

Level

Grades two and three students. Activity would require 3-4 30 minute classes.

Objective

- To enhance the students' understanding of the African culture by listening to an African folktale and learning an African song.
- To explore the different aspects of the story using music, mirroring and creative movement techniques and to use these to enhance the retelling of the story.
- To perform the student's version of the story for students in a younger grade (optional).

Rationale

Stories from different cultures tell much about the identity of that culture. By using these stories, we can increase our students' knowledge of customs and traditions of people who come from a different cultural background. Adding music, dance and drama brings the story to life especially for the musical and kinesthetic learner.

Materials

- "Ananse's Dance" story from "Beyond the Beanstalk" by Lynn Rubright.
- CD of "Spider Song" from Denise Gagne's "Musicplay 3 p.70".
- Hand drums or African drums.
- Strips of black crepe paper.

Method:

- Brainstorm about Africa and Ghana.
- Locate Africa on a map and give some of the origin of the Ananse stories.
- Tell the story of "Ananse's Dance" and discuss the story with the class.
- Learn "Spider Song" from "Musicplay 3". This song originated in Ghana. Listen to the song on the CD and then teach it to the students by rote.
- Learn a simple drum accompaniment on the African drums.

- Add the drum accompaniment to “Spider Song”.
- With strips of black crepe paper, the students can create spider dances to “Spider Song”. There is a place in the story where all the neighbors join Ananse and his mother in-law in their dance.
- Students will work with a partner, and take turns being leaders for mirroring activities acting first as Ananse, and then the mother in-law.
- Retell the story with students acting out the parts of Ananse, Ananse’s wife, Ananse’s mother in-law and the neighbors. Sing “Spider Song” at the beginning, the end, and in the middle of the story where the neighbors dance their spider dance with Ananse and his mother in-law. Some students can play the drum accompaniment. All the students should be involved in the retelling. It is important that all students have a chance to try as many parts as possible during the process.

References

Gagne, D. *Musicplay Series Grade 3*. Red Deer, Alberta: Theme and Variations

Rubright, L. (1996) *Beyond the Beanstalk: Interdisciplinary Learning through Storytelling*.
Portsmouth, NH.: Heinemann

Evaluation:

Students always enjoy stories and were enthralled with the story of Ananse. When they heard that there were other “Ananse” stories in the school library, many were eager to sign them out.

At first students struggled with singing “Spider Song” due to the language and a different musical style. The CD was very helpful in giving the students support as they learned the song. The words of the song are very repetitive so the students soon became very confident and enjoyed the song. Two girls in the divisional choir asked if they could share the song with their choir instructor. The African drums added a definite African flavour and the class experimented with singing the song unaccompanied, adding the drums the second time through and accelerating the tempo as the Spider Dance got more intense.

With a very simple prop of strips of black crepe paper, the students had a wonderful time improvising “Spider Dances”. It is amazing to see how uninhibited and creative children can be. Pretending to be a character such as a spider helps to remove their inhibitions.

The mirroring activities gave the students the chance to explore the character of Ananse and his mother in-law without being put on the spot. It also gives the teacher the chance to observe which students would be comfortable in acting the part of Ananse, his wife and his mother in-law in the retelling of the story.

The retelling was a huge success. All students had a part that they enjoyed and were proud of. The students were eager to share the story with their teacher and with the grade 1 class who had heard a different “Ananse” story from their teacher. After watching and listening to the grade 3’s telling and acting out of “Ananse’s Dance”, the grade 1’s asked if they could act out that story when they were in grade 3. The power of storytelling was evident in the engagement of the students and their focus throughout these lessons on Ananse.

Follow –up Activities

- Read or tell other Ananse stories.
- Have students write their own “Ananse” story.
- Read or tell stories from other countries and cultures.
- Learn about spiders.
- Have students bring stories from home that are representative of their family’s culture.
- Sing and play “Obwisana” (Gagne p.70), an African game song from Ghana which involves passing a stone around the circle on the beat. Start with one stone and add more stones as students master the passing technique. If played as an elimination game, students can play an African drum when they go out.
- Study Africa and African culture as a social studies unit.
- Give students the opportunity to do either some spider art or a traditional African craft or art activity.
- Class discussions on similarities and differences in their culture and the African culture with an emphasis on celebrating the differences.