

HATS OFF TO AFRICAN TALES

Celebrate African-American History Month this February with a tribute to African folklore. You'll find ideas for spotlighting one book or more for each week of this month-long celebration. As you read the modern-day versions of these tales, kids will gain a sense of the history, values, and traditions of African communities.

AFRICAN FOLKLORE

Africa has a rich tradition of oral literature that has been passed down from generation to generation. These stories include tales of tricksters, animal fables, cultural hero legends, proverbs, riddles, songs, and explanations. Scholars today record African oral literature so that it may be saved for future generations. Before the existence of the writ-

ten language, it was common in West African villages for griots (GREE-ohs) to preserve the experiences of their people through storytelling. These traditional storytellers often carried a net or wore a hat from which a variety of objects hung. Listeners would pick an object from the net or hat and the griot would tell a story with this object in it. Let African folktales turn you and your students into story listeners as well as storytellers.

BOOK NET

Create a motivational book center in your room that focuses on African folktales. Many excellent choices for African folktales are listed in this unit and can be spotlighted in your classroom. Place a fishing net over a table or tack it to a wall or bulletin board. Attach the book jackets of a variety of African folktales to the net and invite kids to "Get Hooked on African Folktales."

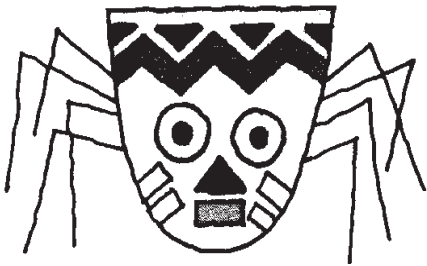
A STORYTELLER'S HAT

Help children create their own storyteller hats...a unique introduction to this unit on African folktales. You will need the folktale character patterns, two 9" x 12" sheets of colored construction paper, scissors, crayons or markers, glue, and tape. Tape the two sheets of construction paper together lengthwise and decorate with crayons or markers. Adjust the size to fit around the head, and tape to secure. Color, cut out, and glue the storyteller patterns on the hat. Kids will love wearing their storyteller hats during story time!



INTRODUCING FOLKTALES

A terrific way to introduce a study of African folktales is with the book **A STORY, A STORY: AN AFRICAN TALE** by Gail E. Haley (Atheneum). In this Caldecott Medal winner, Anansi the Spider outwits the Sky God to bring stories to the world. Read the tale aloud to your class, pointing out the many repetitive words and phrases which provide emphasis and drama. Read the tale a second time and invite children to participate by chanting the repeated words along with you. There are many excellent African folktale collections for further study and enjoyment:



THE OX OF THE WONDERFUL HORNS AND OTHER AFRICAN FOLKTALES

by Ashley Bryan
(Atheneum)

THE DANCING GRANNY

by Ashley Bryan (Aladdin)

TALES FROM THE STORY HAT

by Verna Aardema (Putnam)

TALES OF AN ASHANTI FATHER

by Peggy Appiah (Deutsch)

MISOSO: ONCE UPON A TIME TALES FROM AFRICA

retold by Verna Aardema
(Apple Soup/Knopf)

AFRICAN VILLAGE FOLKTALES

Audio Collection Volumes 1-3
by Edna Mason Kaula
(HarperCollins)

STORIES FROM WEST AFRICA (MULTICULTURAL STORIES)

by Robert Hull (Steck-Vaughn)

TALES FROM AFRICA

by Mary Medicott
(Kingfisher)

TRICKSTER TALES

An entire family of animal tricksters populates traditional folktales of West Africa. These trickster tales are meant to be instructive as well as entertaining. The cunning and lovable folk heroes take the form of a rabbit, spider, or tortoise. These animals, who possess human qualities and get into precarious situations, must use their cunning to get out of their predicament. In the end, the tricksters manage to outwit their larger foes while hopefully gaining wisdom. The overriding message of these tales is that you don't have to be bigger and stronger, just smarter!

Share the crowd-pleaser **ZOMO THE RABBIT: A TRICKSTER TALE FROM WEST AFRICA**, told and illustrated by Gerald McDermott (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich). In this brilliantly illustrated tale, Zomo the Rabbit yearns to be wise. The Sky God offers him wisdom if he can obtain the scales of Big Fish, the milk of Wild Cow, and the tooth of Leopard. Zomo uses his cunning to obtain all three but soon learns that cleverness and wisdom are not necessarily the same. This is a fun tale for children to dramatize. Make puppets by duplicating the storyteller animal characters for each student. Ask the kids to color each animal with bright colors as McDermott did in his book. Attach the animals to straws or craft sticks. Reread the story to the class and encourage the children to act out the story with their puppets, complete with sound effects. Lots of fun!



Compare and contrast African trickster tales by reading some of these other books:

THE ADVENTURES OF SPIDER: WEST AFRICAN FOLKTALES

retold by Joyce Cooper Arkhurst
illustrated by Jerry Pinkney
(Little, Brown)

ANANSI THE SPIDER: A TALE FROM ASHANTI

adapted and illustrated by Gerald McDermott (Holt)
A Caldecott Honor Book

ANANSI FINDS A FOOL: AN ASHANTI TALE

by Verna Aardema and Bryna Waldman (Dial)

ANANSI AND THE MOSS-COVERED ROCK

retold by Eric A. Kimmel
illustrated by Janet Stevens
(Holiday)

ANANSI GOES FISHING

retold by Eric A. Kimmel
illustrated by Janet Stevens
(Holiday)

ANANSI AND THE TALKING MELON

retold by Eric A. Kimmel
illustrated by Janet Stevens
(Holiday)

RABBIT MAKES A MONKEY OF LION

by Verna Aardema
pictures by Jerry Pinkney
(Dial)

THE FLYING TORTOISE: AN IGBO TALE

retold by Tololwa M. Mollel
illustrated by Barbara Spurrll
(Clarion)

SUNGURA AND LEOPARD: A SWAHILI TRICKSTER TALE

by Barbara Knutson
(Little, Brown)

POURQUOI TALES

Pourquoi or Why stories are common tales in Africa. They are stories which provide explanations for natural phenomena. The popularity of these tales lies in their answers, which are often witty and humorous. Interestingly, these tales, like other African folktales, surface in other versions in different regions of the continent. Spotlight the pourquoi tale **WHY THE SKY IS FAR AWAY: A NIGERIAN FOLKTALE** retold by Mary-Joan Gerson with pictures by Carla Golembe (Joy Street/ Little, Brown). With the look of tradi-

tional African folk art, this tale explains why people must grow their own food today. It seems that long ago the sky was so near that one needed only to reach up and cut parts of it to eat. When people became greedy and wasteful, the angry sky moved upward out of reach. Read the tale to your class while inviting listeners to pour over the illustrations. Challenge children to explain why this kind of tale is called a *pourquoi* tale. Read other examples of this kind of tale to further exemplify the genre. Then encourage students to write their own *pourquoi* tales to explain the “unexplainable.” Help kids get started by brainstorming a list of possible topics to spark some interest...

WHY DOGS WAG THEIR TAILS

WHY THERE ARE STARS/CLOUDS IN THE SKY

WHY RABBITS HOP

WHY TREES LOOSE THEIR LEAVES

HOW THE WORLD GOT LAUGHTER

Ask children to illustrate the pages and bind them into a book to share with others. Then check out these titles for more *pourquoi* tales:

WHY MOSQUITOES BUZZ IN PEOPLE'S EARS: A WEST AFRICAN TALE

*retold by Verna Aardema
pictures by Leo and Diane Dillon
(Dial)*

A Caldecott Medal Winner

THE VILLAGE OF ROUND AND SQUARE HOUSES

*by Ann Grifalconi
(Little, Brown)*

A Caldecott Honor Book

THE TORTOISE AND THE TREE

*adapted from a Bantu Folktale by
Janina Domanska
(Greenwillow)*

HOW MANY SPOTS DOES A LEOPARD HAVE? AND OTHER TALES

*by Julius Lester
illustrated by David Shannon
(Scholastic)*

HALF-A-BALL-OF-KENKI: AN ASHANTI TALE

*retold by Verna Aardema
pictures by Diane Stanley Zuromskis
(Warne)*

HOW THE GUINEA FOWL GOT HER SPOTS: A SWAHILI TALE OF FRIENDSHIP

*by Barbara Knutson
(Carolrhoda)*

HOW THE GIRAFFE GOT SUCH A LONG NECK—AND WHY RHINO IS SO GRUMPY

*by Michael Rosen
(Dial)*

THE CAT'S PURR

*by Ashley Bryan
(Atheneum)*

RHYTHMIC TALES

It was a common practice for drums to be used in storytelling. Drums provided a dynamic that drew listeners into the story and invited their participation. The stories often had recurring phrases, chantable refrains, or songs. The African tales sometimes incorporated onomatopoeic sounds that described the behavior of the animals. One such tale is the enchanting **TRAVELING TO TONDO: A TALE OF THE NKUNDO OF ZAIRE** retold by Verna Aardema and illustrated by Will Hillenbrand (Knopf). The earthy tones and stylized pictures of this book perfectly complement a refreshingly funny tale. When Bowane the cat decides to marry a pretty feline from a neighboring village, he returns home to get his attendants. On the way back to Tondo, the cat indulges the whims of each of his friends and ends up missing his wedding... by years! This is a great tale for audience participation. Emphasize the repetition of the phrase “*the four of them traveling to Tondo.*” Encourage students to tap on their desks to the beat of the syllables as if they are playing drums. Have fun with the guttural noises that each of the animals makes as it moves. Children can chant the sounds. You may even like to emphasize these sounds with handmade instruments. Tap on an oatmeal box drum for the cat walking. Clap cymbals made from two plastic disposable plates for the bird flapping. Add cereal or rice to an orange juice can to make a

rattle for the snake slithering or tap two sticks together as rhythm sticks for the turtle waddling. Sure to be enjoyed by all! Keep the beat going with some of these rhythmic African tales:

BEAT THE STORY DRUM, PUM-PUM

*by Ashley Bryan
(Atheneum)*

WHY MOSQUITOES BUZZ IN PEOPLE'S EARS: A WEST AFRICAN TALE

*retold by Verna Aardema
pictures by Leo and Diane Dillon
(Dial)
available in filmstrip and cassette*

BRINGING THE RAIN TO KAPITI PLAIN: A NANDI TALE

*by Verna Aardema
pictures by Beatriz Vidal
(Dial)*

WHO'S IN RABBIT'S HOUSE?

*by Verna Aardema
pictures by Leo and Diane Dillon
(Dial)*

PRINCESS GORILLA AND A NEW KIND OF WATER

*by Verna Aardema
illustrated by Victoria Chess
(Dial)*

BIMWILI AND THE ZIMWI

*by Verna Aardema
illustrated by Susan Meddaugh
(Dial)*

MAGICAL TALES

Everyone likes to escape to a magical world at one time or another. Like many folktales told around the world, African folktales possess a magical quality. Most often these tales contain a wry and sophisticated sense of humor. A captivating and magical example of wit and wisdom can be found in **THE FORTUNE-TELLERS** by Lloyd Alexander and illustrated by Trina Schart Hyman (Dutton). The dazzling illustrations bring this fateful tale to life. It seems an unhappy carpenter pays a visit to a fortuneteller who is a master of double-talk. The carpenter chooses to hear the best of what is said and, ironically, the good fortune comes true. When the carpenter returns and is mistaken for the fortuneteller, he does

indeed become rich and famous. After reading the tale, discuss the way in which the fortune-teller spoke. Listeners will find this double-talk to be both funny and farcical. After reading the story, make paper fortune tellers with your class.

FOLDING THE FORTUNE TELLER:

1. Give each child a 9-inch square of paper.
2. Make a smaller square by folding each corner into the center.
3. Turn the square over and fold each corner into the center again.
4. Fold the square in half. Crease and then open. Fold again the other way. Crease and open.

WRITING ON THE FORTUNE TELLER.

1. On each triangle, write a numeral from 1 to 8.
2. Lift each triangle and write a fortune on every half. Be hopeful. Be funny. Be positive.
3. Turn over and write the name of a color on each square.

PLAYING FORTUNE TELLER:

1. Slip a thumb and index finger from each hand under the color squares as shown.
2. Ask a player to choose a number. Use fingers to open and close the fortune teller that number of times.
3. Next ask the player to choose a color. Spell out the color, opening and closing the fortune teller once for each letter.

4. Ask the player to pick another number. Lift the corresponding flap and read the fortune. These African folk tales are embodied with a sense of magic, fantasy, and beauty:

MUFARO'S BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTERS: AN AFRICAN TALE

by John Steptoe
(Lothrop, Lee & Shepard)
A Caldecott Honor Book

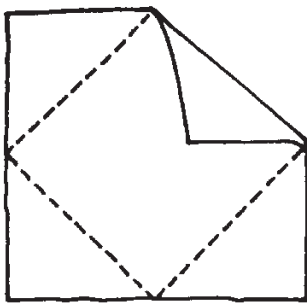
THE MAGIC TREE: A TALE FROM THE CONGO

by Tololwa M. Mollel
illustrated by Paul Morin
(Clarion)

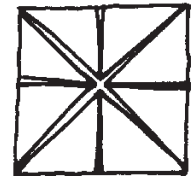
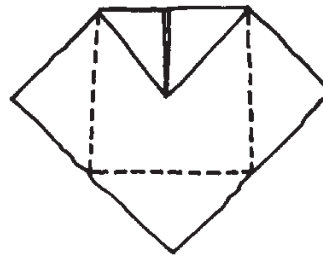
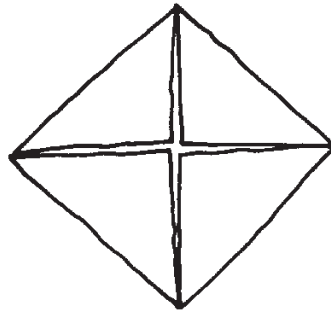
SHADOW: FROM THE FRENCH OF BLAISE CENDRARS

translated and illustrated
by Marcia Brown
(Scribner)

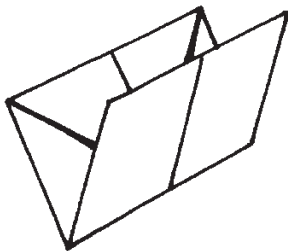
MAKE A FORTUNE TELLER!



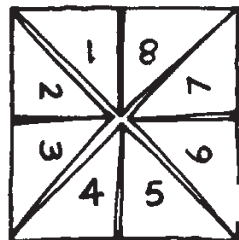
Fold the corners of a paper square to the center to make a smaller square.



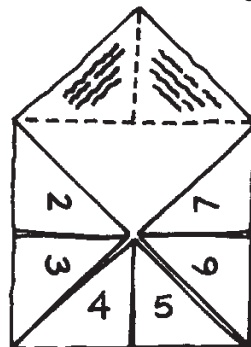
Turn the square over and fold each corner into the center again.



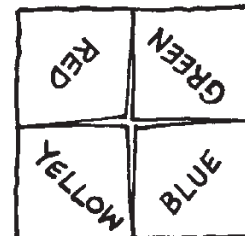
Fold square in half. Crease and open. Fold the other way. Crease and open.



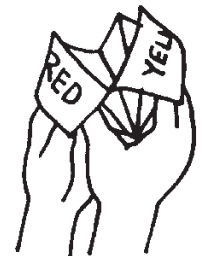
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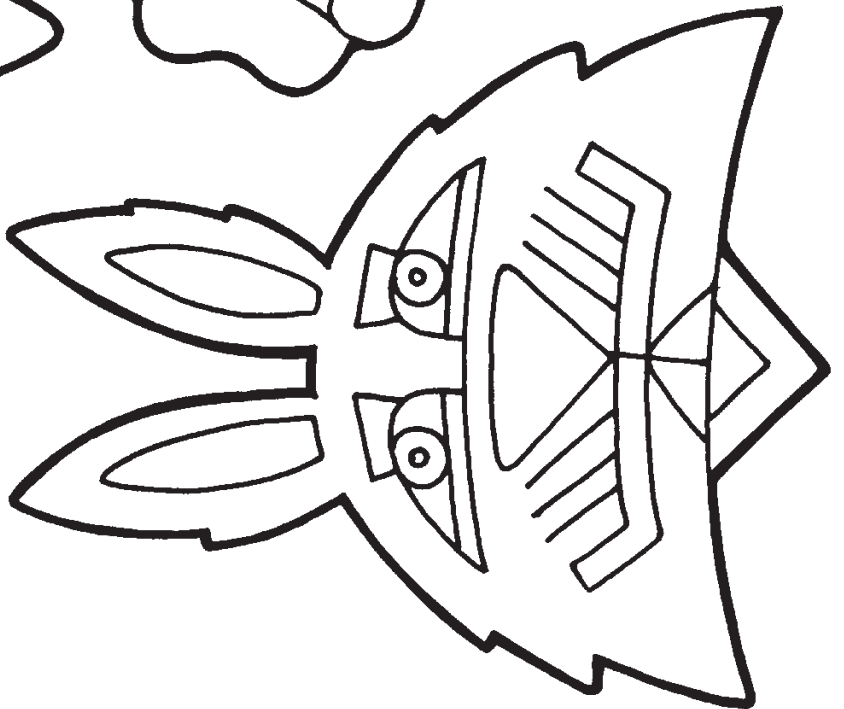
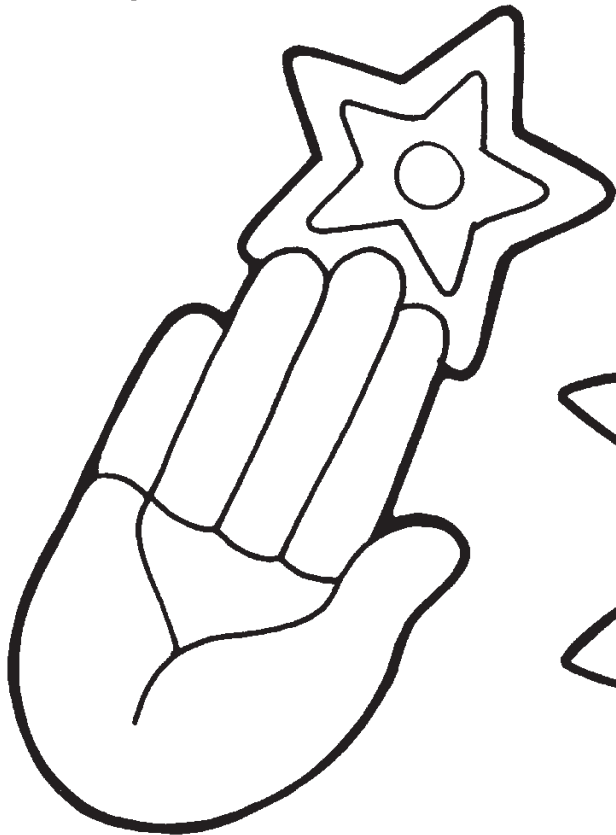
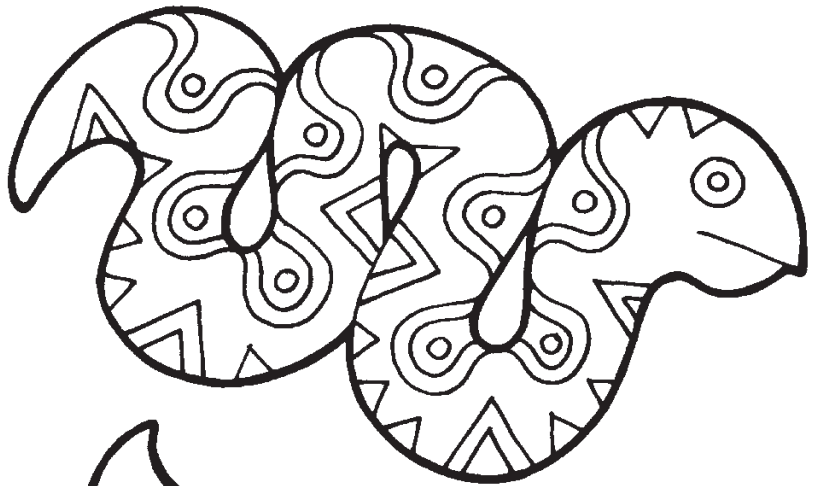
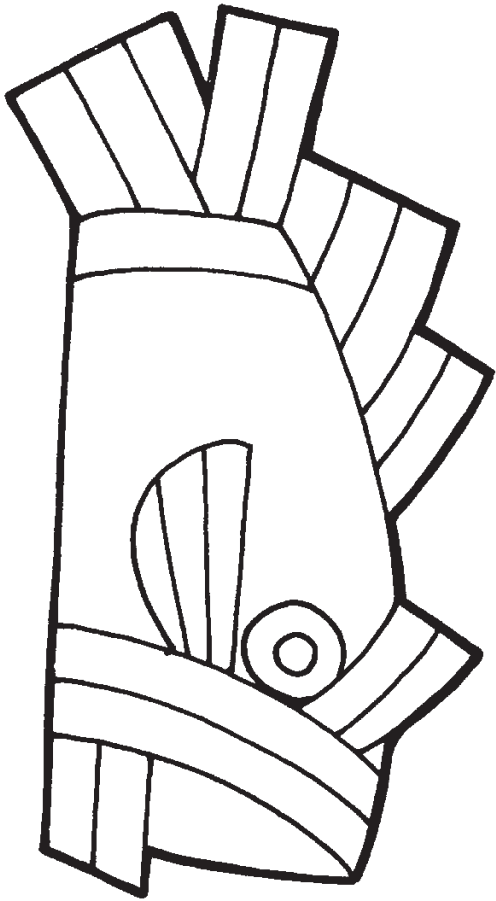
Lift each triangle and write a fortune on each half.



Turn over and write the name of a color on each square.



AFRICAN FOLKTALE CHARACTERS



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