



Keeping the Tradition of African Storytelling Alive

Curriculum Unit 09.01.08, published September 2009

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Introduction

Storytelling takes you on a journey that inspires you to learn about yourself and the world around you. It reflects social values in a culture that motivate people in their pursuit of a meaningful life. The oral tradition of storytelling makes it possible for a culture to pass knowledge, history, and experiences from one generation to the next. Many cultures in Africa have rituals of oral storytelling. Traditional storytelling in Africa reveals ideas, themes, beliefs, and facts that are widely spread. It discloses conceptions that are unique to a tribe, village, or region. According to Harold Courlander, tribes may be united with a mainstream of African traditions and yet have stories of their own heroes, mythological idols, and unique ancient origins.¹ Storytelling in Africa has been manifested in many ways and was used to serve many purposes. It was used to interpret the universe, resolve natural and physical phenomena, teach morals, maintain cultural values, pass on methods of survival, and to praise God.

What is storytelling? Storytelling is retelling a tale to one or more listeners through voice and gestures. It is not the same as reading a story aloud or reciting a piece from memory. The storyteller creates a series of mental images associated with words. The audience stares, smiles, or leans forward to hear more.

What is unique about storytelling in Africa? Storytelling in Africa provides entertainment, satisfies the curiosities of the African people, and teaches important lessons about everyday life. It is essentially a communal participatory experience. According to Jack Berry, in a storytelling setting, where the storyteller and the audience interact, both parties have rights and obligations.² Storytelling is a shared event with people sitting together, listening, and participating in accounts of past deeds, beliefs, taboos, and myths. Repetition of the language and rhythm are two important characteristics of oral storytelling in Africa. Storytellers repeat words, phrases, and stanzas. The use of repetition makes the stories easy to understand and recall from memory. When the audience is familiar with the stories, they actively participate as they learn important aspects of their culture.

Rationale

My excitement for writing a curriculum unit on African storytelling elevated while attending a seminar on "Storytelling around the Globe" at Yale University. The resources and expertise provided by Professor Dudley Andrew allowed me to create a unique unit, engrossing 3rd -5th grade students with West African films and folktales. This curriculum unit is designed to enhance students' knowledge and appreciation of traditional storytelling in West Africa. I will include background information on traditional African storytelling, storytelling in African film, and the role of the storyteller. The literary focus for this unit will be animal trickster tales, since they are the most popular among the folktales. The trickster tales include an animal trickster with human habits, beliefs, and weaknesses. African storytelling will come alive, as students view three films, *Abouna, Keita: The Heritage of the Griot*, and *Wend Kuuni*. My curriculum unit will challenge students to think about how stories are constructed with powerful characters and dynamic plots.

I teach African American students at a title one school, located in southeast DeKalb County in Georgia. These students have diverse learning needs and ways of learning. Some of the students have developed negative attitudes about reading because they have difficulty reading at grade level or reading fluently. I want to make reading an enjoyable opportunity, rather than a complicated task. African folktales will captivate students' interest in reading and storytelling. Students will be motivated to read West African folktales, since they are amusing, fascinating, and appealing. There are distinctive narrative elements of African folktales that make them ideal for beginning storytellers. The narrative elements include: a short opening, generalized setting, trickster characters, and plots that move quickly to a satisfying or surprising ending. The oral language and dramatic activities in this unit will enthrall students' interest in reading and storytelling.

My students are searching for their cultural roots. By reading and listening to African folktales they will acquire a sense of the history, values, and traditions of the African culture. As students analyze African folktales they will make connections to their cultural heritage. These folktales will teach principles of morality and provide students with a sense of identity. Students will learn valuable lessons about life.

Objectives

This unit will encompass an array of activities that will enhance students' knowledge of traditional African storytelling. Students will answer who, what, where, and how questions to analyze the narrative structure of African film. Students will recognize the distinctive elements of a folktale by completing story/plot maps, character charts, graphic organizers and retelling a tale. Students will make judgments and inferences about characters, plot and events after viewing African film. The students will use oral language for different purposes by retelling African folktales and participating in dramatic activities. Students will recall, interpret, and summarize information presented orally by engaging in the daily storytelling sessions. It is my hope that by exploring West African folktales and film, my students will be able to appreciate African storytelling. I intend to continue the tradition of African storytelling in the classroom.

African Storytelling

Africans are rooted in oral cultures and traditions; therefore they have admired good stories and storytellers. Since ancient times, storytelling in the African culture has been a way of passing on traditions, codes of behavior, as well as maintaining social order. Writing had not been developed in ancient Africa, but there were ways for Africans to transmit their thoughts, beliefs, and feelings. Africans utilized various forms of art, myths and ceremonies. The tradition of African storytelling is one of the most ancient in African culture.

Emmanuel Matateyou contends that storytelling is an integral part of the cultural life of the African people in Cameroon. "Storytelling like rhetoric is the exercise of the mind. The words have great power."³ In Cameroon folktales keep the community united. They help reserve the knowledge, wisdom, and techniques which are part of the society. The narration of the tales takes place at night after the evening meal. The oral folktale can be recited, sung, and adapted to various circumstances. Taboos in many cultures of this area prevent people from engaging in any serious work at night. Each tale retold enlightens the consciousness of the audiences. In the western region and south of Cameroon, night-time gatherings provide an opportunity for the affairs of the land and family to be discussed or planned. Problems are resolved through recourse to folktales..

Matateyou describes the important elements of the storytelling events. The folktales are divided into three sections which include the opening formula, the body/expository section, and the conclusive formula.⁴ The storytelling session begins with an opening formula. Next there is an exchange of jokes and riddles. After engaging audience participation, the storytelling event sets in motion with a solemn beginning. After the opening formula, the storyteller starts the narration of the tale. The storyteller sets the scene, introduces the characters, and defines the conflict using all sorts of techniques. In many areas in Cameroon the people perform a real dramatic play. The storyteller sings, dances, shouts and invites the audience to dance or sing. The storyteller uses a language full of images and symbolism. The performer imitates many characters in the story. During the conclusive formula, the closure of the story is indicated by a moral or final statement about an issue that was indicated in the body/expository section. The order of the events illustrates the importance of structure as a literary quality of folktales.

Storytelling has been a ritual for the people of Ghana in the evening after a hard days work. Telling the Ananse folktales help the children grow up to be responsible members of the African society. "The psychological intent of exposing the children to storytelling justifies the reason for telling folktales in Ghana."⁵ Ananse folktales are usually told creatively by adults. The audience includes family members and children of the neighborhood. The serene nights and sitting around the fire set the tone for storytelling. The attention and enthusiastic response of the audience make the stories interesting. The Ananse folktales do not follow any sequential order. The stories are told subjectively once the description or theme of the story is decided. The narration of the Ananse stories are accompanied with music, singing, drumming, percussion instruments, clapping, and dancing. The proverbial songs are utilized to highlight the expression of the characters. The Anansi stories are intended to send a moral message to the audience, especially the children.

Storytelling in Film

African films focus on social problems, personal concerns, and cultural issues. They offer the audience a glimpse of African concerns, traditions, and pride. The African cinema is an expression of cultural autonomy. The filmmakers give the films an ageless look and tone by often using rural landscapes and conventional

characters. The filmmakers choose situations where they would not need artificial lighting because they didn't have sufficient technical materials or money. African films tend to be creations of intense stories, rich in emotion rather than spectacle and special effects.

The film, *Abouna*, directed by Mahamat Saleh Haroun in 2002, is beautifully shot. The film provides a glimpse into a dusty village in Chad. It is similar to many African productions in its visual and aural style. It begins with a recognizable situation, the loss of a father. Two boys, Tahir and his asthmatic brother Amine, wake up one morning to discover their father has disappeared. They sense something is wrong when their father fails to show up to referee their soccer game. Their mother tells them that their father has left them. The boys refuse to believe that their father is gone for good. After the boys cause problems for their mother, she sends them to a Koranic school. The boys encounter love, rebellion, self-determination, and separation. The viewer will be surprised with the later plot development.

The film, *Keita: The Heritage of the Griot*, directed by Dani Kouyate in 1994, is based on the epic tale of Sundiata Keita, emperor of Mali. The filmmaker skillfully moves the audience from one narrative strand to the next. The beautiful narration and the traditional music help to bridge these transitions. This film allows you to view the Griot's style of narration. The film opens in a village in Burkina Faso. Djeliba, a West African Griot, has a dream which makes him see that he must go to the city to initiate Mabo Keita, a young boy, into the history of his heritage. Djeliba wants to relate the epic of Sundiata to Mabo. The epic recounts the life of Sundiata Keita, the king responsible for turning the land of Mande into the great trading empire of Mali.

Djeliba moves in with Mabo and his family and begins telling the story of ancestry, *The Sundjata Epic*. Mabo is completely fascinated by the story and doesn't want to go to school. This results in a great deal of tension in the Keita household. Mabo's mother becomes concerned about Djeliba's stories distracting her son from school work. Mabo's father feels that it is important to pass on the stories of the Keita heritage. The story of Sundjata and the magnificent empire is of great importance to the people of West Africa. It provides them with a common identity. From this point on, the film moves back and forth between the mythical world of the story and the modern world of storytelling.

Mabo's modern education conflicts with his desire to be educated by Djeliba. His teacher visits the home and discusses his concerns with Djeliba. He feels that the Griot teachings should discontinue until summer vacation. The difficulties in the Keita household prompted Djeliba to return to his village without completing his mission. The film ends without the story being completed.

The film, *Wend Kuuni*, directed by Gaston Kabore in 1983, adapts the rhythms of traditional African storytelling. It demonstrates Mossi values as it shows domestic scenes of a village family. The daily routines of the family group consist of the father weaving, the mother doing household chores, the daughter assisting with the cooking, and Wend Kuuni taking care of the goats. In the first scene of the movie, a mother is crying and decides to escape from a village with her child. The next scene focuses on a traveler finding a body of a dehydrated young boy. The boy is mute and doesn't remember anything. The traveler picks him up and takes him to the nearest village, a Mossi village. The village leader agrees to raise the boy.

The village chief decides to send a search party to find the boy's parents. Tinga agrees to adopt the boy, since they couldn't find his parents. The boy is named Wend Kuuni, God's Gift. Wend Kuuni has the job of herding the goats. He makes friends with his stepsister, Pougneré. He is very content in his new home.

There is an argument between one of the village elders and his young wife. Tinga calms both of them down. Wend Kuuni left his knife in the field where the goats were grazing. When he goes later that night to retrieve

the knife, he finds the village elder hanging from a tree branch. Wend Kuuni instantly remembers the death of his mother after being chased out of the village. He begins to speak and screams for his mother.

At the end of the film Wend Kuuni tells the story about his mother to his stepsister, Pougner. He speaks about his sick mother being chased out their village and ending up under a tree in the middle of the field. He talks about his mother's death and running for hours. He remembers falling to sleep and the traveler finding him.

The Role of the African Storyteller

African storytellers are performers who entertain, inspire, and educate their audience. They know how to captivate the audience with more than just words. The storytellers use gestures, singing, facial expression, and impersonations to arouse the audience. Berry asserts that there are good storytellers and very poor ones too. The best add a sense of drama, careful timing, appropriate voices, and sustain a dynamic relationship with the audience.⁶ Experienced storytellers narrate the story using repetition, rhythm, imagery, proverbs, and similes. The use of repetition helps the audience remember the chorus and

join in with the storyteller. Using short phrases makes the stories easier to understand and memorize. When the audience is familiar with the story, they actively participate.

In some regions in Africa there are professional storytellers. In Cameroon storytelling is not a professional activity. Although the people have the potential to tell stories, they only develop excellence in the art of storytelling with time, age, and experience. The age and sex of the storytellers in Cameroon determine the type of tale that will be told. Women and children generally tell animal stories dealing with the faults of man. Men narrate tales dealing with heroic characters, gods, and spirits. The storyteller uses the sense of foresight and insight to manipulate the audience and subject matter.

In the Beti area of Cameroon, which is forest region, a storyteller usually tells his stories standing in the middle of the scene to dominate his audience. He moves from side to side, pointing at or inviting a participant to perform an action or repeat a refrain. The storyteller comments on the behavior of a character, explains a social phenomenon, or adds an expression to enhance the understanding of the plot. A successful storyteller is assessed by repetitions, rhythm, imagery, the use of proverbs, riddles, and similes.

Griots and Griottes

The Griots were originally counselors of Kings. "They conserved the constitution of kings by memory and work alone."⁷ Each noble family had an appointed Griot to preserve traditions and tutor the prince. Although the Griots of West Africa begin from many ethical and linguistic traditions, they consider their roots to be tied to the thirteenth century Malian empire and its founder, Sundiata, Keita. The basic tale of Griot origins was used to explain taboos associated with Griots and why their caste is distinct from that of other West African villagers.

The Griots and female Griottes, who have remarkable memories, communicate the history of the society and the great deeds of ancestors. They are prominent in many African societies, particularly West African

societies. Griots in Mali, Niger, Senegal, Gambia fulfill a lot of roles. Their roles include: historians, genealogists, musicians, advisors to nobility, storytellers, advocates, messengers, ambassadors, and praise singers. Griots are respected and feared by people in West Africa because there is a spiritual and ethical dimension to their performance. According to Joanna Lott, the Griots can sing your praises but doom your death.⁸ They sing praise songs and tell stories that last for an extended period of time.

The female Griottes usually play a lesser role. When a woman is married, a Griotte will sing to her to prepare her for her new life. West African women sing about a woman's role in the society and their relationships with husbands and in-laws. Griottes also use songs to express their independence and self-reliance. The songs offer comfort, encouragement, and empowerment to other women. .

The Griot profession is inherited and passed on from one generation to the next. The boys and girls learn from their parents who are Griots. They later attend formal Griot school and receive an apprenticeship with a master Griot. The Griottes have less freedom and time to attend formal Griotte schools because of family responsibilities. The Griots are rewarded for their services to individuals and the community. The reward varies, depending on the Griots' skills and popularity.

Animal Trickster Tales

"Traditional oral literary forms of African people have been woven out of the substance of human experience: struggles with the land and the elements, movement and migrations, wars between kingdoms, conflicts over pastures and waterholes, wrestling with the mysteries of existence, and life or death."⁹ African folktales are one of the primary oral literary forms found among the African people. These tales reflect relations among humans, man and woman, and humans and the animal world. They offer explanations of natural phenomena, teach morality, provide African people with a sense of identity, and are entertaining as well as instructive. The animal trickster tales are the favorite among the folktales because they include an animal trickster with human habits, beliefs, and weaknesses. These tales instill moral values in the people of the tribe or community.

In the Yoruba trickster tale, "Pride Comes with a Great Fall," the deer bragged about running faster than any animal at the meeting of all animals. According to the deer, he could run over twenty-six miles. Although the tortoise accepted the challenge, he arranged for thirteen of his family members to be stationed at every other mile. At the beginning of the race the deer teased the tortoise because he was behind him. As each of tortoise's family members shouted ahead of the deer, he ran more rapidly. The deer died of exhaustion two miles before the end of the race. The folktale teaches African people that too much arrogance has severe consequences..

The trickster tales are found in many cultures in Africa. Trickster tales use animals with human features to convey wisdom. Trickster tales also use animals to help people understand human nature and human behavior. These tales play an important role within the culture in which they are found. The animal trickster tales are meant to be entertaining as well as instructive. Animals are used in different ways to portray human strength and weaknesses.

Animals play a prominent role in African storytelling because African people live in close proximity to wild

animals that share their land. In many of the tales Africans attributed human feelings and desires to particular animals and derived ethical ideas from their behavior. Emmanuel Matateyou contends that the animal tricksters invent what human nature thinks is impossible.¹⁰ The animal tricksters ease their passage through a treacherous world at the expense of more powerful opponents. They get into precarious situations that require them to use their craftiness to get out of their predicament. The fact that they are smaller or weaker than their adversaries show that weight is not important. It also shows that a strong person is not usually intelligent.

Animal Tricksters

Animal tricksters occur in tales from the West, East, Central, and Southern African community. The animal tricksters differ from culture to culture. The hare is the most prominent trickster among people of East, Central, and Southern Africa. He is also important among the Jukan and Angass of Nigeria. The tortoise is the trickster hero among the Yoruba, Edo, and Ibo of Nigeria. The spider is the animal trickster in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the Gold Coast. Each culture has its own unique way of describing and utilizing its trickster. Animal tricksters have exceptional qualities, mental agility, and extraordinary capabilities. They are portrayed as lazy, greedy, talented, clever, and mischievous. They deceive friends, acquaintances, and adversaries in pursuing their own selfish ends. The storyteller's audience appreciates the wit that leads the animal trickster from one victory to another.

Ananse the Spider

The telling of Ananse stories dates back to Ancient times. Ananse, the spider, is one of the major trickster characters in West African folktales. The Ananse folktales were originally told in Ghana, Africa. Ananse is a Ghanaian name for spider. "Ananse is a complex character who can play a plurality of roles."¹¹ Sometimes Ananse is personified to bring the story to life. Ananse plays human roles when his deeds are successful. In time of tragedy, especially when Ananse is humiliated, he shows his true image as a real spider. Ananse is characterized as clever, jealous, mischievous, and greedy. His greediness, mischief and trickery can't be outshined. The spider tales have traveled from Africa to the Caribbean Islands. Sometimes the spelling has changed from Ananse to Anansi. There is always a lesson to be learned from Anansi. Some of the Ananse folktales include: "Ananse and Some Strong Animals," "Ananse and the Cows," "Ananse the Daring Messenger," and "Ananse and the Greedy Lion."

In the Ghana trickster tale, "Ananse and the Greedy Lion," the lion was a bully to some of the small animals. He demanded that Ananse hunt for him. Ananse suggested that they dig a long trench to trap the animals. The lion told Ananse to dig the trench by himself. Ananse dug a trench and planted sharp stakes and poisonous thorns. He covered the trench with light palm branches and dry leaves. Ananse told the lion to go to the other side of the forest to roar and scare the animals toward the trap. Many animals got trapped and killed in the trench. Ananse and the lion had more meat than they could eat. Ananse was ordered by the lion to carry all the meat to the house. The lion didn't allow Ananse to eat. Later the lion ordered Ananse to cook dinner for him. Although Ananse was tired, angry, and hungry, he cooked for the lion. Ananse thought of a way to free himself from the lion. Ananse found a huge deer to cook for the lion. He smeared the deer with poison from a deadly plant. After devouring the poison meat, the lion complained of a stomachache. The lion died of meat poison. Ananse was free. Ananse and his family went to the trench daily to collect food.

Ajapa the Tortoise

The Yoruba find the trickster folktales appealing because they can comment on antisocial behavior. Many children in Yoruba are exposed to Ajapa tales. Ajapa, the tortoise, is the animal trickster among the Yoruba of West Africa. He is the most frequent protagonist of Yoruba folktales. His popularity equals that of Ananse, the spider. Ajapa is known for his mischievous tricks to secure advantage for himself with little or no physical effort or material resources. Ajapa is portrayed as being so lazy that he will not work for a living. In times of scarcity of food, he relies on trickery and the reluctant generosity of some friends to obtain food. Aside from being lazy and greedy, Ajapa refuses to share with any animal. In "Ajapa and Inaki the Baboon," Ajapa reveals his gratuitous defiance.

He manipulates Ekun, the leopard to his own purpose. The tortoise also plays the role of the trickster in the folktales of the Kalabari in southeastern Nigeria, where he is named Ikaki. In Cameroon, east of Nigeria, the tortoise is named Ekaga. Some of the Ajapa tales include: "Ajapa and Kiniun the King Lion," "Ajapa Humbles Erin the Elephant," and "Ajapa, Aja the Dog, and the Yams."

In many of the trickster tales Ajapa's deeds are not successful. This is illustrated in the tale, "Ajapa, Aja the Dog, and the Yams." Ajapa, Aja, and their families faced starvation. Aja figured out a way to feed his family. He stole a few yams from the neighboring farmers. Aja made sure that he didn't take too many yams, just enough to feed his family. Ajapa noticed that Aja's family was doing well. Ajapa wanted to know how Aja was able to help his family. Aja finally took Ajapa to one of the farms. Ajapa was greedy and stole too many yams. Ajapa was caught and taken to the king. He told the king that Aja tricked him into picking the yams by saying he needed help on his farm. The king sent a messenger to Aja's house. Aja pretended that he was sick. His wife told the messenger that he had been in bed for three days. The messenger took Aja to see the King. After the king heard Aja's story, he exiled Ajapa from the community.

Strategies

I will implement this unit in a standard-based classroom during the reading period. The three-part lesson framework will be used during the reading period. The three-part framework consists of a mini-lesson, student work period, and sharing. The mini-lessons will include accessing prior knowledge, providing background information about the culture and folktale, reading aloud a folktale, modeling storytelling, analyzing a folktale, introducing key vocabulary words, and introducing the different types of folktales. During the student work period, the students will read folktales, respond to discussion questions, identify narrative story elements, complete graphic organizers/story organizers, practice drama activities, and practice telling their own stories. Storytelling will occur during sharing time. The students will also share their responses to questions.

During the mini-lessons, I will model creative, dramatic storytelling. The only way students will learn the art of storytelling is through teacher modeling or watching a storytelling performance in a film. I will use gestures, facial expressions, body movements, and appropriate voices to present different kinds of folktales. The students will be encouraged to be active participants in the storytelling. I want to entice students into enthusiastic storytelling.

The KWL chart will be used to set a purpose for my unit. The KWL chart is a good introductory strategy that

provides a structure for recalling what students know about a topic. This chart will be used to activate background knowledge and help in learning. The letters KWL are an acronym for what we know, what we want to know and what we learned. By asking students what they already know about folktales, they will think about prior experience reading tales and knowledge about the folktales.

Story maps will be used to facilitate comprehension and memory of the folktales. Story maps are visual representation of the narrative elements of the story. They can be used as a pre-reading strategy. They can also be used as frameworks for storytelling or retelling stories. This strategy enables students to relate story events and perceive the structure of the story. Story maps are visual representation of the elements of the story.

The students will work in small groups during the work period. Working in small groups ensures active participation of all of the students. It enables students to move more readily from receiving knowledge to generating knowledge. Students can be grouped according to skills or interest. When I work with the teacher group, the other groups will be working on the same activities but adjustments will be made based on their level of readiness.

Reader's theater is a strategy I will use to entice students into enthusiastic storytelling. It is a dramatic reading from a text. I will use this strategy to involve students in reading the character parts of a folktale. The emphasis is on oral expression of the reading. It will enable students to bring a folktale to life and create powerful interpretations. Reader's theater will enhance their skills as readers, listeners, and speakers. It will also offer support to less confident readers.

I feel the best way to teach storytelling is to read the folktales aloud. Reading aloud a folktale, placing special emphasis on the voices of the characters, will aid students in retelling the story. This strategy will help students' understanding and memory of the folktale. Listening to the repetitive patterns of the folktale can be the schema for students' comprehension. Reading aloud a folktale will make it easy for students to remember the vocabulary, grammatical structure contained in the folktales. After reading aloud the folktale to the students, I will give them a chance to share their feelings and thoughts. I will also give the students opportunities to read folktales aloud to express their own voices of the characters as they read.

Text rendering is a strategy I will use to help students think critically about the folktales they read. After reading a folktale, I will ask students to highlight an important word or phrase. The students will write the phrase or word in their journal. I will tell the students to describe what it means to them and why it is important. Text rendering will help students identify the meaning of unknown words.

Response to questions for class or group discussions is a strategy I will use to assist students in analyzing the narrative structure of films. The questions will be written on the board before the students view the movie. I will use who, what, and where questions to encourage students to look at the story or content of a film. I will develop "how" questions that will enable students to examine the plot structure. Students need to determine the setting, main characters, key conflicts, and events in a movie.

Classroom Activities

Activity One: What Are the Characteristics of a Trickster?

Objective: Students will identify the character traits of Anansi, the spider by completing a character chart.

Georgia Performance Standards: ELA3R3, ELA4R3, and ELA5R3

Materials: Collection of Anansi tales, chart paper, markers, character chart, handout on character traits

Mini-lesson: Check for prior knowledge by asking students if they have ever heard about Anansi, the spider. Provide background information on animal trickster tales and Anansi, the spider. Tell students that Anansi is sometimes called Anansi, the trickster. Ask students why they think Anansi is called a trickster. Write their responses on chart paper. Let the students know that Anansi demonstrated many qualities in the animal trickster tales. Inform them that another word for qualities is characteristics. Write the definition of the word characteristics on chart paper. Next distribute a handout on character traits for students to use for a word bank. Next give students a purpose for reading the Anansi tales. Advise the students to think about Anansi's characteristics as they read the animal trickster tales..

Student Work Period: Students will read Anansi tales in their assigned small groups. After students read the tales, they will discuss the characteristics Anansi demonstrated in the tales. Students will complete the character chart.

Sharing: A student from each group will identify the characteristic that Anansi demonstrated in the stories they read. The teacher will write the responses from each group on chart paper.

Activity Two: How Do You Tell a Story?

Objective: Students will recall, interpret, and summarize information in order to retell a West African folktale.

Georgia Performance Standards: ELA3R2 and ELA3LSV1

Materials: Collection of West African folktales

Mini-lesson: Use the KWL chart to introduce storytelling. Provide background information on traditional African storytelling and the role of the storyteller. Retell a West African folktale using creative storytelling techniques. Use gestures, facial expressions, body movements, and appropriate voices to represent different characters. Provide opportunities for the students to participate in the retelling of the tale..

Student Work Period: Students will read their favorite folktale. Students will work in small groups as they practice retelling their favorite folktale.

Sharing: Students will retell an African folktale in front of an audience.

Activity Three: What is the Narrative Structure of Film?

Objective: Students will analyze the narrative structure of a film by answering who, what, where, how questions.

Georgia Performance Standards: ELA3R2 and ELA3LSV1

Materials: Film, *Abouna*, student journals

Mini-lesson: Before viewing the film, *Abouna*, provide background information of storytelling in African films. Discuss the importance of films in the African culture. Explain to students how stories are constructed. Tell the students that the narrative structure of film includes characters, action, and consequences. Give the students a purpose for watching the film, *Abouna*. Inform them to pay attention to how the story is told and what the story is about. Write questions on the board to help students discuss the narrative structure of the film. Write on the board: What event begins the story? Who are the main characters? What conflicts do they face? How is the major conflict in the story set up? How do the characters face the conflicts? How is the major conflict resolved?

Student Work Period: Once students have viewed the film, divide the students into small groups to discuss and answer the questions. Students will take notes and write responses to the questions in their journals.

Sharing: Students will share their responses to the questions.

Appendix A: Implementing District Standards

Reading

ELA3R1 The student demonstrates the ability to read orally with speed, accuracy, and expression.

ELA3R2 The student acquires and uses grade-level words to communicate effectively..

ELA3R3 The student uses a variety of strategies to gain meaning from grade-level text..

ELA3LSV1 The student uses oral and visual strategies to communicate.

ELA4R3 and ELA5R3 The student demonstrates comprehension and shows evidence of a warranted and responsible explanation of a variety of literary and informational text.

Annotated Teacher Bibliography

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Owomoyela, Oyekan. *Yoruba Trickster Tales*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997. A collection of twenty-three tales exploring different aspects of Ajapa, the turtle, is included in this book..

Tembo, Mwizenge. *Legends of Africa*. New York: Michael Friedman Publishing Group, 1996. An introduction to African myths, folktales, and legends is enfolded in this book.

Annotated Student Bibliography

Aardema, Verna. *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears: A West African Tale*. New York: Dial Press, 1975. Mosquito tells a lie that starts a chain reaction of panic throughout the jungle.

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Filmography

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Keita: The Heritage of the Griot, Directed by Dani Kouyate, 94 min. Burkina Faso, 1994, Videocassette.

Wend Kuuni, Directed by Gaston Kabore, 75 min. California Newsreel, 1983, Videocassette.

Notes

1. Harold Courlander, *A Treasury African Folklore*, 3.
2. Jack Berry, *West African Folktales*, 2.
3. Ibid, *An Anthology of Myths, Legends and Folktales from Cameroon*, 4.
4. Emmanuel Matateyou, *An Anthology of Myths, Legends and Folktales from Cameroon*, 6.
5. Emmanuel Asihene, *Traditional Folktales of Ghana*, ii.
6. Ibid, *West African Folktales*, 3.
7. D.T. Niane, *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali*, vii.
8. Joann Lott, "Keepers of History" in *Research Penn State*, www.rps.psu.edu/0205/keepers.html.
9. Harold Courlander, *A Treasury of African Folklore*, 1.
10. Emmanuel Matateyou, of *An Anthology Myths, Legends and Folktales from Cameroon*, 147.
11. Emmanuel Asihene, *Traditional Folktales of Ghana*, Introduction.

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