

Teachers' Notes

Ananse Stories: The Music and Stories of Ghana

The Performance

As Sam enters the room he is drumming the message “Mmofra Mo ntie, Mmofra Mo ntie” on the amazing talking drum. The message means “Attention children, Attention children”.

The Anansesem stories he tells will be selected according to the age range of the attending audience.

Upper Primary

Central themes

- Problem solving through co-operation and knowledge is powerful when shared.
- “How knowledge and wisdom came into the world”

Lower Primary

Central themes:

- People in communities have common needs and promises should be kept.
- “Why the crow chases the hen”, “Why the leopard has spots”, “How the snake got its shape”.

Sam encourages participation from the students by involving them in the singing of traditional folk songs from Ghana. These songs are selected to reinforce themes in the stories and while the stories are in English, the songs are in the traditional language of Akan.

The songs take the form of call and response, and are accompanied by the African talking drum. Sam calls the songs, and teaches the response to the children.

Background Information

Ghana is a West African country bordered by Togoland in the east, Ivory Coast in the west and Burkina Faso in the north. The English named Ghana “The Gold Coast” four hundred years ago and the Portuguese called it “el Mina” (“The Mine”) because gold was plentiful and the Europeans traded items for the precious metal.

Ashanti

The Ashanti lived deep in the rainforest area of Central Ghana and are one of the strongest and most traditional of the Akan people. This is due to their geographical location – the forest protects them from outside influence and modernisation, which brought change to other people living in more exposed and coastal areas.

Storytelling

In Ghana, there is a storytelling art called ‘Anansesem’ by Akan speaking people. The term translates to mean ‘Ananse stories’, and is used for both the body of stories told and for the storytelling performance itself. Although this storytelling is usually a domestic activity (Sam was taught by his grandfather) there are in existence some specialist groups who have given it a full theatrical expression with established conventions.

In Anansesem, the musical segments are called “Mboguo”. Many of the Mboguo are part and parcel of the stories themselves and are performed in context, led by the Storyteller. However, it is a convention for Mboguo that other people contribute to the performance.

A typical storytelling session opens with a series of rousing songs. Directly afterwards, the storyteller begins to perform and from this point on, the program is serialised, and the narrative is broken up at various moments with different songs or chants.

Anansesem is a community art. All the people present are performers in one way or another, either actively or

African (Ashanti) Costume

- Batakari (top dress): made out of hand woven “Kente” cloth.
- Juakoto (pants): made out of tie-dyed cotton.
- Talisman/Wallet: worn around the neck and made with leather from Tamale in Northern Ghana using designs from the Dagomba group.
- Talking Drum: drum for sending messages, playing different tones by tensing and releasing the skin.
- Krokoto: talking drumstick.

The main feature of Ashanti people’s dress is the Kente (a hand woven multicoloured cloth) worn as a wrap around the body and over one shoulder by the men, and as a body wrap folded above the breast by the women. Women sometimes wear a second Kente over the shoulder for warmth.

There are different types of Kente patterns – eg: a “gye nyame” pattern is worn by wealthy people; an “endinkra” pattern is worn by people mourning the death of a loved one, and an “adwine-asa” pattern (meaning “knowledge is lost” is commonly worn today. This pattern was designed by the older generation, who consider modernisation as a loss of tradition and knowledge.

Naming

In Akan culture, naming children involves a given first name (depending on the weekday when one is born) and an inherited second name (which often includes paternal and maternal names in one word). First names are as follows:

	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Monday	Kwadwo (pron. Kojo)	Adwowa (pron. Ajowa)
Tuesday	Kwabena	Aba
Wednesday	Kweku	Ekuwa
Thursday	Yaw	Yaa
Friday	Kofi	Efia
Saturday	Kwame	Amma
Sunday	Kwesi	Akosua

Before the performance

Prepare the children with the background information offered in these notes. Other questions, which could stimulate discussion or lead to class work, include:

1. Storytelling: what is your favourite story? Who tells it? Why is it told? When and where is it told?
2. Younger students could choose from the school resource centre or bring a favourite book from home to share with the class. (try to tell it, not to read it!)
3. Older students might research and debate the topic – “What is the difference between storytelling and reading or writing a story?”

Traditions and cultures

- What do you know about Africa?
- Collect magazine and newspaper articles / photographs to illustrate the wide variety of people and situations.
- Research an ancient culture and the modern political situation. Compare and contrast.

Young Australia Workshop

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