THE BULLY-FREE ZONE

A Storytelling Experience

STUDY GUIDE

Queen Nur

BACKGROUND ON STORYTELLING

Storytelling is older than all other creative arts. It is said to be older than history. Storytelling transcends time, continents, and civilizations. It originated on the African continent and spread throughout the world. Stories may differ from place to place. In some cultures such as in Ghana, the teller is expected to repeat a story as it has been told for generations. It is not unusual to find a storyteller being interrupted by a listener if the style or content of a traditional story has been altered by the teller. In other instances, stories often change to fit the time and context in which they are being told, but universally, storytelling has continued to fill the same basic social and individual needs.

THE BULLY-FREE ZONE

Folk tales, fables and hip-hop take center stage in Queen Nur's inspiring show about accepting each other's differences:

Stories are:

1. The way in which the history, traditions and cultural values are passed on from generation to generation.
2. The way in which the rules of the community are reinforced with children.
3. A way of explaining natural phenomena
4. A fundamental unit of knowledge.
5. The foundation of memory.
6. Essential to the way we make sense of our lives: the beginning, the middle and end of our personal and collective trajectories.

The early storyteller was established as the bringer of good news, the historian, the disperser of the culture, the upholder of religious belief systems and morals, and an entertainer. In many West African cultures there was the "resident storyteller" (griot, djali, or Jali) who was assigned to chiefs, royalty, and others with status in the community. His position was one of high honor, great respect, and power. The "travelling storyteller" went from village to village with tales, anecdotes, fables, accounts of natural disasters, births, deaths, successions, songs, and any event that affected the welfare of the people. In the mid-to-late 1800's, folklorists began to seek out and preserve traditional African tales in written form. Collections of narratives became an important part of the preservation of the oral tradition. Out of this work came many anthologies of African and African American

folktales by folklorists and researchers such as Roger Abrahams, Harold Courlander, B.A. Botkin and William Faulkner.

GETTING READY FOR THE STORYTELLER: Suggested Activities Before the Performance

Familiarize your children with African and African American folktales by:

- Reading aloud or having your children read several folktales (consult your school librarian for help, or refer to the sources in this guide)
- Choose an Anansi story, a tall tale, a dilemma tale (the resolution of a conflict is left for the listeners to discuss), a story that offers an explanation for natural phenomena such as why mosquitos buzz in people's ears. Do any of the stories have morals or lessons?

What are they?

- Try to find two versions of the same story. Have children make comparisons between the two.
- Encourage students to tell – not read – a story they are already familiar with. Discuss the differences between telling a story and reading that same story from a book.
- Have your students brainstorm what they think a storyteller might do to make a story interesting to the audience. Make a list on chart paper. Encourage them to watch and listen carefully during the performance to observe the storyteller's voice, facial expressions, and body movements. Are there instruments used? How are they used in telling the story?

Please note: It is important to refer to the African continent as just that – a continent. It is as diverse, if not more so, than the European continent. There are 52 separate countries and hundreds of ethnic groups, languages, cultural traditions and belief systems within each country's borders. Just as we make a point to clearly identify Pols, Czechs, Armenians, Scots, Celts, Welsh, Bosnians, Serbs, Croats, or the Hmong, we must also make a point to do the same when referring to inhabitants of the vast and ethnically diverse continent of Africa.

Familiarize your students with the names, locations, and diverse cultures of the African continent by:

- Identifying the ethnic group, culture, or country associated with the stories you use. Write and speak the name of the group or region of origin when referring to the story. Example: Anansi stories were created by the Ashanti people of what is now Ghana in the western part of the continent. Sungura the trickster rabbit comes from Kenya on the opposite side of the continent.

The land areas, peoples, and lifestyles are all different.

- Identifying on a map or globe – not just the African continent – but the country (and ethnic group or culture where possible) of the story's origin. Examples: The Ashanti of Ghana, the Yoruba of Nigeria, the Baganda of Uganda, the Shona of Zimbabwe.

- Selecting an ethnic group, country or region of the continent. Research and explore the cultural traditions, foods, clothing, family structures, and languages of that region.
- If you have access to a computer, search through an encyclopedia on CD-ROM (such as Grolier's or Encarta). Type in (or click-on) and African country and download or print out the information. What do you discover that you didn't know before? Did you discover information that is on your brainstormed list?

DURING THE PERFORMANCE

- Listen and observe the storyteller carefully. Participate when asked.
- Notice how the storyteller uses his or her voice? Take notice of any additional items that the teller uses to enhance the story.
- Visualize the setting of the characters of the story.
- Be aware of what parts of the stories make you laugh, feel empathy, excitement, sorrow, fear, or suspense. Did any of the situations in the story sound familiar to you? What were they?
- If the story has animal characters, pay attention to their behavior in the story. Do they take on human characteristics?
- Notice if a character – human or animal – learns a lesson in the story. Is there something in the story that the listener can learn from?

AFTER THE PERFORMANCE:

- Review the list that was brainstormed before the performance. Ask your students to see if there are any items on the list that the storyteller incorporated into her storytelling style. Ask them to recall anything the storyteller did that was not on the list.
- What specific things held their attention the most?
- Did any of the stories leave them with something to think about or discuss? What, if any, lessons were learned from the stories? Which stories? What were the lessons?
- If there were instruments, how were they used to enhance the story?
- Which of the stories did you most enjoy? Retell the story in your own way.
- Illustrate one of the stories.
- Research and select a different story for telling.
- Create your own story – one that teaches a lesson perhaps.

BULLYING STATISTICS:

Researchers from the National Center for School Engagement conducted a series of studies to explore the connections between bullying in schools, school attendance and engagement, and academic achievement. This bulletin provides an overview of the OJJDP-funded studies, a summary of the researchers' findings, and recommendations for policy and practice.

Following are some of the authors' key findings:

- Bullying is a complex social and emotional phenomenon that plays out differently on an individual level.
- Bullying does not directly cause truancy.
- School engagement protects victims from truancy and low academic achievement.
- When schools provide a safe learning environment in which adults model positive behavior, they can mitigate the negative effects of bullying.
- Any interventions to address bullying or victimization should be intentional, student-focused engagement strategies that fit the context of the school where they are used.

IDENTIFYING BULLYING

- Bullying is identified as any behavior that tries to hurt or break a person's self-worth.

TYPES OF BULLYING

- Bullying is an ongoing problem and while schools try to prevent it, it can be a difficult task as there are several different types of bullying.
    - Physical bullying
    - Verbal bullying
    - Emotional bullying
    - Exclusion
    - Cyber bullying

Each case of bullying should be addressed and not taken lightly. Schools should take steps to make students feel safe at all times. While it's almost impossible to eliminate bullying, a good bullying prevention program can go a long way to trying to achieve this goal.

Cyber bullying; Cyber bullying is recognized as spreading of rumors and/or using hurtful words through the use of some electronic devices. While adults have separated "cyber" bullying from face-to-face bullying, this is an increasing problem as adolescents see their online and offline identities as one.

How to respond to cyber bullying:

- Parents and children should define their rules as a family about what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behavior on a computer, cellphone, smartphone or any other wireless device.

- Parents should offer an open line of communication to their children so they feel comfortable coming to them to discuss any inappropriate images or messages that might be sent to them. Parents should remember to get all the facts before reacting.
- If the situation calls for school officials or law enforcement to get involved, parents should discuss this with their child and let them know what action they plan to take.

EXERCISES FOR SPEAKING GOOD OF OTHERS:

- Have students stand in a circle. Go around the circle and have students look to their right and say something positive about the person standing next to them. When the circle is completed, if there is time, have students repeat this action with the student on their left side.
- Have an open dialogue to discuss recognizing bullying. Ask the students for some situations that they might feel comfortable role-playing. Have the class watch the scene and come up with three possible, positive solutions. Then have the students act out the solutions. Discuss which solution the students thought were the most effective.
- Have students make a list of ten positive characteristics they see in themselves.
- Place an "anti-bullying" box in your classroom, like a suggestion box. Tell students they can write on a piece of paper when they witness or experience an instance of bullying. Read the papers on a daily basis and discuss them, trying to find positive solutions to what happened. Let the students know that their stories will be anonymous to encourage them not to be afraid to put their stories in the box.

TOLERANCE – CELEBRATING DIFFERENCES:

"The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members."
Coretta Scott King
"Memories of our lives, of our works, and our deeds will continue in others."
Rosa Parks

- Repeat the first exercise under 'speaking good of others' but have the students say something positive about the person standing next to them that is a different characteristic from them. For example, "You are really good in math. I admire that trait because math isn't as easy for me as some other subjects." Students will have the opportunity to see the positive traits others see in them while also understanding how it feels to build someone up through positive reinforcement.
- Have students bring in something they think represents their family background. It could be a family tree or crest, a photograph or a food dish. Have students share what they brought in with the class and discuss how it represents their family background. Encourage students to ask questions after each presentation.
- Have students research a culture they're interested in learning more about. Have them give a 3-5 minute report on what they learned using photographs, stories and maybe even music to tell demonstrate what they learned.

NO FIGHTING ZONE:

Queen Nur promotes a "Bully Free Zone" in her show as well as a "No fighting zone."

- After seeing the performance, talk to students about what they think a "no-fighting" zone is and how they can implement it in and outside of the classroom. Make a list of things they bring up and post it in school so if bad behavior begins, they can check the list and then make sure it stops. This way all of the students can take responsibility for their behavior as well as learning to stop bad behavior before it starts.

NO TEASING ZONE:

Queen Nur promotes a "Bully Free Zone" in her show as well as a "No teasing zone."

- After seeing the performance, talk to students about what they think a “no-teasing” zone is and how they can implement it in and outside of the classroom. Make a list of things they bring up and post it in school so if teasing begins, they can check the list and then make sure it stops.
- Teasing can often be misconstrued as funny and harmless if the person being teased doesn’t speak up. Ask students for examples of a time they felt teased and what they did about it. Discuss positive ways students can speak up or diffuse teasing before it escalates into something worse.

FRIENDSHIP DIALOGUE:

- Teaching students to recognize the power of words plays an important role in recognizing verbal bullying. Teach students to share “friendship dialogue” by speaking to each other in class as if they are all good friends.

KINDNESS:

- Ask students to keep a kindness journal and have them write down when they experience an act of kindness or do something kind for someone else. Have them write down how it makes them feel to spread kindness and joy and how it affects others around them as well.
- Hold a poster contest against bullying. Have the students put their names on the back and turn them in.

SUGGESTED READING:

Bullying: a resource guide for parents and teachers, Vivette O'Donnell, Attic Press

The Anti-bullying Handbook, Keith Sullivan, Oxford University Press

Bully Busting: how to help children deal with teasing and bullying, Evelyn Field, Finch

Breaking The Silence - A Guide To Helping Children With Complicated Grief, Linda Goldman

The Bully, The Bullied and the Bystander, Barbara Coloroso, Harper Collins

Encounters with Every-Day Angels, Kathy Noll