

Music, Folktales, and Griots
Lesson plan by Kim Freeman and Diana Tursi

Overview Griots pass down the stories of West African culture through song and storytelling. In these lessons, students will learn about Griots' traditional storytelling and about the stories of Anansi, the trickster spider from West Africa. Students will perform Readers Theater adaptations of Anansi stories in both whole and small-group settings.

Grades 2-5

Suggested time 2-3, 45-minute sessions

Suggested Subjects English Language Arts/Social Studies

Essential Questions

- What do stories tell us about a culture?
- How are stories passed along?
- Why do stories matter?

Alignment with NC Standards

while the standards listed below are for grade 2, they can be altered as needed for grades 3-5

Music: Contextual Relevancy

- 2.CR.1.1 Exemplify music representing the heritage, customs, and traditions of various cultures.
- 2.CR.1.2 Understand the relationships between music and concepts from other areas.

Theater Arts: Communication

- 2.C.2.1 Use improvisation to communicate problems and resolutions.
- 2.C.2.2 Interpret stories from previously-read texts by acting them out.

ELA Reading: Key Ideas and Evidence

RL.2.2 Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral.

ELA Reading: Craft and Structure

RL.2.4 Describe how words and phrases supply rhythm and meaning in a story, poem, or song.

ELA Reading: Fluency

- RF.2.5 Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.
 - a. Read on-level text with purpose and understanding.
 - b. Read on-level text orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression on successive readings.
 - c. Use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary.

Materials

- [Google Slides](#) to display during the lesson
- Copies of [Anansi thinking web](#) for each student OR display the web to work on it as a group
- Printed copies of Readers Theater scripts
 - [Anansi the Spider](#)
 - [Anansi and the Stories](#)
 - [Anansi and the Yam Hill](#)
 - [Anansi's Feast](#)
 - [Anansi's Pot of Wisdom](#)
- Anansi books from the school library, such as
 - Anansi the Spider* by Gerald McDermott
 - Anansi the Trickster* Series by Eric A. Kimmel and Janet Stevens
 - Anansi Does the Impossible* by Verna Aardema

Lesson 1: Folktales and Griots

Note: This lesson naturally follows the [previous unit](#) on griots, though it can easily stand alone if necessary.

Procedures

1. Introduce the lesson by displaying the covers of the Anansi book(s). Ask students if they have ever heard stories about the trickster spider. Allow students to share their previous knowledge.
2. Tell them that today they will be learning about the West African people who first told stories like Anansi, then passed them along for others to enjoy. These people are called griots.
3. Display slide 2 and pass out Anansi thinking web. Read aloud the directions written at the top of the page: on each of Anansi's legs, write 1 fact you learn about griots and folktales like the Anansi stories. **note: you may also choose to simply complete a large group thinking web with younger students**
4. Display slide 3 and discuss the origins of Anansi stories. Work together to fill out some points on the thinking web.
5. Display slide 4 and talk about the differences between myths, legends, and folktales:
 - a. Myths are about supernatural beings like gods and goddesses
 - b. Legends are historical stories (i.e. based in real history)
 - c. Folktales originate in oral history-- people pass the stories down through word of mouth
6. Play the video on slide 4.
7. Finish filling out the thinking web together, or allow time for students to fill out the web.
8. Tell students that they are going to become storytellers, telling the story of Anansi the spider

9. Pass out copies of [Anansi the Spider](#) (pages 7-10) and assign the following parts (14 total):
 - a. Narrator 1
 - b. Narrator 2
 - c. Narrator 3
 - d. Narrator 4
 - e. Anansi
 - f. See Trouble
 - g. Road Builder
 - h. Fish
 - i. River Drinker
 - j. Game Skinner
 - k. Falcon
 - l. Stone Thrower
 - m. Cushion
 - n. Nyame
10. Ensure students that they will all get a turn to read and perform a part, even if they didn't get to today.
11. Perform the Readers Theater, helping students read their lines as needed.

Lessons 2-3

Take as much time as is needed for classroom context/grade level

Procedures

Over the next lessons, students will work in small groups to practice and eventually perform their own Anansi stories. For younger age groups, this practice time may work best in reading groups with an instructor present. For older grades, students may work independently in small groups. Once the groups have prepared, allow them to perform for the group.

[Anansi and the Stories](#) -- 4-6 readers

[Anansi's Feast](#) -- 4 readers

[Anansi's Pot of Wisdom](#) -- 3 readers

[Anansi and the Yam Hill](#) -- 10 readers

Optional Extensions

- Borrow or create musical instruments to add music to the skits. *Note: students may like to use their rubber band harps from the [previous unit](#).*
- Create costumes, sets, and props and put on a play for the school.