

# Children's Theatre Tour

## African Folktales Come to Life!

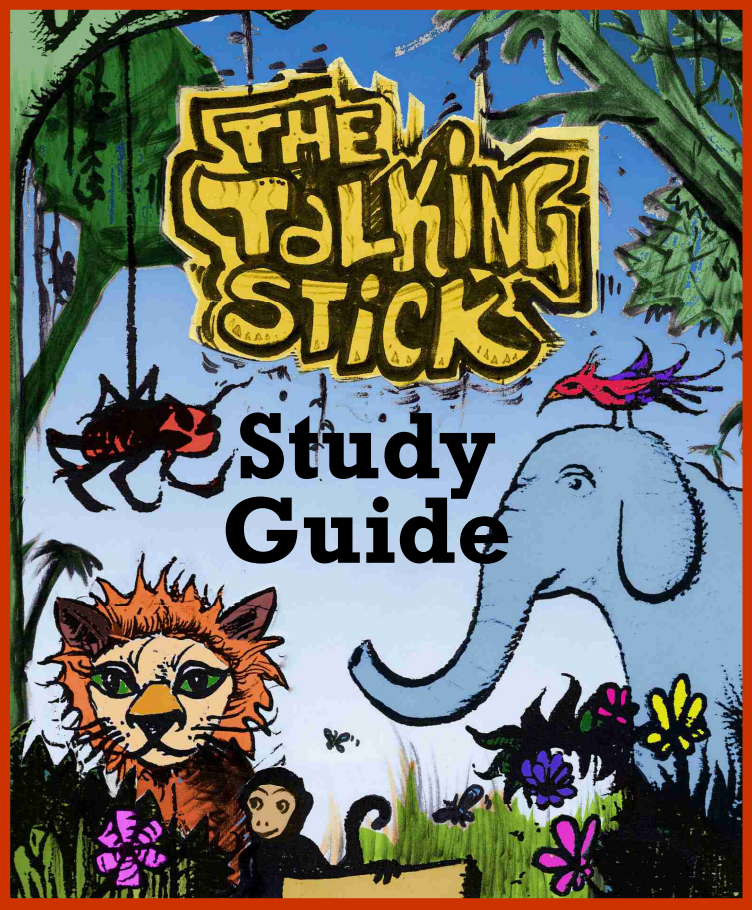
In the spirit of *The Lion King*, four traditional folktales from the continent of Africa are adapted for the stage in this original performance. Using large puppets, drumming and dance, seven dynamic actors bring the tales to life.

All four stories explore what it means to be a good friend through the themes of trust, humility, kindness, and honesty.

In *The Tale of Cat and Rat* the audience learns the animals were once very good friends. When a handsome peacock comes to live in the king's courtyard, Rat falls helplessly in love and resorts to deceiving Cat. Cat eventually finds out and that is why she is still chasing the Rat to this day.

In *The Fortunate Trap* the very popular Hippos become a bit "full of themselves" and tease their dinner guests with a riddle that no one can answer. It is only wise Tortoise who is able to solve the riddle and move the prideful Hippos into their muddy home.

The value of compassion is shared in *The King and the*



*Mice* in which a noble prisoner is kept alive by his tiny companions.

Finally, the very popular African trickster Anansi is featured in *Anansi and the Number 9*. Anansi has discovered a way to trick his

animal companions until he is caught by a little spy.

Each tale introduces the audience to the wisdom the stories hold while also providing exciting storytelling and puppetry.

## What does the play mean? The themes of The Talking Stick

Negotiating the ins and outs of friendship can be difficult for anyone. The qualities of honesty, compassion, trustworthiness, and humility are not traits that we develop naturally. It is in our best interest to often go against these higher goals and serve ourselves first. Experience tells us, however, that good friendships require that we master these qualities so that we may become people who not only can make friends, but keep them as well.

For children, friendship comes easily and is challenged when one's selfish needs come into

conflict with those of others. Empathy results as we are better able to reflect upon how our actions and choices affect others.

The four tales in this play highlight what happens when friends lie to each other, take advantage of admiration, show compassion, and remain honest and fair. It is our hope that with the aid of our animal friends, even the younger members of our audience will be able to reflect upon the stories in a way that teaches us all how to be a better friend now and in the future.

CSU Bakersfield

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## Characters in the Show

- Cat
- Rat
- Peacock
- Hippo
- Lion
- Tortoise
- Elephant
- Hare
- Mouse King
- King
- Nayame
- Anansi the Spider

# Africa Map and Activity Page

Below is a map of Africa with different animals and arrows pointing to where they live. Match up the animal with its name on the side of the page.

Elephant  
Hippo  
Monkey  
Rat  
Anansi the Spider  
Tortoise  
Lion  
Cat



The animals on the map are located in the regions that they live in Africa. See if you can use the compass to name the region (North, South, East, West) of where the animals live.

The animals in the picture participated in different stories. See if you can remember the characters in *The Cat and the Rat*, *The Fortunate Trap*, *The King and the Mice*, and *Anansi and the Number 9*.

The West coast of Africa is a jungle—who lives there?

The North East coast of Africa is the country of Egypt and the Nile River. Who lives in the river there?

In the middle of Africa and towards the east is the savanna, and in particular the Serengeti Plain. It is an open grassy plain with small rivers and watering holes but no major lakes. What animals live there?



# Origins of the Stories

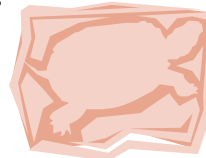
The four folktales found in this play were adapted from their original source materials found at [www.sacred-texts.com](http://www.sacred-texts.com). The site provides “public domain” resources for folklore from various cultures around the world. Many of the stories were compiled by Andrew Lang, the famous author of the various “Fairy Books.” Each book would have a different color and the collection inside contained various folktales and stories from different cultures. Many African folktales can be found in Andrew Lang’s *Crimson, Brown and Lilac “Fairy Books.”*

*The King and the Mice* was adapted from the Yoruban tale *The Olofin and the Mice* as translated told by M.I. Ogumefu. In *Yoruba Legends*, London, 1929. The Yoruban kingdom in West Africa was the homeland of many African

slaves and contributes many folk hero types that are found in traditional African American folklore.

The story of *The Fortunate Trap* is derived from the Southern Nigerian tale *The Affair of the Hippopotamus and the Tortoise* as told by Elphinstone Dayrell in his text *Folk Stories from Southern Nigeria*, 1910. In this collection can also be found *The Story of Cat and Rat* adapted from *Why the Cat Kills Rats*.

Anansi stories are a staple of African and Jamaican folklore. A s a n



**Tortoise as featured in *The Fortunate Trap***

infamous folk hero Anansi stories have been told for years and passed down through African American folk traditions. In the United States, however, Anansi is more popularly known as Briar Rabbit and is often best known for his encounters with Briar Fox and the Tar Baby. In this play *Anansi and the Number Nine* was adapted from *The Yam-hills* as told by George Parkes. The story appears in a collection of tales *Jamaica Anansi Stories* by Martha Warren Bechwith, published in 1924.

Each adapted story stays as true to the original telling as possible, while also being accessible to the youth audience by highlighting the positive attributes of the characters’ choices and the lessons we can learn from their mistakes.

The drums at the beginning of our show play Baga Giné, a song in the Susu language. The drums each have different names. The small drums played with the hands are DJEMBÉS (pronounced gym-bay.) The next size drum that is played with mallets is the KENKANI. (Kin-ki-nay) The largest and lowest sounding drums are the SAGBAN (Sang-bon) and the DUNUNBA. (Dun-un-ba) We had fun learning how to play our drums and keep in time together.

## The Cast of The Talking Stick

The actors of *The Talking Stick* are all current students at California State University Bakersfield. Many have an interest in becoming educators and have the desire to combine theater with classroom programs—integrating drama into other subjects. They spent ten weeks rehearsing the show.

Instruction in African drumming, dance and puppetry were all part of the rehearsal process. They hope you enjoy their show!

*Tortoise, Nayame*  
 .. .....Bonnie Rodriguez  
*Monkey*  
 .....Chelsea Gahagan  
*Anansi the Spider*  
 .....Carly Elder

*Mouse King, Cat, Lion*  
 .....Natalie Phillips  
*Mrs. Hippo, Elephant*  
 .....Toni Kerley  
*Rat*  
 ..... Priscilla Allen  
*King, Hippo*  
 .....Danvir Grewal

## What is a Talking Stick?

The term “talking stick” is often used when referring to the custom of the First Nations Indian tribes in the Eastern United States. During tribal meetings a stick would be used to aid in discussions. While one person was holding the stick, only that person could talk while all others would patiently wait until they finished and relinquished the stick to the

next speaker.

So why a storytelling “Talking Stick?” Well, in Africa many tribes have tall sticks used by storytellers as a means to remember the sequence of events in a story. The events are carved on a stick and serve as a great tool to pass on to the next generation of tale tellers. Combining this idea of the storytelling stick

with the concept of the “talking stick” and the respect paid to the person speaking, the two separate ideas have been combined into our “Talking Stick,” which is a series of stories about respect for one another.

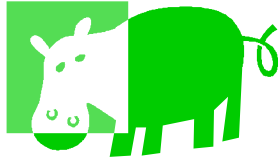


## Things to Talk About Before The Show

The play takes place in an African Village where people tell stories. What do you imagine that village looks like? What do people wear there? What might our set and costumes look like? (CA Theatre Arts 1)

In the play the actors also work as puppeteers? Do you remember seeing a puppet show? How big were the puppets? Did you see the puppeteer too? Do you remember the story the puppets helped tell?

(CA Theatre Arts 3.0)



The audience plays an important role in a play—without them the play would never happen. The actors have the job of telling the story of the play. What is the job of the audience? How do they help the actors do their job? How can the audience make it difficult for the actors to do their job?

(CA Theatre Arts 4.0)

Our play takes place in Africa, in a small village in the savanna. Many of the animals in our play live in that region. Look at the list of characters on the first page and discuss where each animal lives—in a river, or in a tree, or on the ground?

(CA Theatre Arts 5.0)



children focus on the characters in our play, or another story in the classroom. That way they can re-enact the tales with their own puppet characters.

(CA Theatre Arts 2.0)

### “Orphan Sock” Mouth Puppet Activity

Most of the puppets used in our play are called mouth puppets. They have this name because they have moving mouths that help people imagine that they are really speaking. Have students bring in “orphan” socks who have lost their mate. These socks can have a new life as mouth puppets.

Foamie sheets are great to have to decorate the socks since they are easy to cut, and also come in many pre-cut shapes. Google eyes are also a fun touch.

Before children begin building have them draw out their puppet design so they have an idea about the colors and shapes they want to use. You can have

### Things to talk about after the show

Of the four stories presented in the play, which one did you enjoy the most—why?

Theatre is exciting because we can experience different feelings during the play because of what happens to the

characters. How were you feeling when:

Hippo teased his guests?

Rat stole the food?

Anansi tricked his friends?

When the mice helped the king?

Each story is about how someone treated their friend. What did the stories tell you about how to treat your friends?

(CA Theatre Arts 4.0)

Our show opens with the song “Sansa Kroma.” This is a children’s song from Akan a region in Ghana. It accompanies a rock passing game and sounded like a great melody to begin our show with.

The first dance is SOWU (Sew-woo) from Ghana. It tells the “story of life.” Look for special movements that symbolize sowing seed, giving thanks, moving forward, picking and thanking our elders.

The second dance is called Gbedbe (BEGBE) from the Ivory Coast. It is a dance for vision and strength. Look for movements that have people going in different directions, either forward or backward.

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## Production Credits

Writer, Director  
Set Designer  
Puppet Design  
Costume Construction  
African Drumming Advisor  
Recorded Music

Graphic Design

Kamala Kruszka  
Danvir Grewal  
Omnipresent Puppet Theater  
Christine Blair  
Gandalf  
Tambores (Dom Moio and Joe Garcia)  
used by permission  
Alex Votichenko

## Sources and Other Great Resources

### Sources for the Play

#### Dances:

**African Healing Dance—VHS Tape, 1995 by Wyoma.**

**Activity Page—Frank Schaffer's School Days, Feb-March 1987. (page 55.)**

#### Sansa Korma Song:

**Adzenyah, Abraham K, Judith Cook Tucker, Dumisani Maraire. Let Your Voice Be Heard: Songs of Ghana and Zimbabwe. New York, World Music Press, 2000.**

### Other Books to Check Out!

**Aamiton, Virginia and Leo and Diane Dillon. The Girl Who Spun Gold. New York, Blue Sky Press, 2000.**

**Cowen-Fletcher, Jane. It Takes a Village. New York, Scholastic Inc., 1994.**

**Diakite, Baba Wague. The Hatseller and the Monkeys. Mexico, Scholastic Press, 1999.**

**Feelings, Muriel and Tom Feelings. Jambo Means Yellow: A Swahili Alphabet Book. New York, Pied Piper, 1974.**

**Kimmel, Eric. Anansi and the Moss Covered Rock. New York, Holiday House, 1990.**

**Maddern, Eric. The Fire Children: A West African Tale. New York, Deal, 1993.**

**Merrill, Yvonne. Hands-On Africa: Art Activities for All Ages. Salt Lake City, UT, Kits Publishing, 2000.**

**Mollel, Towalla M. The Flying Tortoise: A Igbo Tale Retold. New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1994.**

**Mollel, Tolowa M. The Orphan Boy. London, Oxford University Press, 1990.**

**Stepstor, John. Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters. New York, Scholastic Inc., 1987.**

