

About the Performance

Storyteller **Muriel Johnson** interweaves stories and songs to educate, inspire and uplift while entertaining her audience. In the program *Folktales from Around the World and Back*, Muriel will present a patchwork of multicultural and African Diasporic fables, folktales, and songs ranging from West African Anansi stories embedded with moral lessons to clever Native American trickster tales and everything in between. All stories offer interactive components with movement, singalongs, claps, or chants. Each performance is crafted to suit the audience age level and maturity. Tales embody themes of friendship, diversity, how things came to be, overcoming obstacles, and cultural norms of “others.”



About the Artist

Professional storyteller **Muriel Johnson** has performed at preschools and elementary schools, museums, colleges, churches, theaters, festivals and countless other venues across the U.S. and toured Colombia, Brazil, Peru and as well as Cape Town, South Africa and Ghana, West Africa. She has an animated and interactive storytelling style in which she incorporates songs, rhythmic chants, humor and rich character voices. Her masterful telling has captivated audiences around the world. With over 30 years of experience as an early childhood educator, Muriel enjoys teaching about the role storytelling plays in early literacy and language development.

Program Learning Goals

1. To foster an appreciation for literature, stories, and storytelling.
2. To increase students' analytical and critical thinking skills.
3. To build students' confidence and comfort speaking publicly and sharing their own stories.

Essential Questions

1. What does a storyteller do to make you interested in listening to a story?
2. How does storytelling connect to your emotions?
3. How can we use our distinct voices to tell stories?

Vocabulary

- **Storytelling:** the art of telling a story about real or imagined events using gestures and words to bring the events and characters of the story to life in the minds of those listening
- **Oral Story:** tales that are spoken out loud rather than written down
- **Folktales:** stories that originated by being passed down orally (though some are recorded in written form today), often contain a moral or lesson, and are closely related to other storytelling traditions including fables, myths, and fairy tales
- **Narrator:** the person or character telling the story
- **Characters:** the people, animals or creatures in a story who think, feel or act
- **Setting:** where and when the story happens, such as a beach in the summer, a forest at night or a big house in the cold winter
- **Problem:** a conflict or challenge that the character needs to change, fix or figure out
- **Events:** action parts of story, big moments
- **Solution:** how the problem is resolved, typically the ending of a tale
- **Diaspora:** a community of people who share a culture and traditional homeland but live in a different place either by choice or by force

Key Facts and Context for Students

A World of Storytellers

Storytellers have existed in every country, culture and group of people for centuries. Before there was written language people told stories. In many parts of West Africa, a storyteller is referred to as a **griot** (*gree-ot*). Griots are revered figures who are also historians, poets, musicians, and diplomats. The position of griot is hereditary and passed down through generations. In Ireland, storytellers are called **seanchaí** (*shan-a-kee*), in Ancient Greek storytellers were called **bards**, in France storytellers were called **troubadours**. In every Country throughout history, storytellers carried an important role in society.



*"I have been telling stories professionally for 30 years.
My love of stories came from my mother singing to me and telling me stories and from
enjoying being read to and learning to read as a child."*

- Muriel Johnson

Pre-Performance Discussion Questions

- Does anyone in your family tell you stories? What are those stories about?
- What makes a story interesting?
- Is reading a story the same as telling a story?

Pre-Performance Activity: Exploring Oral Stories

Learning Goals:

- To identify the elements that make up a story.
- To demonstrate the evolution of oral storytelling.

Directions:

1. Discuss storytelling and oral traditions with students. How is storytelling already a part of their lives? What information gets passed down through generations in their families?
2. Share this historical anecdote about oral storytelling:
 - *Before there was written language, all cultures of people shared stories to teach culture, morals, life lessons, and history. In the oral tradition, stories and news were passed down and carried from town to town by travelers and storytellers of a particular culture.*
3. Review the elements of a story: characters, setting, beginning, middle, a problem or conflict that needs to be solved, and a resolution or ending of the story. See if students can identify these elements in a familiar story. *Optional extension: read a folktale from any culture and analyze the elements with the class.*
4. Play "Telephone" with the class to illustrate the way stories are told, changed, adapted, and passed on to the next generation:
 - Gather students in a circle. Whisper a sentence into the ear of one person. For example: *"There was a tall man wearing a red hat who was looking for a dragon."*
 - Ask that student to whisper the same sentence to the next person, and continue around the circle. Each person has only two chances to hear what is being said. If they can not understand the first time they must say, "Operator." If they can't understand it the second time, they must whisper to the next person what they think they heard or make it up.
 - The last person in the circle must say what they heard out loud.
5. Discuss how this game demonstrates how a story might change from person to person, and that each person may interpret what they hear differently. What did students notice when playing this game? How do oral stories evolve over time?



Post-Performance Discussion Questions

- What was your favorite part of the storytelling performance? Why?
- What was the main problem or conflict in the story and how was it solved?
- What did you notice in the way the storyteller used their voice, their body and facial expressions when telling the stories?

Post-Performance Activity: Telling Original Stories

Learning Goals:

- To write an original tale that follows the elements of a story.
- To perform a story using voices, body movements, and facial expressions to convey characters and plot points.

Materials:

“Story Map” worksheet (see page 5)



Directions:

1. Discuss Muriel Johnson's performance. Encourage students to share their thoughts, ask questions, and express their opinions in regards to the storytelling program.
2. Review the elements of a story: characters, setting, beginning, middle, a problem or conflict that needs to be solved, and a resolution or ending of the story. See if students can identify these elements from a story in Muriel's performance. *Optional extension: have students tell, write, or draw either a sequel to the story or a different ending, or write/illustrate a reflection on how they felt while listening and watching the storyteller.*
3. Using the “Story Map” worksheet, have students create their own story either alone or in small groups. *Optional adaptation: if students are not reading and writing yet, their stories can be recorded, written down and made into a classroom book.*
4. In small groups, have students pick one of their original stories (or a short folktale or story from the performance) to act out. Encourage them to use character voices, body language and facial expressions to make their tales more compelling.
5. Perform the stories for the class. Encourage positive, supportive audience behavior including listening and applauding.
6. Discuss the stories and performances. How is it different to tell a story orally versus writing it down? What were the most effective ways to convey characters and plot points? What was similar and different to each storytelling performance?

Name: _____

Story Title: _____

STORY MAP

Directions: Draw and/or describe the elements of the story in each box.

Setting:

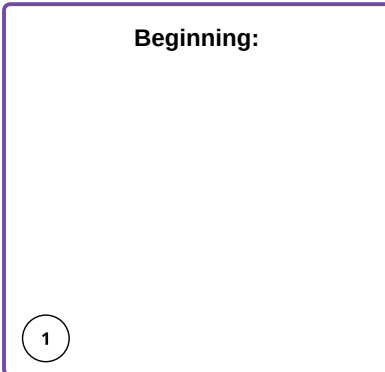


Main Characters:



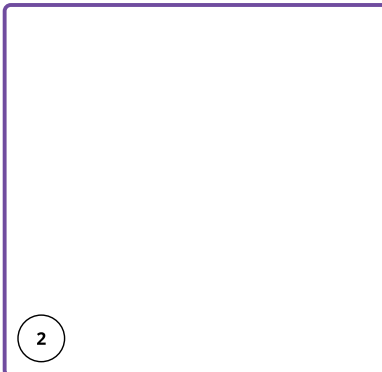
Plot:

Beginning:

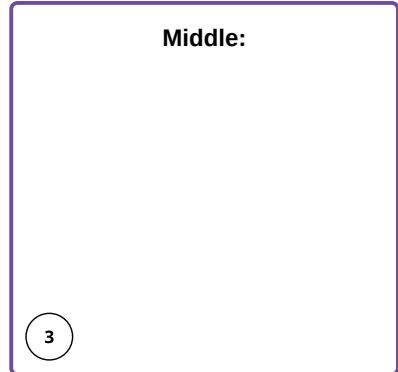


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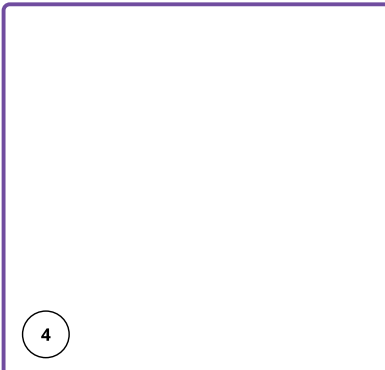


Middle:



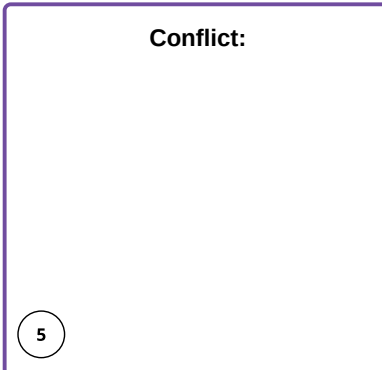
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Conflict:

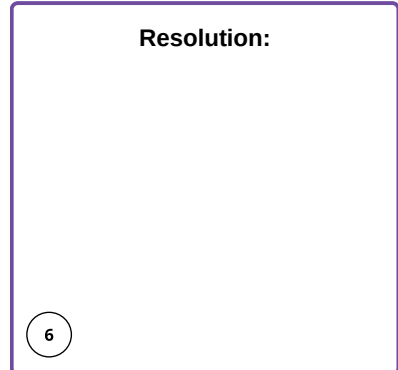


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Resolution:



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Further Resources

- [Muriel Johnson Artist Website](#)
- **By Muriel Johnson:**
 - [We Sing Like This](#) (book of Cuban folktales)
 - [I Can See With My Ears](#) (storytelling CD)
 - **Storytelling videos:**
 - [“Storyteller Muriel Johnson”](#)
 - [“Little Daughter and the Wolf”](#)
 - [“How Goat Got Out of Trouble”](#)
- **Books for Teachers:**
 - Hamilton, Martha and Mitch Weiss: *Children Tell Stories: Teaching and Using Storytelling in the Classroom*, Richard C. Owen Publishers (2005)
 - MacDonald, Margaret Read: *Storyteller's Sampler: Tales from Tellers around the World*, Libraries Unlimited (2015)
 - Norfolk, Shelly, Jane Stenson and Diane Williams: *The Storytelling Classroom: Applications Across the Curriculum*, Libraries Unlimited (2006)
- **Books for Students:**
 - DeSpain, Pleasant: *Tales of Tricksters*, August House (2006)
 - Harris, Joel Chandler: *The Classic Tales of Brer Rabbit*, Running Press Kids (2008)
 - Sowah, Adolika Nenah: *Anansi Stories: Six Exciting Escapades of Anansi*, E-Playground (2023)

Curricular Connections

Arts Standards: Theatre

Creating

- Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work. (T.Cr.01)
- Organize and develop artistic ideas and work. (T.Cr.02)

Performing

- Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work. (T.P.06)

Responding

- Perceive and analyze artistic work. (T.R.07)
- Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work. (T.R.08)
- Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. (T.R.09)

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Curricular Connections, continued

Arts Standards: Theatre, continued

Connecting

- Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art. (T.Co.10)
- Relate artistic ideas and works to societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding. (T.Co.11)

English Language Arts and Literacy Anchor Standards

Reading

- Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. (R.PK-12.2)
- Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. (R.PK-12.4)

Writing

- Write narratives to develop experiences or events using effective literary techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured sequences. (W.PK-12.3)

Speaking and Listening

- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. (SL.PK-12.2)
- Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric. (SL.PK-12.3)

Language

- Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening. (L.PK-12.3)
- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings. (L.PK-12.5)

History and Social Science

PreK

- Topic 1: Civics: fairness, friendship, responsibility, and respect (HSS.Pre-K.T1)
- Topic 2: Geography: maps and places (HSS.Pre-K.T2)
- Topic 3: History: personal experiences and memories (HSS.Pre-K.T3)

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Curricular Connections, continued

History and Social Science, continued

K

- Topic 1: Civics: classroom citizenship (HSS.K.T1)
- Topic 2: Geography: connections among places (HSS.K.T2)
- Topic 3: History: shared traditions (HSS.K.T3)

Grade 1

- Topic 1: Civics: communities, elections, and leadership (HSS.1.T1)
- Topic 2: Geography: places to explore (HSS.1.T2)
- Topic 3: History: unity and diversity in the United States (HSS.1.T3)

Grade 2

- Topic 2: Geography and its effects on people (HSS.2.T2)
- Topic 3: History: migrations and cultures (HSS.2.T3)

Grade 3

- Topic 5: The Puritans, the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Native Peoples, and Africans (HSS.3.T5)

Grade 4

- Topic 4: The expansion of the United States over time and its regions today (HSS.4.T4)

Grade 5

- Topic 5: Slavery, the legacy of the Civil War, and the struggle for civil rights for all (HSS.5.T5)

Grade 6

- Topic 1: Studying complex societies, past and present (HSS.6.T1)

