story!

We tell stories for enjoyment. But we also tell stories to make sense of the events that happen to us, our families, or the people and events we hear about in the news. We tell each other stories to share our lives and to help us remember things that are important to us.

Happy stories, sad stories, funny stories, scary stories – stories tell us about who we were, who we are, and who we might aspire to be.

Some stories also have a special purpose:

They explain...

In ancient times and primitive cultures, stories were often used to explain things that people didn't understand – nature, the weather, the behavior of animals and people. Today, we explain these things using science. But before we had science, we made up stories to help make sense of the world.

They teach...

Stories are often used to show people how they should behave. Stories provide examples of good and bad behaviors and show how positive actions (like kindness, generosity and bravery) are rewarded, and negative actions (cruelty, selfishness, and cowardice) are punished. They help us understand right from wrong.

They help us understand each other...

Stories help keep a culture alive by passing on lessons about life, history, beliefs, and values from generation to generation. When we hear stories from another culture, it helps us to better understand the people from that culture. Stories can teach us something that is different or unique about another culture. They can also show us that deep down we're all very much the same.

ELEMENTS OF A STORY

Setting...

The place where the story happens.

Characters...

Not only people but animals, objects, and even forces of nature like the sun and the moon can become the characters in stories. Every story needs at least one good character who is the hero, or protagonist. Many stories also have a villain, or antagonist, to create conflict with the hero.

Conflict...

Most stories have a problem that the hero needs to solve. This might be outwitting the villain, making a difficult journey, helping another character who is in danger, overcoming personal obstacles (poverty, fear) or natural ones (crossing an ocean, surviving a terrible storm.)

Plot...

Every story needs a Beginning (that sets up the story and introduces the characters and the problem that needs to be solved), a Middle (that describes the hero's journey in solving the problem), and an Ending (that wraps up the story and shows how the problem was solved).

Theme...

The central idea behind the story. A theme is something important that the story tries to tell us – such as a moral or a lesson that might help us in our own lives. Not every story has a theme, but it's best if it does. Some stories have more than one.

AFRICA IS NOT A COUNTRY

Charlotte Blake Alston will share stories from African and African-American traditions.

Learn more about Africa and African American culture and where the stories you will hear come from.

THE CONTINENT OF AFRICA

Many people think of Africa as a country, but it's not.

It is a continent with 54 different countries. The people of Africa include hundreds of different ethnic groups with their own languages, belief systems, and culture.

What we think of as an "African" story, might actually be a story from a particular African culture.

Some stories – like the Anansi story you will hear in the performance – have different versions in different parts of Africa. When you hear or read an African story, see if you can identify exactly what African country and culture is represented.



Africa is a large, diverse continent. It contains 54 countries and is home to hundreds of different ethnic groups. Map: Mapwire.com.

AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURE

African American culture is different from African culture. Although it has its roots in African culture, it has developed over time to include the traditions of many African cultures and other world cultures to become a culture of its own.

The Africans who first came to America brought along the stories of their homeland. Over time those stories changed to reflect the characters, settings, and names, more familiar to the culture. For example, the Anansi spider character is sometimes called Nancy, Aunt Nancy, or Sis' Nancy in the American versions of those stories. Sungura, the trickster rabbit, became Br'er Rabbit (Br'er is short for Brother).

Think about...

When you hear, or read a story, think about where it comes from. Some stories – like *Cinderella* – have different versions from different cultures around the world.

PRE-SHOW EXPLORATION, pg. 1 of 2

1) EXPLORE AFRICAN FOLK TALES

Goal: Familiarize students with African Folktales and understand their origins.

Explanation: Students will experience a variety of African Folktales through books and compare and contrast the stories' origins, characters, and themes.

Materials:

Several African folktales, such as those suggested on the resource list on page 19.

You may also consult your school librarian for help identifying stories that will work well for your grade level.

Materials:

- ◇ Blank paper for each student
- ◇ Pencils
- ◇ Crayons, colored pencils, or markers

Activity:

For each selected story, have students participate in the following:

1. Identify where in Africa the story comes from and find it on a map or globe.
2. If you can, identify the ethnic group, culture or country associated with the stories. Write and speak the name of the group or region of origin when referring to the story.

Examples: Anansi stories were created by the Ashanti people of what is now Ghana in the western part of the continent.

Sungura, the trickster rabbit comes from Kenya on the opposite side of the continent. The land areas, peoples and lifestyles are different.

3. Identify the main characters of the story. Who is the hero? Is there a villain?
4. Identify the theme. Is there a moral or lesson to the story? Is someone rewarded? Is someone punished?

Expanded Activity Ideas:

Take one of the stories you have read aloud and explore the country with your students. (You can do this as a group, or have students pick a story and do their own research on the country.)

1. When students have located the country on a map or globe, have them answer the following, based on what they see:

- ◇ What kind of climate would it have? How does it compare to ours?
- ◇ What animals might be found there?
- ◇ Is it north or south of the equator?
- ◇ What are some neighboring countries?

2. Using encyclopedias or the internet have students research some additional facts on the country to share with the class. Some possible topics might include:

- ◇ Famous Landmarks
- ◇ Wildlife
- ◇ Plants and Flowers
- ◇ Government
- ◇ History
- ◇ Culture
(Select an ethnic group within the country and explore the culture: what do people eat, what do they wear, where do they live, what kind of music do they play, what language do they speak, what are some traditions of the culture, etc.)

3. If you want to make time, have students work individually or as teams to create a project on a country. Projects could include:

- ◇ A travel poster and brochure
- ◇ A travel journal for an imaginary safari through the country
- ◇ A cookbook with recipes of dishes eaten in the country
- ◇ A Powerpoint guided tour presentation about the country or one of its landmarks.

(NOTE: Some of these activities might also be saved until after students have attended the performance. You may wish to choose a country based on the setting of one of Ms. Alston's stories.)

PRE-SHOW EXPLORATION, pg. 2 of 2

2) FINDING THE LESSON IN A STORY

Goal: For students to identify the moral or lesson in a story

Materials:

- ◇ An Anansi story, a tall tale, a dilemma tale (in which the resolution of the conflict is left to the listeners to discuss), a story that offers an explanation for natural phenomena (a porquoi or 'why' tale) such as *Why Mosquitos Buzz in People's Ears*

Activity:

1. Read the story aloud.
2. Discuss as a class the lesson to the story.

Follow-up Questions:

1. Did everyone come up with the same lesson for the same story?
2. Which stories teach more than one lesson?
3. When you first heard the story, did you realize there was a lesson?
4. Can you think of some "grown up" stories – books or even movies – that teach a lesson? (Examples – Harry Potter, Star Wars, The Lion King)

Extended Activity:

1. Ask students to name some different folk tales or fairy tales they remember and write them on the board. If they can't think of any, you might want to suggest some stories, or read one or two short ones.
2. Ask the students to pick one of the stories from the board – or another story they know well – and write down the lesson or moral the story teaches.
3. Have them share their answers with the class. (You can also do this as simple discussion, without any writing.)

Examples:

- ◇ Pinocchio - telling lies is wrong
- ◇ The Tortoise and the Hare - never give up, no matter what the odds
- ◇ The Ugly Duckling - it's wrong to judge people from their looks

3) STORY MOUNTAIN MAPPING

Goal: To help students understand the structure of a story.

Materials:

- ◇ Story Mountain Map worksheet, page 17

Activity:

1. Pick a story. It could be one story the whole class has read, or each student may pick their own.
2. Using the Story Mountain Map worksheet, have students identify the different "levels" of the plot. This can be done as a class discussion or individually, as appropriate.

4) WHAT MAKES A GOOD STORYTELLER?

Goal: To help students understand that telling a story is different than reading it.

Materials:

- ◇ Board or chart paper
- ◇ Writing utensil

Activity:

1. Encourage students to tell — not read — a story with which they are already familiar.
2. As a class, discuss the differences between telling a story and reading that same story from a book. Some questions to ask:
 - ◇ Was the story hard to remember?
 - ◇ Do you think it was easier to tell the story than to read it aloud? Why or why not?
3. Have students brainstorm what they think a storyteller might do to make a story interesting to an audience. Make a list on the board or chart paper. Some prompts to generate ideas.
 - ◇ What might you do with your voice? Your hands?
 - ◇ If you are playing all the parts, how could you show different characters?
 - ◇ What might you bring with you to help tell the story? (Props, instruments, sound effects?)

After the Performance:

Review your brainstorm list. Ask students to identify items on the list the storyteller incorporated. Add anything the storyteller did that was not included on the list.

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION & ASSESSMENT

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *WhyOhWhyOhWhy* was a one-woman show. Storyteller Charlotte Blake Alston was the only performer. What specific things did she do that held your attention during the performance?
2. Did any of the stories leave you with something to think about or discuss? What, if any, lessons were learned from the stories? Which stories? What were the lessons?
3. What instruments do you remember? How did they help enhance the stories?
4. For the stories with animal characters, what characteristics did the animals take on to make them seem human?
5. What did the storyteller do to represent different characters? Did she use different voices? Facial expressions? Movements?
6. Was lighting used to help represent the mood of the stories? Did you notice when the lights changed?
7. Did any of the stories seem familiar to ones you already knew? If so, how was the story you saw performed similar or different?

1) RE-TELL A STORY

Goal: To recall and retell a story

Explanation: Students will re-tell a story from the performance for their peers and engage in reflection.

Activity:

1. Invite students to choose one of the stories from the performance they liked the most and to re-tell it in their own words to the class or a small group.
2. After they finish telling the story, ask for feedback from the listeners. Did the story make sense? Was there something they remembered from the story that the student storyteller forgot to include?

Follow-Up Questions:

1. Did you tell the story the exact same way as Ms. Alston? Why or why not? Is that okay?
2. What parts were easiest to remember in the story? Why?

2) WRITE A LETTER

Goal: To reflect on the performance experience and to practice writing skills.

Explanation: After the show, students will write letters to Charlotte Blake Alston or to Des Moines Performing Arts donors whose support keeps Applause Series tickets accessibly priced for school groups.

Activity:

1. After attending the performance, discuss the experience with your students.
2. Next, invite students to write a letter to storyteller Charlotte Blake Alston or to Des Moines Performing Arts donors.

Questions to ask them to help them frame their letter:

- ◇ What did you like best about the show?
- ◇ Was there something that was surprising? Scary? Funny?
- ◇ What would you like best about your job if you were a storyteller?

3. Invite students to illustrate their letter with a scene from their favorite story in the show.

4. Mail the letters to the following address:

Des Moines Performing Arts
Attn: Education Department
221 Walnut Street
Des Moines, IA 50309

Follow-Up Discussion Questions:

1. What did you choose to share in your letter? Why?
2. How does receiving a letter make you feel?
3. How do you think the recipient of your letter will feel when he or she receives your letter? Why?

STORYTELLING ACTIVITIES, pg. 1 of 2

1) CREATE A PORQUOI TALE

Goal: To understand the genre of the porquoi tale

Explanation: In this activity, students will create their own story that gives an explanation for why something happens.

Materials:

- ◇ Porquoi Tale worksheet, page 18
- ◇ Paper
- ◇ Writing utensils

Activity:

1. Invite students to think about a mystery in the world that people wondered about before we had Google:

- ◇ Why is the sky blue?
- ◇ Where do the stars come from?
- ◇ Why does a zebra have stripes?
- ◇ Why does a giraffe have a long neck?

2. Pass out the Porquoi Tale worksheets.

3. Depending on the age of your students, you may wish to have students do some research about their subject to better understand their characters and setting, as well as think about how to personify their characters.

4. As students work, circulate and ask them questions to help them further develop their story. Some questions to ask:

- ◇ Where do the characters live? What is the weather and landscape like in that place?
- ◇ If the character is an animal, what are some character traits of that animal? Is it shy? Aggressive? Slow? Resourceful?

5. Provide students with time to write their stories in narrative form and to revise.

6. As a culmination, invite students to share their stories or 'Porquoi Tales'.

Modification for younger students:

Verbally guide students through the questions on the worksheet and encourage them to illustrate their responses. They may then dictate captions.

"The Tale of..." activity adapted from materials by StoryArts.
Storyarts.org/lessonplans/index.html

2) THE TALE OF...

Goal: To develop creative writing skills utilizing story elements

Explanation: In this activity, students will write origin tales inspired by everyday objects.

Materials:

An assortment of "things" such as...

- ◇ Piece of paper
- ◇ Shoe
- ◇ Match
- ◇ Rubber band
- ◇ Paper Clip
- ◇ Woolen Sock
- ◇ Apple

Activity:

1. Have students choose an object and imagine the life story of one of those "things." Ask them to trace its history backwards through its use, purchase, manufacture, to original natural resources from which it or its components were made. (Students may need to do a little research to find out where it comes from.)

2. Then have student write its life story. Examples:

- ◇ Tell the tale of a piece of newspaper back to the tree in the forest.
- ◇ Tell the tale of how a woolen sock began on the back of a sheep and transformed into a sock.

3. You may have each student choose a different object or pick one object for the whole class to explore, then compare the stories the students create. Some things to have students think about as they create their stories:

- ◇ Chronology: Do you want the story to go forwards or backwards in time?
- ◇ Point-of-View: Who is the storyteller? Is it a narrator, another character in the story (could another tree tell the tale of the newspaper?), or is it the object itself sharing its autobiography?
- ◇ Characters: Is your character male or female? Does it have a name? What other characters might you include to make the story more interesting?
- ◇ Conflict: Does your subject have something (or someone) it must overcome to become what it is?
- ◇ Resolution: Does your story have a happy ending? Does it teach a lesson?

(You may find it helpful to use the Story Mountain worksheet on page 17 to help students chart their plots.)

STORYTELLING ACTIVITIES, pg. 2 of 2

3) TELLING STORIES

Goal: To develop speaking skills

Explanation: In this activity, students will verbally tell short stories

Materials:

- ◇ Access to short stories through your school library
- ◇ Or, internet access to Story Arts' library of short and kid-friendly stories for student Tellers:
<http://www.storyarts.org/library/nutshell/index.html>

Activity:

1. Work with students to select a short story that interests them and that they feel like they can memorize and later perform for the class.
2. Give students time to read and memorize their stories.
3. Individually, encourage students to practice saying the stories aloud. As they work, circulate and encourage them to think about ways Ms. Alston used her voice, face, and movement in her performance.
4. If time allows, use theater games (like the ones on page 16) help sharpen their storytelling skills.
5. Once students are memorized and have had sufficient time to practice, host a storytelling performance for the class.
6. As each student finishes, ask listeners to share something that they found particularly effective or memorable about the way the Teller told the story.

Extension Activity:

If your students are older, arrange for them to visit a classroom with younger students to share their stories.

Follow-up Question:

1. What drew you to the particular story you chose to tell?
2. Was it a challenge to memorize your story? Did it become easier once you started practicing it aloud? Adding voices, gestures, or facial expressions? Why or why not?

QUOTATIONS ABOUT STORY

"Long before I wrote stories, I listened for stories. Listening for them is something more acute than listening to them. I suppose it's an early form of participation in what goes on. Listening children know stories are there. When their elders sit and begin, children are just waiting and hoping for one to come out, like a mouse from its hole."
- Eudora Welty,
"One Writer's Beginnings"

"Fairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten."
- G. K. Chesterton

"Wherever men have lived there is a story to be told."
- Henry David Thoreau

"The folktale is the primer of the picture-language of the soul."
- Joseph Campbell,
The Flight of the Wild Gander

"Story is the vehicle we use to make sense of our lives in a world that often defies logic."
- Jim Trelease

THEATER GAMES FOR STORYTELLING

Play these games with students to help them flex their “storytelling muscles. Each can take as little or as much as you want to give them, can be used as icebreakers, or a way to change pace if students have been sitting for a long time.

You can do any or all of these activities, in any order you choose.

VOCAL VARIATIONS

Because storytellers often perform alone, they need to learn how to use their voice in interesting ways to hold the attention of the audience.

Have students count to 20 (or higher) — or say the letters of the alphabet — using different voices, pitches, volume, etc. The key is to have students strive to make each number or letter as different as possible. (It helps if you can first demonstrate what you are asking them to do.) This may be done either individually or as a class. While full group can get loud, this often helps shy students feel more comfortable fully participating.

CHARACTER WALK

Storytellers use their bodies and facial expressions to show different characters. Help students think about a character’s physicality by facilitating a character walk.

Find an open area and have students walk around the room—either in a large circle or randomly. Have students begin by walking naturally. Then, begin to call out prompts to change their walk for different characters, times of day, places, situations, etc.

Here are some examples:

- ◇ Barefoot on hot pavement (on ice, on something sticky, in deep water)
- ◇ On the first day of school (last day of school, about to take a test, to the Principal’s office)
- ◇ In the dark and can’t see anything (in a spooky house, trying to find a seat in a crowded movie theater)
- ◇ A very old person (a 3-year old, a king/queen, a mountain climber, a monkey, an explorer in the jungle)

Remind students that their walks should be done without using their voices. They need to show the character or situation using only their bodies.

PLAYING WITH PROPS:

“THIS IS NOT A...”

Pick a common object (shoe, pencil, book, pillow, etc.) and have the class stand in a circle and pass the object from person to person.

Each student must pretend to use the object as anything other than it actually is (a shoe could become a telephone, a hairbrush, an ice cream cone – but never a shoe.) Each person must use it in a way that everyone can guess what the object is. It helps if you demonstrate a few examples before you get them started.

IMPROVISATION: STORY CIRCLE

Have the class sit in a circle. Begin to tell a story, starting with “Once upon a time...” and move around the circle so each person adds a bit of the story.

You should guide when the story moves to the next person. You might want to begin by changing Tellers at the end of every sentence. When they get the hang of it, you can let each person tell a little more of the story until s/he runs out of ideas or you choose to stop her/him.

You can also challenge them by stopping a teller in the middle of a sentence to allow the next person to finish it:

- Student A: Once upon a time there was a dog named.. (STOP)
- Student B: ...America. She had a best friend who was a...(STOP)
- Student C: ...Turtle named Tina. They lived together in... (STOP)
- Student D: ...Spaceship orbiting Mars.

Students will often surprise each other – and you – with the crazy stories they come up with together. Sometimes they even make sense! Try to keep going until the tale reaches a resolution. You may even want to record it to listen to later!

TIP: Set some ground rules on appropriate language and avoiding bathroom humor before starting. Tell students you want to stretch their creativity muscles and that, while funny, bathroom humor jokes are “easy” and “expected”. You are confident that they can be more creative.

STORY MOUNTAIN WORKSHEET (for Pre-Show Exploration 3, pg. 12)

NAME: _____

Story Mountain

The **Plot** of a story - or hero's journey - is like a mountain. As a story progresses, the hero moves from the Beginning of the story up the mountain to a high point (or Climax) and then down the other side to the Ending.

Take a story you know and map it. Or use this worksheet to map out a story of your own!

Peak: What is the most exciting point of the story?

Climb The Mountain: What happens on the way to the high point of the story?

Base Camp: How does the story begin?

Climb Down: What happens on the way to the end of the story?

New Base Camp: How does the story end? What's different than it was at the beginning of the story?

PORQUOI TALE WORKSHEET (for Storytelling Activity 1, pg. 14)

NAME: _____

Title of Your Tale:

What animal, plant or natural element is the tale about?

Who are the characters? (They do not need to have specific names.)

Think about...

What are their character traits?

Who is the hero/protagonist of your story?

Is there a villain?

Is there a trickster?

What is the problem in your story?

What is the resolution to the story? How is the problem solved?

List the events in order.

RESOURCES AND SOURCES

SUGGESTED READING LIST

- ◇ *Anansi the Spider: A Tale from the Ashanti*, Gerald McDermott
- ◇ *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears: A West African Tale*, Verna Aardema and Leo Dillon
- ◇ *African American Folktales: Stories from Black Traditions in the New World (The Pantheon Fairy Tale and Folklore Library) Paperback*, Roger Abrahams
- ◇ *Her Stories: African American Folktales, Fairy Tales, and True Tales (Coretta Scott King Author Award Winner)*, Virginia Hamilton
- ◇ *African Folk Tales*, Hugh Vernon-Jackson and Yuko Green
- ◇ *African-American Folktales (American Storytelling)*, Richard Young and Judy Dockrey Young
- ◇ *African-American Folktales for Young Readers: Including Favorite Stories from African and African-American Storytellers...*
Judy Dockrey Young and Richard Alan Young
- ◇ *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters: An African Tale*, John Steptoe
- ◇ *The Legend of The Dancing Trees: An African American Folktale*, Kenneth Curry
- ◇ *Indaba My Children: African Folktales*, Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa

ONLINE RESOURCES

UNDERSTANDING THE GENRE OF STORYTELLING:

American Folklore: African American Folklore.

<http://americanfolklore.net/folklore/africanamerican-folklore/>

National Humanities Center: The Trickster in African American Literature.

<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1865-1917/essays/trickster.htm>

Story Arts – Lesson Plans and Ideas for Teachers.

<http://www.storyarts.org/lessonplans/lessonideas/index.html#tour>

Wikipedia: African American Folktales.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African-American_folktales

Yale National Institute: Using African and African-American Folktales in a Genre Study.

http://teachers.yale.edu/curriculum/viewer/initiative_06.03.09_u

STORY SOURCES:

Mr. Donn's Site for Kids & Teachers: African Fables for Kids.

<http://africa.mrdonn.org/fables.html>

GEMS | Great Explorations in Math and Sciences: World Culture.

<http://lhsgems.org/WorldCultConx.html>

Folklore and Mythology Electronic Texts University of Pittsburgh.

<http://www.pitt.edu/%7Edash/folktexts.html>

World of Tales – Online versions of folk tales from around the world.

http://www.worldoftales.com/browse_all_folktales.html

ACTIVITIES AND SOURCES FOR STUDENTS:

PBS Kids – Explore Africa With Anansi.

<http://www.pbs.org/wonders/Kids/kids.htm>

YouTube: African and African American Folktales.

<https://youtu.be/iNYBT59j4rk>

STUDY GUIDE SOURCES

Charlotte Blake Alston.

<http://www.charlotteblakealston.com/>

StoryArts Online.

<http://www.storyarts.org/>