



AFRICAN FOLKTALES

Bright Star Touring Theatre

Study Guide

About the show:



Akili and Jabari are excited to share the folktales they've gathered from across the African continent. From Ghana, Liberia, and Nigeria in West Africa to Kenya in East Africa to Zimbabwe and South Africa in - you guessed it! - South Africa, their stories come from a variety of different people and tribes.

Set in an African market, **African Folktales** includes some characters that may already be familiar, as well as introducing new stories that you probably haven't heard before. African folktales were passed down orally through generations - that means that they were told verbally instead of written down on paper and read. They also tend to be very interactive - so get ready to participate! You may be asked to help make sound effects, call out a certain word at a certain time, or even come up on stage to help tell a part of the story!

Many African folktales use animals who act like humans in order to teach a lesson. Other tales explain why an animal looks or acts the way they do, or how that animal came to have a specific character trait. A common character in African folktales is the trickster - usually an animal who is smaller in size than the others and who uses his wits to outsmart others. Sometimes the trickster is very funny, and sometimes he or she is not likable at all! Anansi the Spider is probably the most famous of the African tricksters. Our show includes a funny story about Anansi that explains how he got his long, skinny legs, and also teaches a lesson about being greedy.

Music and movement are big parts of traditional African storytelling. Akili and Jabari use drums, their voices, and parts of their bodies to make music. And watch how they change the way they move across the market to portray animals as opposed to humans! We know that you'll have fun while learning a lot about African culture, storytelling, and literature!

About Our Production:

This production is a touring show with Bright Star Touring Theatre. During its run, this production may be seen by audiences in as many as 16 different states across the country. In a typical week, our actors will perform in 10-13 venues for all ages! Our actors travel in minivans, averaging 800-1000 miles of driving *per week*, and they have performed for as many as 10,000 people *in one week*! After the show, our actors are available for you to ask questions about this production and their lives as actors - it's one of the most exciting parts of the Bright Star experience - and we hope you'll have a chance to have your question answered!



Words to Know:

Theatre is a form of storytelling that has been entertaining people for thousands of years. Theatre has its own kind of language. Here are some terms that actors, directors, and other “theatre people” use all the time!

Audition: A hopeful actor will either read, sing or dance (or sometimes all three!) in order for the director to decide which actor she wants to cast in a particular role.

Director: The director reads the script, and tells the actors where they should go and what they should do. Each director has a different way of telling a story from every other director, and this means that each play will be unique from every other play!

Set: All of the scenery on the stage is part of what is called the “set.” It helps to paint a picture of where the story takes place, so it is easier for the audience to follow the play. For *African Folktales*, our actors use a backdrop, which is the colorful painted background.

Costumes: All of the clothes that are worn on stage by the actors are costumes. The hats, the coats, and even the shirts and shoes are all part of the costumes!

Props: Anything that an actor carries during the show is a prop. Can you remember any of the props used by the actors in this play?

Rehearsal: Once the cast of the play is set, everyone needs to practice to get ready for the show. This can take weeks, and that gives time for the sets and costumes to be built, and for the actors to learn their lines.

Actors: These are the people that you see on stage. They each have a character to play, and they spend a long time rehearsing before they perform. They have to learn where they should walk, when they should talk, and how their characters should act. It’s a lot of work!

and of course -

Audience: Perhaps the most important element in the show! The audience consists of the people who come out to watch the play. You were our audience for *African Folktales*!

Check These Out!

Would you like to read more African folktales? Here are just a few suggestions. Be sure to ask your school librarian or the librarian at your nearest library branch to help you choose a book - they might have many more suggestions!

Anansi the Spider: A Tale from the Ashanti

by Gerald McDermott

This story relates the tale of father Anansi and his six spider sons. When Anansi sets out on a dangerous journey and gets into all sorts of trouble, each son does one thing to help, and all their efforts together save their father.

Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain

retold by Verna Aardema

Ki-pat is a cattle herdsman in Kenya who figures out an inventive way to end a terrible drought.

Nelson Mandela’s Favorite African Folktales

by Nelson Mandela

These 32 different stories from across the African continent represent a range of cultures and genres and are a compilation of writings and translations by numerous authors.

Map of Africa:



Classroom Activities:

Write Your Own “Why” or “How” Story!

This activity incorporates creative thinking, writing, visual art and performance!

Stories that explain *why* an animal acts a certain way or *how* it came to look the way it does are called “pourquoi” tales (“pourquoi” - pronounced “por-KWAH” - is the French word for “why”).

1. Choose an animal who is native to Africa. Some suggestions are a giraffe, zebra, lion, or elephant.
2. Write a short story that explains how or why your animal has a certain trait. For instance, in **African Folktales** you learned why Anansi the Spider has such long, skinny legs. Be as creative as you’d like!
3. Once you’ve written your story, draw pictures to illustrate your tale.
4. Performance time! Read your story and share your pictures with a partner, or with the entire class!

Map It!

This activity incorporates social studies and geography!

Find the following African countries mentioned in the play on a map:

Ghana, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Liberia, Kenya, Nigeria

Can you remember which folktale is associated with which African country?

Match the Words!

This activity incorporates foreign language and creative writing!

Match the Swahili word to its meaning in English. Then, write a paragraph containing all the Swahili words!

Jambo!
simba
safari
rafiki
shule
Asante!

Thank You!
friend
Hello!
school
trip
lion

About 30.7 million people speak Swahili around the world. So now you can say hello to 30,700,000 people!

Seeing the Play:

Attending the theatre is very different than going to the movies or watching television. For one thing, the actors are real people who can hear and see everything that’s happening in the audience. It’s important to know a few rules before seeing a play:

- ★ Please be quiet and respectful during the performance so that those around you can hear what’s happening.
- ★ If something’s funny, it’s okay to laugh!
- ★ If you like the play, be sure to clap at the end.

What else can you add to the list?

Questions for Discussion:

1. Why was it important for Manzanaba and Zenzele to find and tell stories? Can you think of things that stories help us to understand or explain?
2. Why did Anansi decide not to stay at Rabbit’s house until the food was cooked? Did Anansi end up getting any food at all? What do you think is the lesson in this story?
3. Why did King Leopard have a contest with all the animals? Were you surprised by who won the contest? Why or why not?
4. What annoyed Toad about Grasshopper? What bothered Grasshopper about Toad? Do you think they could have solved these problems? What would you have done differently?

Write your own review!

Your assignment is to write a review of *African Folktales*. If you were writing a review for a newspaper, here are some items that you would need to include:

- ★ Your reader may not have seen the performance. Start by placing your reader in the middle of the action by describing some of the high points.
- ★ Was there a scene or character that you especially liked? Write about what made that character or scene special to you.
- ★ Most reviews comment on the acting, the direction, the sets, the script, and the costumes. Choose at least three from the list to include in your review

Create a headline for your review: _____

Byline (your name): _____

Please feel free to send us pictures, drawings and writings about our play! We cannot thank you enough for them - and neither can our performers!



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