



AFRICAN VILLAGE FOLKTALES

Art Form: Theatre

Style: Traditional Folk

Culture: African

Technical Needs

- ❑ one microphone on stand
- ❑ six to seven chairs
- ❑ one electrical outlet

Meet the Artists

Each of the four performers in African Village Folktales has numerous stage, music, theater, film, and/or directing credits.

Joe Plummer received a Jeff Citation for his work in Lynda Barry's *The Good Times Are Killing Me* and a Black Theatre Alliance Award for co-writing the play *Get Ready*.

Wanda Getsug has taught free acting, movement, and voice classes in Chicago and has appeared at Pegasus' Young Playwrights Festival and the Zebra Crossing Outreach Program.

Eva D, a native Chicagoan, is a singer and actress. Credits include *Moms Mabley* and *The Other Cinderella*.

Gregory Parker has performed in children's theatre touring productions for thirteen years and played Isaac in the Jeff-award winning play *The Good Times Are Killing Me* by Linda Barry.

About the Performance

In a jungle full of talking animals, the African Village Folktales come to life. Students will hear the African American stories of "The Lion and the Woman,"

“The Tug of War,” and “The Frog Who Wanted to Be a Singer.” The actors of HOT SILK PRODUCTIONS perform adaptations of these famous tales. Through storytelling, body movement, music, and dramatization, the small cast of actors portray various animals that teach us about human nature and the African experience.

Contextual Information

Folktales are stories, legends, myths, and riddles that represent a people’s cultural history and values. It is an oral tradition that has entertained adults and children alike for centuries. Using everyday situations, folktales have been used to solve problems, express beliefs, and teach moral values.

Nowhere is the oral tradition of folktales more powerful or prevalent than in Africa. Here, folktales play an important role in daily life. In their roles as living historians, storytellers known as “griots” work to strengthen community ties. Their stories of genealogy, cultural roots, traditions, and social norms help to maintain harmony within the community as well as instill pride.

When Africans were uprooted from their villages and brought to America as slaves, folktales took on a different role. After the daily chores were done, slaves would exchange stories to entertain and educate the children. These folktales recreated traditional African trickster stories where small animals often outsmarted their larger and stronger enemies. Traditional African trickster characters such as Anansi the spider gave rise to American counterparts such as Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox. As slavery continued, folktales featuring trickster characters were expanded to include the adventures of fictional human characters (Uncle Remus) who devised ways to ridicule their slave masters or managed to escape slavery and avoid capture. Slavery gave way to a whole new generation of griots, who used their storytelling talents to relay messages of comfort, hope, survival, and family values. Their telling and retelling of folktales helped to preserve African roots and traditions while providing a brief escape from life as a slave.

As slavery ended, so did the folktale tradition—at least for a while. Newly freed blacks were busy trying to establish themselves in American society, and for a time the history they created was written and not spoken. It was not until the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s that the African American folktale tradition was revived. Prominent African American authors such as Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston reintroduced African Americans to the forgotten art of folktales. Once used to remind people of their African heritage, folktales now serve the purpose of preserving the cultural heritage of blacks living here in America, allowing them to reach across space and time to remember the past, understand the present, and look forward to the future.

Vocabulary for the performance:

Cumulative: folktales which use a lot of rhythm and repetition, with a specific phrase being repeated many times throughout the story

Folktales: stories, legends, myths, and riddles that represent a people's cultural history and values

Griots: storytellers who held important roles in the community within West African society

Magic folktales: fairy tales

Trickster: animal characters who possess human characteristics (talking, etc.) and are faced with the challenge of having to outwit someone who was supposedly bigger, stronger, or more powerful than them

Vocabulary for audience behavior:

Appreciation: understanding the benefits of what you are learning

Attention: directing your eyes and ears to the stage

Satisfaction: feeling good about learning something new

Concentration: directing your mind and thoughts to the stage