

BOXTALES Theatre Company

Africa to America – The Ananse Story

Teacher Guide K-6

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Boxtales is a storytelling theatre company, which uses masks, movement, storytelling and live music to present myths and folklore from around the world. Performers Matt Tavianini, Marie Ponce, and Michael Andrews combine their diverse talents to create a professional, high energy, highly interactive theatrical experience for young audiences.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

For generations, we have passed down our history, beliefs, and values through stories and songs. They can help us make sense of tragedy, teach us important life lessons or just provide good entertainment. Africa to America – The Ananse Story shows how stories often travel with people and how the stories will change to adapt to a new environment or situation. Ananse is a character from the stories of the West African Ashanti people. You see, when African people were captured, brought to the America's and forced to work as slaves, their freedom and basic rights were taken away. During these dark times, the stories they told were more important than ever. In these stories, trickster characters, like Ananse, would outwit and defeat larger, more powerful creatures. They were rebellious and stood for hope. Over time, the stories and the names of the characters changed, and many of the Ananse stories became the Brer Rabbit stories of the American South.

Two stories will be presented. B'rer Rabbit, B'rer Alligator and Trouble (Southern United States), and How Kwaku Ananse Gained a Kingdom of Knowledge from a Kernel of Corn (Ghana, West Africa). The children will also be taught a West African song called "Adunde" and will hear some African drum rhythms.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify the definition and understand elements of fables and trickster stories
- Recognize, Ananse spider stories, and related tales from various cultures
- List human traits associated with particular animals in fables and trickster stories
- Identify the specific narrative and thematic patterns that occur in many fables across cultures

- Compare and contrast themes of trickster tales from different cultures
- Explain how fables and trickster tales are used in different cultural contexts to point out human strengths and weaknesses
- Differentiate between the cautionary lessons and morals of fables and the celebration of the wiles and wit of the underdog in trickster stories.
- To introduce students to classic trickster stories from around the world.
- To introduce students to traditional Afro-Cuban Rhythms played on authentic instruments.
- To encourage students to seek out and read other trickster stories.
- To help develop creative imaginations.
- To introduce the importance of oral tradition as an educational tool.
- To create an appreciation and affection for live stage performance

B’rer Alligator, B’rer Rabbit and the story of Trouble

This story is about B’rer Alligator and B’rer Rabbit, which comes from the Southern states of South Carolina, Georgia and the Georgia Sea Islands. Rabbit comes running by Alligator one day talking about the trouble he has. Alligator who lives by the swamp, has smooth skin, a nice white jacket, and has never seen trouble. Alligator asks rabbit to show him trouble. Rabbit obliges upon which alligator gets into trouble and wishes he had never asked. The moral being, never trouble trouble unless trouble troubles you. A wonderful parallel tale is Brer Possums Dilemma, where the moral is "you knew I was a snake when you got on my back". These stories of Brer Rabbit, Brer Alligator, Brer Possum, Brer Fox and more come from the African American heritage. It's origins come from Africa where many stories involve animals. Have you heard of the trickster spider Ananse, or the trickster turtle named Ejapah? Well they are characters that come from African stories, and when Africans moved to America and became African Americans, these characters changed. They became Brer Rabbit, and Brer Terrapin.

PREPARATION EXERCISES

You can read other Brer Rabbit stories. You can find other ones in the books listed in the bibliography. Good ones are Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox and the Briar Patch and Brer Possum's Dilemma.

Points of interest: Arkansas, Georgia, South Carolina, Georgia Sea Islands

FOLLOW UP EXERCISES

Write or tell a story about some time that you knew that you were getting into a situation which was trouble but kept going forward and got into trouble? Was this smart?

Can you find newspaper articles that are examples of troubling trouble?

How Kwaku Ananse Gained a Kingdom of Knowledge from a Kernel of Corn

We go back to West Africa (Ghana in fact) for an Ashanti story about **Ananse** the spider. This popular and well known African character here finds himself in a sticky situation. The mean and powerful sky god **Nyame** has charged **Ananse** with the task of bringing the entire Kingdom from Beyond the River (every man, woman and child) before **Nyame** to pray. The only tool **Ananse** is given to complete the challenge is a small grain of corn. **Ananse** moves from village to village tricking the chiefs in a game of exchanges until eventually he succeeds. This is really a story about how **Ananse** gains his knowledge and becomes the trickster character he is famous for being. It is also a story about how having faith and believing in one's self is paramount in any successful endeavor.



In Ashanti, as in much of Ghana, the village is a social as well as an economic heart of society. Everyone is expected to participate in the major ceremonies. The most popular ceremonies are funeral celebrations which typically last several days. The extended family - no matter where they live - will travel home to attend a funeral.

The traditional priest and the herbalist provide a medical service which can be partly paid for in local produce (a hen, eggs etc.) as opposed to Western medicine which requires cash payment, and usually a considerable journey to the nearest hospital. The priest, when possessed by the gods, is particularly powerful at dealing with spiritual problems. The herbalist relies on local medicines to affect a cure. Many of these cures are now being investigated by research institutes both in Ghana and elsewhere as alternative remedies for many ailments, including malaria.



PREPARATION EXERCISES

- 1) Coloring the above map of Africa, try to color each country a different color. Then see if you can name each country.
- 2) Each person on this list is an important person in African history. Choose someone from the list and find out as much as you can about them at the library, on the internet or ask your family members.

FOLLOW UP EXERCISES

- Have your students read up on African people, their culture and accomplishments
- Have your students read other African stories and myths
- Have your students discuss how fear and violence affected Brother Sun and Brother Moon
- Lead a class discussion on how Humans should think about and treat other animals and the environment

- Discuss how sometimes people need to give each other a little space to go through a difficult emotional period
- Talk about tricksters. The trickster animal or person is a character that uses his/her brain rather than their brawn to face challenges or teach lessons and these characters exist in almost every culture. Ask students to find other tricksters in other stories.
- Ask your students to paint or sketch their own versions of one of the stories in the show.
- Have students imagine they are one of the characters in one of the stories. Which one would they be? How would they make different choices than the characters in the stories? Or would they make the same choices?
- Lead a discussion about some of Africa's problems. Famine, draught, disease and war are very serious issues in Africa. Talk about how these problems affect people outside of Africa and how we might be able to help.

For all of the Stories

- For all of the stories, show the kids on a map where these stories come from.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Trouble

Ready to Tell Tales, David Holt & Bill Mooney, August House, 1994

African American Folktales for Young Readers, Collected and Edited by Richard and Judy Dockrey Young, August House Inc. 1993

Folktales from the Gullah (Bo Rabbit Smart for True), Priscilla Jaquith Philomel Books, 1981

Terrapin's Pot of Sense Harold Courlander, Holt Rinehart and Winston 1957

The People Could Fly *American Black Folktales* , Virginia Hamilton Alfred A. Knopf, 1985

Ananse

How Ananse Gained a Kingdom of Knowledge from a Grain of Corn, Ananse the Spider: Tales from an Ashanti Village, Peggy Appiah, Pantheon Books, 1969

For Further Reading or listening

In the Beginning Creation Stories From Around the World- Edith Hamilton, Harcourt Brace Jovonovich Publishers, New York 1988

Homespun Tales from America's Favorite Storytellers, Jimmy Neil Smith, Crown Publishers, 1988

Jackie Torrence's tale of Brer Possum's Dilemma parallels the story of Trouble

Jack Tales, Richard Chase, Houghton Mifflin, 1944

Jack Always Seeks His Fortune, Donald Davis, August House, 1992