

Tell Me About It: The Africa I Left Behind

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Overview

This unit will explore storytellers, and their roles as historians, entertainers, and teachers of community values in Africa. The unit will focus on two important traditions of West African storytelling. The first is the tradition of the Griots, the famous singers of epic tales from the ancient empire of Mali. The second focuses on folktales and fables from the region of Liberia on the west coast of Africa. Both traditions highlight the art of oral narrative in West African culture. Students will read some of these tales and collect stories from their own families. Classroom activities will draw primarily on the Liberian folktales, which are accessible to American teachers and students.

Who were storytellers, and what were their stories? Perhaps the most famous stories in West Africa are the epic tales of the griots. The griots were men or women who passed down stories from generation to generation. Their tales were told through music and speech, and most of them tell about the adventures of the great emperor Sundiata, who ruled Mali in the 13th century. Further south, in the forest region of West Africa, traditions of storytelling featured a wide variety of animals like the hare, the elephant, and Anansi the spider. Both storytelling traditions served to entertain, educate, and give guidance to their audiences.

This unit was developed for English as a Second Language students in first, second, and third grades. The term ESOL is used in the School District of Philadelphia to represent English to Speakers of Other Languages but it means, English as a Second Language, and English Language Learners. Using the Philadelphia ESOL Core Curriculum the students will focus on reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The unit will follow the Philadelphia ESOL Core Curriculum for a four week period and be used to integrate listening, speaking, and reading in a beginner classroom. Eventually writing will develop as the students become more comfortable with the subject matter. The unit can easily be used for other ESOL levels and elementary students.

The unit will provide students with the opportunity to talk with their relatives about what they have learned. Ultimately this unit will spark discussion in the classroom that will follow to the home. Parents will be invited to come to the school to share their oral history or folklore from their country.

Since a majority of the ESOL students in our school are West African immigrants the unit will provide an opportunity for their African families to come to the classroom. For some families, this would be their first time in the classroom. I will encourage the African families to come to the classroom since it would be a wonderful occasion to invite parents to share stories about their homeland with the class, including stories of when they were growing up. In this way, they can participate in the learning process for their children and their children's classmates.

Rationale

I have always wondered why the African students in my school do not know, or choose not to speak about the countries they come from in Africa. Is it because no one ever told them, or were they told not to speak about it? My intention for this unit is to encourage students to learn about their homeland and feel comfortable enough to discuss it with their classmates and eventually ask questions. Not only will this unit provide students with a brief history of storytellers in West Africa, but it will introduce them to a variety of oral history through folklore.

Oral tradition is valued greatly in Africa, where it is a source of entertainment and instruction transmitted across the generations. It is important that stories are continued in the families who have immigrated to the United States from Africa. Teachers can also assist in this tradition by reading different types of stories in their classroom and inviting children to share their stories from or about their homeland. Teachers want students to listen to each other to understand their feelings and needs. Stories play an important role in this aspect of educating children.

To spark the students' interest in African fables they will be introduced to a variety of stories from West Africa. Many beginner ESOL students have limited English skills and in addition are very shy. The unit will begin with oral projects to make the students more comfortable with the subject matter. Since many of the students are also limited in their writing ability, once they become comfortable with speaking we can move on to the writing aspect. This in turn will initiate projects for the students to engage in. Following the conclusion to this unit the teacher can continue the investigation within different regions of the world to meet the needs of the other diverse cultures in the ESOL classroom.

Another focus of this unit is to bring family members closer together. It is important to take time from our busy schedules to spend time with members of our family. Some families may need a reason to come back together. This unit will provide students with an opportunity to bring school home in a completely different manner. Where a family member may not have been able to help them at home with their math and reading, the students may reach their relatives on a different level. It may in turn show the students the added value of their country and culture. It will also allow the families to realize the importance of sharing their history in the home.

Since African folktales have not have been examined as intensely as other folklore, nor has it been introduced to the classroom setting as frequently as others, this unit will provide the students an opportunity to broaden their horizons on more than one level. Furthermore, English Language Learners from other countries will be encouraged to discuss storytelling with their family members and learn about their culture.

Historical and Cultural Background

How were stories told in West Africa? How were events and lessons from the past transmitted orally from one generation to the next? Do storytellers still exist in today's society? These questions will be answered through the following research and the students will gain a better understanding by listening to and discussing a variety of oral narratives and folktales from West Africa.

Storytelling is an integral part of Africa's history and culture. As students investigate the many societies of West Africa they will undoubtedly come across storytellers. The culture of West Africa recognizes the importance of storytelling as a way to preserve the memory of the ancestors, to instruct the young in the values of the community, and to entertain adults and children alike. There are different types of storytellers in Africa, but this unit will focus on oral historians, folklorists, and griots.

Griots

In order to understand the importance of oral history and storytelling in Africa, one must first learn about who the storytellers were, and of what they spoke. In Mali and some neighboring countries in West Africa, the art of storytelling is associated with individuals known as griots (gree-oh). Most griots descend from families who trace their ancestry back to the ancient empire of Mali in the 13th Century. They have been renowned for generations as poets, praise singers, and wandering musicians.

Historically griots belonged to an endogamous occupational caste and intermarried with other griots, a practice that still exists in the same areas of West Africa today. Popular legend tells us that King Nare Maghann Konate offered his son Sundiata a griot to accompany him on his life's journey. The griot, Balla Fasseke, advised Sundiata during

his reign as Emperor of Mali. Therefore Balla Fasseke is considered the first griot and the founder of the Kouyate line of griots who exist to this day.

History tells us that the warrior kings, called *jatigi*, were accompanied by griots. The two were considered inseparable and worthless without each other, although the *jatigi* could loan his griot to another *jatigi*. In Mande terms the griot is also known as the *jeliw and jali*. While there is limited information about women griots, they are recognized as griottes, acknowledging the difference in gender.¹

Although oral history did not originate with griots, many African historians recognize them as the accepted keepers of history. According to some historians, the griots memorized their history and transmitted their recollections in the form of both fixed and free text.¹ Each region that once belonged to ancient Mali preserved its own variant version of the Empire's history, kept by a family of griots from that region. The griots claimed to be accurate and truthful in their version of the past. The griot emphasized the role of prominent families and rulers from that region in the building of the empire.

Typically one hears about griots in epic tales of the old days, but they still exist in today's society. The griot traditionally served the nobility, reminding them of the great deeds of the ancestors and singing the praises of their masters. While the griots considered their profession as essential for the preservation of their society's history and culture, their critics often regarded them as servile and self-seeking sycophants. "The high status of these first griots may be a reflection of the deep sense of fear or fealty that one man can inspire in others in a society that is based on a feudal social structure. But it may also reveal more recent efforts to raise the status of griots in the eyes of a public that does not consider them to be the social equals of people of noble or free origin."ⁱⁱ To remove the stigma of the griot as member of a once-servile caste, and to acknowledge their changing historical role, "A study commissioned by the government of Niger recommended that the word *griot* be replaced with *artist, musician, and singer*. The authors also proposed the establishment of a professional association, a school to train griots, and the awarding of medals to the most talented of them."ⁱⁱⁱ

Most of the griots' functions involve words, and they were known for their "speaking documents"; but griots were also poets, genealogists, historians, spokespersons, teachers, musicians, singers, and entertainers. Other roles produce forms of verbal art- songs, tales, and epics. Griots have become synonymous with oratorical excellence throughout West Africa; the term implies an expert in oral performance. Tradition was preserved through griots, and they continue to link contemporary individuals to their ancestors. The griot in fact belongs to a profession that celebrates the deeds of many diverse peoples, including those who are not related to the Mande.^{iv} Today they are often professional musicians.

Despite some of the negative images associated with their occupation, griots still perform many functions that are considered valuable both in their African societies and around the world. According to Hale, the griots provide multiple social functions including “recounting history, providing advice, serving as spokesperson, representing a ruler as a diplomat, mediating conflicts, interpreting the words of others into different languages, playing music, composing songs and tunes, teaching students, exhorting participants in wars and sports, reporting news, overseeing, witnessing or contributing to important life ceremonies, and praise-singing.”^v

Griots who were looking to restore their importance in modern society came to help parents celebrate naming ceremonies and then to collect rewards from the relatives who attended.^{vi} Although there are many discussions about the role of the griots in the past and present, “griots remain enigmatic figures in part because they have no equivalent outside the continent.”^{vii} The role of the griot is recognized in many countries within West Africa.

The griots’ original archaic language is sometimes undecipherable, but contemporary scholars have attempted to translate their words into print. “A sampling of the many kinds of texts that scholars have recorded, transcribed, and translated- praises, genealogies, songs and poems, proverbs, and epics- can give readers from parts of Africa as well as from other continents, a way to appreciate the artistry of these bards.”^{viii}

Liberian (and other West African) Folktales

Although Liberia is not part of the geographical area where the oral epic of ancient Mali is still told, the tradition of passing on stories in the spirit of the griots is just as important there. Oral histories and various genres of oral folklore exist in Liberia. Many folktales from West Africa are unfamiliar to elementary school students. By allowing the students this opportunity to explore varieties of oral history and folktales, they will be introduced to a whole new genre of storytelling.

Elizabeth Tonkin states, “the different conventions of discourse through which speakers tell history and listeners understand them can be called genres. A genre signals that a certain kind of interpretation is called for.”^{ix} Sharing history orally is an intrinsic tradition in Africa. Since many African’s were not literate, most of Africa’s recorded history was not written down, but transmitted orally. This is how information was passed on from generation to generation.

Folklore

Folklore includes oral history, tales, and customs to name a few. In folklore there are many different categories or genres, including fairytales, fables, legends, and proverbs. A

fable is a short narrative of a cautionary tale involving animals that speak and act like humans. Legends typically tell of a famous person and his or her feats.

Folktales are stories that are heard and remembered, but may change from one person to the next. Typically a folktale is passed on orally, but it can be passed on in written form. Most African folktales involve animal characters. The characters include the spider, the monkey, the tortoise, the elephant, and the hare. In West Africa the tortoise is a trickster of secondary importance, while in stories from Liberia the spider is the primary trickster. The spider is famously known by his Twi name, Anansi. The spider plays the role of hero and trickster in West African folktales. Although he may have a different name he can be found as the character that is cunning.^x

In Africa stories are passed down by word of mouth and thus a folktale is recognized as a form of art; verbal art. Stories were generally told in the village at night by the light of the moon, or a fire. In these stories a lesson was learned, and usually it was the egotistical character that learned the lesson. The individual who tells the story wants to be recognized as an artist, and look to his or her peers for that recognition. But what happens if the tale constantly changes each time it is told? Creativity is encouraged, because a well-told tale is not retold word for word.^{xi}

My research on African folklore reveals that there are two types of folktales. To explain why something is the way it is, or what lesson was learned in the end. In most cases the stories tell of Spider the clever trickster, but in the end his tricks do not always go his way.

Trickster tales

The trickster's character is responsible for getting another character, presumably the main character of the folktale, to do something he wants. The trickster gets what he wants by pulling a prank. The trickster's role is to tease, entertain, and explain how something came to be, or what lesson was learned.

In many cases this trickster is an animal, simply considered the protagonist. He is clever and devious and his pranks usually cause trouble. The trickster may get away with his prank, or the prank may be turned against him by the main character in the story. Yet in the end, a lesson is learned. The lesson learned might be: not to be greedy, not to be vain, or not to be naïve, for ultimately your mischievous actions will be punished.^{xii}

The trickster is specific to each culture. In West Africa the trickster is typically the Tortoise, Anansi the Spider, or Zomo the Hare (who later became Brer Rabbit when African lore was carried to the Americas). The spider is presented as the beginner at a new task, and the Hare usually finds suitable answers on the first try.^{xiii} In some tales the trickster is cruel, in others, mysterious. But the tale will eventually present a situation to

solve. The trickster is well spoken, but mistrustful, and is usually by the end remorseful. The trickster may try to improve his fortune, hoping not to induce retributions. Although the primary role of the trickster is to cause trouble, each story is different, with a different lesson.

The role of the trickster is to cause trouble, and this trouble will make the reader laugh. They will laugh either because of the trickster's creativity or because by the end of the story his tricks are not fruitful. Many times the trickster rushes into the situation without thought and acts irrationally, thus causing a situation in need of resolution. The trickster wants to play on the weakness of others, usually one who is revered.

In his book *Forms of Folklore in Africa*, Bernth Lindfors speaks of how the African Trickster is the "impossible imitation". He also goes on to explain, "The Trickster is seen to fail for want of taking stock in his strength before undertaking a task which surpasses it. Most often it is the Spider who is the Trickster figure, but other incarnations of the character can meet the same pitiable defeat."^{xiv} Another role of the trickster is to explain why something is a certain way. One example used by McCarthy is the story of "Coyote and the Wolves". McCarthy explains that in tricking the wolves, Coyote forms constellations in the night sky.

Lindfors continues to explain that if the Tricksters trickery does not cost him his life, he will then run away disgraced only to return in the next tale to find success with his dishonesty and mischief. Defeat is not always the end of the tale. The trickster wants to change the accepted order, but without risk to himself and those who are weak are not to be believed, and sometimes deception wins over strength.^{xv} The trickster may even try to act as another whose strengths he does not possess and pretend to triumph over a situation seemingly impossible. Eventually his lies are uncovered and at that time made to look like a fool.

These stories were told not only to entertain, but also to reemphasize the importance of gathering together as a community. The gatherings were also the catalyst to oral history. Since many Africans could not write, the stories at these gatherings were how information was passed on, reminding us once again of the power of speech.

Oral History

Thad Sitton states, "History is one of those everyday words with a confusion of meanings. In one meaning, history is everything that happened in the human past. In another sense it is the debris, the traces, left by that happening, which take the forms of written documents, artifacts, and the recollections of living persons."^{xvi} He ends by saying that the historian works with the information provided to create a history using such forms as biographies, political narratives, and textbooks, whichever survives.

Using Sitton's definition, oral history is information about the past that comes down to the present by word of mouth, even if it is eventually written down. Oral tradition is a collective history that most members of a community share and agree upon. In *Narrating our Pasts*, Elizabeth Tonkin discusses collecting the oral history of a community in Liberia. She states, "If there are living survivors, they can be asked what their memories will yield about life in that different country."^{xvii} Each person has a different opinion, or retelling of an event, but it does not change the fact that it happened. People should utilize their opportunities to learn about the past through stories, therefore giving them a different perspective. Tonkin goes on to say, "history has to stand both for 'the past', history as lived, and 'representation of pastness', history as recorded. Because history-as-recorded is a representation, it must be understood as such. Verbal representation are chains of words, either spoken or written, ordered in patterns of discourse that represent events."^{xviii}

Tonkin goes on to emphasize the proper time and place for an oral telling, "The social contexts of oral histories include the additional condition that their tellers must intersect with a palpable audience at a particular moment in time and space. What they choose to say is affected by these conditions, which also mean that they can get immediate feedback. Just as narrators may monitor they audience's reactions, and take account of them to adjust their tone and presentation, so the audience may play an energetic part in the proceedings, as questions, answer back, or perhaps just walk away"^{xix}

Although Tonkin makes a good argument for the reasoning behind history accepted orally, there are many who still cannot accept history unless in its written form. "African oral literature, for instance, had to gain recognition on literates terms in a world dominated by literates and it was not until 1970 that Ruth Finnegan provided an indispensable base line for doing so in her *Oral Literature In Africa* reviewing the scattered evidence already available in print, contextualizing and sorting it out to show something of its scope and scale."^{xx}

Does this mean that history is only true when it is written down? Not at all. Even where different oral versions of a community's past may differ, oral recollections serve to represent the past as an important aspect of social history. Tonkin argues that "the remembering and the telling are themselves events, not only descriptions of events. An event lived is finished, bound within experience. But an event remembered is boundless, because it is the key to all that happened before and after it." This is why it is important for families who come from a deeply rooted tradition of oral history to continue that tradition. If parents and teachers do not continue to tell stories from their culture than who will? "The times in the narration are affected by times outside it; even the audiences; interventions may direct and alter these times and the choice of representation through which they are effected."^{xxi}

Although some are skeptical about the “truth value” of the history told by griots and the lessons taught by folklore, it is up to the individual to make that conclusion. “It is not easy or even always possible to say how far tellers are authors or authored by their telling.”^{xxii} Oral history is a living person’s recollection of the past, and within that personal history there may be some distortions, but isn’t that true for history itself?

Continuing the tradition of oral tales and history is an important aspect of culture. Cultural growth indicates personal and historical tradition and stories of past occurrences. “Anthropologists have increasingly become interested in how selves are constructed and what social conditions support or constitute what kind of self, but according to their sense of the word, their approaches and conclusions are often very different.”^{xxiii} This gives us the opportunity to take the information provided and make of it as we please.

Oral history is a person’s own memories of their own experiences. These experiences do not have to be recorded by sound, tape, or even written. They simply can be another person’s recollection. Oral history gives credibility to the tradition of oral transmission. Words are a powerful means of communication and are honored through the wordsmith. The wordsmith is an integral part of history and they stand out in African culture.

Using Oral History in School

As we have found, oral history and storytelling are connected. In a time when people were illiterate their method of passing on historical events were verbal. In today’s society there are still oral histories, in the form, for example, of stories that our grandparents and parents have told us from their childhood. The stories continue as a collective memory preserved by the individual, a bit of oral tradition. If they do not, then what happens to them?

Storytelling is an integral aspect of cultural memory, whether of a nation, a community, a family, or an individual. Storytelling ranges from the epic of Sundiata in Africa, to folktales and fairytales that we know by heart. But what happens if we stop passing these tales on? Stories that we have loved since we were children might end with our generation. It is important to continue these traditions, and what better way than in school.^{xxiv}

Oral history is one person’s, or many persons’ recollection of what happened in the past. It is also a form of reflection on the past, a way of giving the meaning or significance to that past. The griots, as we saw above, recall and retell a history that benefits their rulers. Their history is a story that shows no immoral actions by the griots’ benefactors, whom they support with their tales. In Africa stories are not always told to entertain, but to provide historical information and to instill pride. Therefore taking the first steps to learning the history of Africa begins with the students being introduced to fables from

their country. This may spark student's interest and excite them with the idea that they too may have stories such as fables from their own relatives.

In the book, *Oral History: A Guide for Teachers and Others*, Sitton's goal is to plan and implement classroom oral history projects. He states, "The idea of classroom oral history began with practicing teachers in real-world classrooms and, up to this point, has spread largely by word of mouth and example."^{xxv} We need to get connected again to our children. This is true not only as a teacher, but also as a parent. There is so much to learn from others, but what about that untapped knowledge right in our own back yard.

Students should go to their own families and communities, settings where they are familiar, and bring history from their home into the classroom. Sutton states, "Oral history is a field work enterprise that opens new relationships between the world of classroom and history textbook and the oral traditional history of the community outside."^{xxvi} Oral history will give the students the ability to tap into something that is readily accessible to them, and take it with them forever.

Starting with storytelling the students will have oral classroom lessons to complete. Once they have begun their excitement for the subject matter, they can move to the next step of writing their own stories, or transcribing interviews they have done with a family member.

Some children from Africa come to the United States already with sad stories. Many countries are war torn and family members have been killed so the remaining members are trying to flee. The parents or foster parents are trying to make a better life for their children here in the United States. But teachers may be able to find culturally sensitive ways to remind them and their children of some of the positive aspects of the country they left behind. If the parent is not available then it may be the responsibility of the other elders in the home to provide the history.

Since many of the students in the ESOL classroom are living in the United States under the previously mentioned circumstances, teachers need to find a way for students to open up, and ultimately use whatever opportunities they have to understand that where they came from might have been scary, but it is full of tradition. The students should be encouraged to ask questions about their history, not hide it away.

Objectives

In this unit we will study oral history in West Africa focusing on storytelling from Liberia. Beginning with the wordsmiths, also known as griots, the students will investigate the region of Liberia and West Africa using maps to identify the location of the African continent and the countries of Mali and Liberia in West Africa.

The students will also understand the importance of storytelling as a part of oral history and oral literary culture. This will in turn lead the students to the study of different folktales, folklore, legends and fairytales within West Africa. The students will read four stories from the West African region and compare them to each other to understand the importance of oral storytelling passed through the years.

For students to understand the importance of oral history they must be introduced to those Africans whose responsibility it was to pass on the history of their country; such as the griots (in the case of Mali or neighboring countries) or the village or family elders (in the case of Liberia and its neighbors).

By the end of the unit the students will choose a topic we have discussed in the classroom and interview a person in their home about the topic. This is done to understand the importance of oral history and folklore and to appreciate the opportunity to become closer with a member of their family. Interviewing is a more personal and private experience. Interviewing will be done with a tape recorder along with the prepared questions.

ESOL students tend to have a difficult time with reading and writing, and sometimes this is also the case with the elders who live in their household. By using their listening and speaking skills they will find success and gain confidence through this unit. Students will be able to expand their knowledge and develop social skills. The differences with oral histories are that as long as you are linguistically compatible, you can pass on the story.

Elizabeth Tonkin discusses the “pastness as oral ones, because orality is the basic human mode of communication, and although peoples all over the world now use literate means to represent pastness, and written records have existed for many hundreds of years, the business of relating past and present for social ends has for the most part been done orally; it still is so.”^{xxvii}

Strategies

When ESOL students arrive to the School District of Philadelphia, they are given a test to determine their level of proficiency. Depending on how they score they are placed in the corresponding level of their ESOL classroom. These lessons are guidelines and can be made easier or harder depending on the ability of your students.

The strategy for students in first, second, and third grades is to provide them with a deeper appreciation of oral tradition as well as improve their oral skills. The students will gain a better background and appreciation of West African folklore by reading, discussing and investigating.

During this process students will discover what makes West Africa unique. They will be able to identify the continent of Africa, the direction of West Africa from North America, and the location of the country of Liberia within Africa. They will also read four different folktales from West Africa and discuss their similarities and differences. Finally they will use the information they have learned to create interview questions and interview a member of their family.

These ideas are important to understand the history of West Africa and the importance of oral history as a traditional method of passing information from generation to generation. There may also be an opportunity to have African storytellers come to the classroom, or for the students to take a class trip to listen to their stories. Following what is learned from this unit, and possibly interacting with another person who represents their homeland, the students will spark discussion within the family unit.

Classroom Activities

Lesson One: Introduction to Maps

Objectives: The students will look at a variety of maps and locate Africa and Liberia, by writing the correct location on the map.

Duration: 45 Minutes

Materials: Compass, Large map of world, map of Africa, map of Africa with Liberia.

Procedure:

- 1) The students will look at a large map of the world and talk about directions North, East, South and West while looking at a compass.
- 2) Direct student attention to the seven different continents on the map. Explain that a continent is a large area of land that holds many countries.
- 3) Start in North America and explain that this is where we live. Put your finger on Pennsylvania, and say, "this is the state of Pennsylvania". If your map allows put your finger on Philadelphia and say, "this is Philadelphia". Move your hand to the right and explain that you are going east.
- 4) When you get above Africa move your finger to the south and say, "now I am going south". When your finger reaches the word AFRICA on the map tell the class you have reached the continent of Africa.
- 5) Ask the students how they may get from the continent of North America to Africa. (They may tell you to go east and then south, or they may tell you a mode of transportation depending on their level.)
- 6) Indicate to the students the northern, eastern, southern, and western parts of Africa, and then talk about the different countries within Africa.

- 7) Put your finger in the middle of African and repeat the word WEST. Ask the students to look at their compass and ask them to tell you which way is WEST (right or left). Then move your hand to the western portion of Africa.
- 8) Confirm to the students that you move to the right to go WEST.
- 9) Tell the students they will be learning about a country in Western Africa called Liberia.
- 10) Hand out the first map (of the continent of Africa), have students write the word AFRICA on the outline of the continent.
- 11) Hand out the second map (of the continent of Africa with Liberia outlined), and have students write the word LIBERIA on the country.

Lesson Two: What is Oral Tradition?

Objectives: The students will listen to and discuss different fables they have read in the past and create a story map for the story Little Red Riding Hood.

Duration: 45 Minutes

Materials: Chalk, dry erase boards and markers, blackboard, chart paper.

Procedure:

- 1) Talk to the students about the stories of the Little Red Riding Hood. Ask them if they can retell this story without hearing it again (they will probably say yes).
- 2) Ask a student to begin telling the story to the class.
- 3) When the student is finished explain to the class that this is the same idea behind the word ORAL HISTORY. Write the word on the chalkboard.
- 4) Tell the students that they may have heard this story or other stories from their parents. These stories are passed on from generation to generation. Ask the student if their parents tell them stories at home.
- 5) Have students list the different parts of a story, Characters, Setting, Problem, and Solution. (You can use another example of this substituting the story and/or a series of events instead of problem).
- 6) Have the students think of, and name the characters in the story Little Red Riding Hood and write them on the board under the heading CHARACTERS. Do this for each part of the story web (Setting, Problem, Solution).
- 7) Tell the students that in Africa there are many stories that are told over and over again. These stories may be folktales, or actually based on history.
- 8) Ask the students what kind of story Little Red Riding Hood might be (fiction, fairytale, folktale).
- 9) Explain that when telling a story over and over again, a few changes may occur as different people tell it, and you may remember it differently than another person.

- 10) Read the story of Little Red Riding Hood and review the answers the student gave before the reading and after the reading. Ask the students if the story was how they remember it, or was it different.

Lesson 3: Reading Folktales

Objectives: Students will be introduced to four different stories from West Africa and complete a story map. (As they move along students will compare and contrast two Anansi stories).

Duration: One story per week, with one 45-minute activity for each story.

Materials: Four stories from West Africa (suggested stories follow see bibliography for additional stories)

Koi and the Kola Nuts by Verna Aardeme

Anansi the Spider: a tale by the Ashanti by Gerald McDermott

A Story A Story by Gail E. Haley

Anansi and the Magic Stick by Eric A. Kimmel

Procedure:

- 1) Tell the students that some African folktales involve animal characters. The West African stories usually include a spider and his character is a trickster.
- 2) Show a picture of a spider and write the word TRICKSTER on the board. Ask the students if they hear a word they recognize in the word TRICKSTER. (trick)
- 3) Ask the students what it means to play a trick on somebody. Write their suggestions on the board. Talk about whether it is nice or mean to play a trick on someone.
- 4) Return to the picture and ask the students if they think a real spider is going to be in the story, or if the spider is going to be illustrated (drawn).
- 5) Explain to the students that a folktale is a story that teaches a lesson. Ask the students if they know any stories that teach a lesson and write them on the board.
- 6) Remind students about ORAL HISTORY from the lesson before, and that many stories from Africa were told at night by the light of the moon or fire. Ask the students if they have ever heard a story this way.
- 7) Tell students that they are going to hear four stories from Africa, specifically from West Africa and Liberia.
- 8) Pick the first story and review with the students the steps to reading a new story.
- 9) Show the cover and have a discussion about what the story might be about.
- 10) Take a picture walk of the story discussing what they see in the story.
- 11) Read the story to the children and have a discussion about what the story was about.

- 12) Create a story map including Characters, Setting, Events, what problem was solved by the end of the story. (Eventually compare/contrast the stories with the students)

Have students write on sentence strips, or type, parts of the story on paper. Have students put them in order. Sequencing would indicate an understanding of the order of the story. The students can also draw pictures to go with each sentence, and then these different parts can be put together to make the students own depiction of the story. More advanced students can create their own folktale and put that into a book.

You could also use McCarthy, Tara (1992). *Multicultural Fables and Fairy Tales Stories and Activities to Promote Literacy and Cultural Awareness*. New York: Scholastic Professional Books Inc.

Lesson 4: Interviewing Questions

Objectives: Student will prepare question to ask a member of their family focusing on learning more about that person and where they came from.

Duration: Four- 45minute periods a week.

Materials: Chart paper, markers, ruled paper, pencil, tape recorder.

Procedure:

- 1) Talk to students about questions they might ask when they first meet someone. Write these questions on the chart paper.
- 2) Practice using these questions on a student in the classroom. Write their responses on the paper.
- 3) Have students practice these questions with a partner.
- 4) Tell students that they will be asking questions to a family member. This time the questions will include, "Where are you from?" "How many people lived there with you?" "When did you come to the United States?" "Tell me a story about where you lived".
- 5) Have students generate questions they may want to ask a member of their family.
- 6) Guide students in using the tape recorder.

Appendices/Standards

ESOL Standards

1.2 Reading Critically in All Content Areas

A. Discuss content of informational items in text.

B. Identify and use a variety of media to gain information (e.g., computer, tape recorder, television, videos, filmstrips, films).

C. Identify the conventions of a variety of genre.

1.3 Reading, Analyzing, and Interpreting Literature

A. Reading a variety of works of literature, and participate in guided discussion.

B. Describe the characters and setting indicating impact on the main idea of the story.

E. Identify dialogue and story action in plays and stories.

1.5 Quality of writing

A. Write with a selected focus.

B. Write content sentences using content appropriate for the topic.

1.6 Speaking and Listening

A. Listen to others when they are speaking and demonstrate an understanding of the message.

C. Use correct vocabulary and word usage when speaking.

D. Relate real experiences to a specific topic.

F. Use electronic media for learning purposes, such as generating a journal or story.

1.8 Research

C. Gather important information related to the main idea.

Social Studies Standards

Geography

7.1B Basic Geography Literacy

Describe and Locate Regions

7.4 The interactions between People and Places

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Dorson, Richard M. (1972). *African Folklore*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.
Dorson discusses the concepts in African folklore by exploring the folklorists and their tales. Examples of the oral tales and the author's interpretation are included.

- Greene, Sandra E. *Whispers and Silences: Explorations in African Oral History*.
- Hale, Thomas A. (1998). *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music*.
Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.
The Griots and Griottes in West Africa are known for their oral history through storytelling, music, and dance.
- Hoffman, Barbara G. (2001). *Griots at War: Conflict, Conciliation and Caste in Mande*.
Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.
Hoffman examines the social structure of the Mande Griots and specifically their actions and speech.
- Lindfors, Bernth. (1977). *Forms of Folklore in Africa*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
Essays collected to study African oral and written literatures. A Penn professor provides the introduction.
- Leach, Maria (1972). *Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend*. New York. Funk and Wagnalls Publishing Company Inc.
The dictionary provides information about folktales, and tricksters from different regions within Africa and outside.
- Martin, Phyllis and O'Meara, P. (1995). *Africa*. Third Edition. Indiana: Indiana University Press.
African history and prehistory, popular culture, art and economics with dozens of maps, photographs and drawings.
- McCarthy, Tara (1992). *Multicultural Fables and Fairy Tales Stories and Activities to Promote Literacy and Cultural Awareness*. New York: Scholastic Professional Books Inc.
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- Sitton, Thad, Mehaffy, G.L., Davis, O.L, Jr. (1983). *Oral History (A Guide for Teachers and Others)*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
A guide created to assist teachers who are interested in beginning oral history projects in their classroom. Includes guidelines for conducting interviews and recording and transcribing oral histories.

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- Tonkin, Elizabeth (1992). *Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
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- Vest, Kathleen (2007). *Using Primary Sources in the Classroom: Examining Our Past, Understanding Our Present, Considering Our Future*. Shell Education. CA.
The Veterans History Project started by the Library of Congress promotes the preservation of oral histories in the classroom. Provides an interviewing guide and model lessons and activities.
- Williams, Regenia, N. *Of Griots and Grace: The Art of Oral History and the History of African American Religion*.

Student Resources/Collection of African Stories

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This story is a tale from Liberia about a young man named Koi who collects goods on his way to explore the world. Along his journey he meets a snake, an army of ants, and a crocodile all of whom he helps. When Koi himself needs help to win the beautiful daughter of the Chief he finds his new friends are very helpful.
- Aardema, Verna (1975). *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears*. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers.
A West African Tale about a mosquito who tells a tall tale to an iguana. The iguana decides to ignore the mosquito by putting sticks in his ears. This begins a chain of events that affects the whole jungle. Teaching Mosquito to stop telling tall tales.
- Aardema, Verna (1960). *Tales from The Story Hat*. New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, Inc.
A collection of African folktales that include the tricky rabbit, the lion, the dog, and the spider.
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In this Ashanti tale from West Africa Anansi is a man, not a spider, but he is still trying to trick others. Anansi is looking for a fool as a partner, but his wife spoils his fun by telling his partner what he has said. The partner then tricks Anansi into doing all of the work.

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An African folktale of why the water could not visit the sun and the moon. Since the water's people were too numerous to fit into the house, the sun decided to make his house larger, but the water's people still could not fit thus forcing the sun and the moon into the sky.

Haley, Gail E. (1970). *A Story A Story*. New York: Atheneum Books.

An African tale retold by Haley about an elderly man called Ananse who wants to buy the Sky Gods stories. The story emphasizes the importance of sharing tales.

Kimmel, Eric A. (1992). *Anansi Goes Fishing*. New York: Holiday House.

Anansi asks Turtle to teach him how to catch fish, but Anansi thinks he can trick Turtle into doing all of the work. Turtle can not be fooled and in turn gets Anansi to do everything, but without the reward of eating the fish. Yet Anansi learns a lesson in the end; how to make a spider web.

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Children can explore the world through written information and games.

Accessed April 16, 2007. <http://www.worldalmanacforkids.com/>

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The following websites were accessed as of June 15, 2007.

Folktales to use in the classroom collected from Liberia including lessons, recipes, plays, and links. <http://www.phillipmartin.info/liberia/>

Bibliography and video resources on African Storytelling including folktales, storytellers and myths. <http://africa.wisc.edu/outreach/units/story-bib.html>

Over thirty West African folktales including how the spider tales came to be. <http://www.mainlesson.com/display.php?author=barker&book=folktales&story=spider>

This site provides an in depth list of books and resources for elementary students covering a wide variety of subjects associated with Africa. A brief annotation about each book is helpful in determining its usefulness.

<http://www.indiana.edu/~afrist/elementary.html>

A list of over forty summarized African and African American folktales including author or reteller, illustrator, and awards received. http://www.childrenslit.com/th_af_tales.html

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

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Lesson plans for teaching about African myth, food, everyday life, art, and music using the PBS Kids website. <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/africa/tools/culture/activities.html>

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Thesis submitted to Brigham Young University in 1999. The thesis was written by Joseph B. Hill called People of Word, Song, and Money: The Evolution of Senegalese Griots

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Endnotes

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