

Musical Activities with *The Talking Baobab Tree*

Lesson plan written by Leslie Roberts

Overview

In this lesson, students will listen to a West African folktale from Senegal and will collaborate as a whole class to arrange a musical performance to go with the story. Students will be able to lead a discussion on similarities and differences between these stories and stories/fables they already know as well as discuss the potential moral lessons presented in the tale.

Grades 3rd-5th grade

Intended Content Area General Music

STEM & Language Arts Connections

Reading of folktales

Introduction to Wolof language with simple words

African proverbs

Essential Questions

How do the other arts, other disciplines, contexts, and daily life inform creating, performing, and responding to music?

Standard Alignment with NC Standards

(while the standards listed below are for grade 3, you may adapt as needed for grades 4 and 5)

Performance Based Objective-Students will be able to create and perform a soundscape using classroom instruments to accompany a folk tale from Senegal.

MU:Cn11.0.3a

Demonstrate understanding of relationships between music and the other arts, other disciplines, varied contexts, and daily life.

MU:Cr2.1.3a

Demonstrate selected musical ideas for a simple improvisation or composition to express intent, and describe connection to a specific purpose and context.

MU:Pr5.1.4a

Apply teacher-provided and collaboratively developed criteria and feedback to evaluate accuracy and expressiveness of ensemble and personal performances.

MU:Pr5.1.3b

Rehearse to refine technical accuracy, expressive qualities, and identified performance challenges.

MU:Cr3.2.3a

Present the final version of personal created music to others, and describe connection to expressive intent.

Materials

1. [Book](#): The Talking Baobab by Nelda LaTeef
2. Classroom Instruments
3. [Google Slides Presentation](#)
4. Optional Props: (puppets, bunny ears, tree branches, costume jewelry, etc.)
5. [Chrome Music Lab Demo](#)

Duration

1-2 days (50 minute lesson each)

Procedures

- Using the corresponding Google Slides, remind students of previous lessons (slides 1-5)
- Teacher reads the [book](#) with students
 - Here is a [video](#) of the author/illustrator read aloud
- Teacher prompts students to identify the characters
 - Discuss the fact that Hare and Hyena are common characters in West African folklore. Some suggested talking points:
 - Hare and Hyena a popular characters in many folk tales from Africa
 - Trickster tales are often about animals and are used as entertainment and to teach a lesson
 - Many times, these tales teach humans about survival in the world and about the ways of life (they may teach a warning or the importance of being clever)
- Note the Wolof words and practice them with students (slide 7)
 - Oubi (open)
 - Jerry-jef (thank you) ***the spelling Jërējëf in the book is done phonetically for English speakers but is spelled differently in Wolof**
- Teacher asks students what they think the moral of the story is? Why do they think Johari drew a picture of an egg in the sand?
- Teacher leads a discussion on what a proverb is and how different cultures use them. Some suggested talking points:
 - Proverbs are short sayings that provide advice or a warning
 - Proverbs are usually accepted as truth by group of people
 - Proverbs can be found in all cultures

- Proverbs may come from someone else’s experiences
 - What are some proverbs that you know?
- Post a list of the proverbs and sayings referenced in the book and discuss their meaning (slides 8-17)
- The teacher will divide the class into groups (depending on class size and the equipment available at the school) to practice for a second reading of the story.
 - groups: accompanying instrumentalists, sound effects players, and actors
- The teacher will rehearse the suggested cue words for the sound effects with those students
- The teacher will rehearse the layered ostinati patterns with the students in the accompaniment group
- Students in the acting group will decide on movements or props to use that match the characters they are playing: Johari the rabbit, the Hyena, and the tree
- Read the book a second time as a class performance
 - Perform sound effects and accompaniment with classroom instruments at the suggested cues during the second reading of the book
 - Add movement and acting with props during the second reading of the book
 - actors interpret their own movement and choose props that are appropriate for their part of the story’s retelling

Sound Effects

****To be used sparingly at various times in the book**

Instruments	Cue in the story
Chime tree	every time you hear the word “tree” **Note: this appears rather frequently in the book and may be a simple way to engage a student that needs a little extra attention
Sand blocks	sand or sand dune
Xylophone glissando down, cymbal crash, or slide whistle	when Johari falls
Xylophone glissando up, slide whistle, or vibraslap	when Johari jumps

Shakers	When the branches of the tree shake
Triangles, finger cymbals, or glockenspiels	When the jewels and riches found in the tree are mentioned (gold, silver, amber, jade, rubies, pearls, diamonds, emeralds, sapphires, and amethysts)
Ratchet	Sound of the tree opening
Whip	Sound of the tree closing
Singing voice	Sing the words “Oubi” (“mi- sol” solfege pitches) and sing the words “Jerry-jef” (“mi re do” solfege pitches) when they appear in the book
Students mimic the hyena’s laugh	Ghoulisn laughter: “hah hah... hee hee hee... hah hah hahhh!”
Xylophone suspenseful tremolo	When the hyena threatens that rabbit: “If you don’t tell me where that necklace came from, you will never see daylight again!”

Story Accompaniment

****Layer ostinati sounds at specific parts of the story.**

See link for Chrome Music Lab demo of accompaniment:

<https://musiclab.chromeexperiments.com/Song-Maker/song/6430362112884736>

1. Use the bass xylophones to keep a quarter note steady beat pattern on letters “F, A, G, low C” as accompaniment throughout the story
2. Begin layering in the first ostinati pattern when the tree says “I am the baobab” on page 6:
 - “I am the baobab (ti-tika ti-ti shh shh), largest tree in Africa” (tika-tika ti-ti shh shh) - transfer this rhythm to drums. Be sure that students put an emphasis on the down beat using the bass of the drum for the words “I” and “largest” while playing the tones of the drum on the other words of the ostinato pattern

- Teacher may choose to have a small group of students play shakers on the quarter rests of this ostinati pattern
- 3. Begin layering in the second ostinati pattern when the words “tree of life” first appear in the story on page 7
 - Perform the second ostinati rhythm of “tree of life” (ta shh shh ti-ti) on soprano and alto xylophones (pitches- F&A and C&E) to be played over the bass part.
- 4. All accompaniment pauses when the Hyena appears on page 11 and starts back up again when the Hyena meets the baobab tree on page 15
- 5. Fade the musical accompaniment out to end the piece after the last page of the book.

Optional Extension Ideas

- Follow up discussion on the following Wolof proverbs that speak on the importance of teamwork and appreciating your craft:
 - **benn loxo du tàccu** – One hand cannot clap.
 - **kuy xalam di ca jaayu** – The one who plays the guitar should be the first to enjoy it.
 - **ñit ni lay garabam**- people are medicine for people
- Allow students to interpret the meaning of these proverbs
 - An additional resource for African proverbs is the book: [African Proverbs for All Ages](#)