

# African-Americans

## Stories, Storytelling, and Story Quilts

Instructor: Berneitta Brown, M.Ed.  
School: Miles Elementary School  
Grade: 3 & 4

### Subject Area:

Reading

### Related Subject Areas:

Writing, Speaking & Listening

### Grade Level:

3 / 4

### Estimated Time Requirement:

5 days 40 minutes per day

### Lesson Objectives:

Students will:

- *Listen to stories written by African Americans*
- *Retell a story read to them*
- *Write their own story*
- *Make a storyboard quilt*
- *Participate in oral interviews*
- *Research African American roots in storytelling*
- *Create poetry or poems*
- *Invite group participation*
- *Create a class story quilt*

Standards:

**R2.1 Read Accurately.**

**R2.4 Read with comprehension.**

**R3.2 Listen to books being read aloud.**

**W2.4 Produce literary writing.**

**W2.5 Respond to literature.**

**S1.2 Participate in group activities**

**S1.3 Prepare and deliver individual presentations.**

**R3.2 Read and comprehend a variety of literary and nonfictions genres.**

**R3.3 Discuss reading to enrich comprehension.**

**R2.1 Comprehend nonfiction, fiction, poetry, and drama using interpretive, critical, and evaluative processes.**

## Introduction:

# African-Americans Stories, Storytelling & Story Board Quilts

Many tribes in Africa had no written language. All knowledge was passed down through the *gewel* which is the storyteller or historian. Griot is the name Europeans applied to the *gewel* (Branch). At the death or birth of the chief, the *gewel* recall all the history of the tribe's family tree or the chief lineage. This history could take days even weeks to recite. Likewise, when Africans were transferred to the shores of America, their history was in their heads. Storytelling was the only thing tangible the captive African could take along with him or her to America. Storytelling is a great African tradition being passed down for thousand of years, from generation to generation. The stories were original history of an oral family tree or tribe's tree that tells of wars, battles, bereavement and other ancestral rites that was passed down through the *gewel*. When these transplanted Africans came to America enslaved, the only "baggage" they had were their stories, and within their minds their ways of personal and social adornment, performing and celebration. "Like songs and dances, stories live in that part of black life informed by the flash of the spirit of a certain people specially armed with improvisatory drive and brilliance (Abrahams, page 5). Through the minds of the enslaved Africans who made the transatlantic voyage they kept what remembrance of Africa they could within their souls.

The memories of small slaves children were engaged as their elders held on to their rituals in religion in the slave quarters in the secrecy of the forest and back woods.

Through these occurrences, the African traditions were passed on from generation through generation as storytelling (Stuckey, page 73). The telling of tales was a way the enslaved African coped with his new confined condition. It was a primary means of pointing to a terribly complex reality and the lessons arrived at for dealing with it.

Morals, values, codes, messages of escape, songs, spirituals, all were transmitted through the story or a song. "A special freedom was afforded slave storytellers in the last half of the eighteenth century, when the number of first generation Africans was considerable in the north and the south because whites did not understand their native tongues (Stuckey, page 78). Stories and songs were transmitted through those who had experienced the Atlantic voyage and from there a legacy began.

How is a story told so that we listen and laugh to them? The storyteller - through openers such as "Once upon a time" as in western culture, or "This is what I went out to find out about and this is what I was able to return, in spite of everything to tell you, and if you don't believe me go look yourself" as in African and West Indies stories, - presents him or her self as a masterful communicator. (Abrahams, page 5) In essence, the majority of African -American stories- tricks, deception and cleverness are the norm. This deception was procured because of the harsh realities of slavery, as a means the African acquired to cope with his new founded subexistence and to retained his or her's sanity. Much in contrast with Western Society folklore, which stories end in living happy ever after (Pantheon, page 3) "The heroes of the Negro folklore stories are always a rascal- a deceiver. He is usually the weaker creature forced to win his way by his wits, and his deceit is, in a measure, justified but the Negro's imagination, coupled with his racial contempt for the truth, leads him to elaborate floridly, what ever plain tale is told

him, whatever incident falls under his observation” (page x, Gonzales) Tricks are play for the sheer enjoyment or joy of it in Afro American tales. Many tales have a main character that is considered a trickster, such as Brer Rabbit in the Uncle Remus Stories depicted in the American South, Amansi the spider in Western Indian and Africa, and in Haiti there’s scamp Ti Malise. As with the trickster in these stories, the stories all seem to be continued, so there is no sense of the end. In stories like Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty- who lives happily ever after -contrast to- African-American stories, the trickster goes from predicament to predicament. The trickster is exalted however wanton and unnecessary his deceit. (Page xi, Gonzales)

Harriet Powers was a person who kept the stories she heard as a child alive and vivid in her head. She was able to transmit these stories into what is considered stories quilt. “Each panel in Harriet Powers' quilts tells a story of its own and can be viewed and studied like a painting. And so although we have only two quilts, they are comprised of 26 panels in all, eleven for the first and fifteen for the second. Mrs. Powers' art is truly powerful and yet playful, warmly innocent and yet full of spiritual wisdom --her panel-stories are rightly credited as masterworks of American folk art”

<http://womensearlyart.net/powers/>.

A vast number of African-Americans are unaware of the contributions African Americans have made in American life. Stories written by African Americans would help broaden aspects of their culture which has been neglected by mainstream society. Introducing the African American child to literature rich in their culture would help developed self-esteem, hope and purpose in life. You can begin this unit by asking the students to tell some stories they have heard that

have been passed down in their families. If they don't have any stories to share, you the teacher should share your family stories to help get the students interest. The student will gathered information from interviews with family members, school mates, and elders in the community.

These stories can begin to interest the student early on to become journalist, poets, authors, editors, historians, writers, and of course storytellers.

## Keywords

Story  
Storytelling  
Brer rabbit  
Uncle Remus  
Trickster  
Clever  
Deception  
Quilt  
Story board  
Story writing  
Buddy reading  
Standard  
griot  
gewel

## Daily Lesson Plans

### Day One

#### **15 minutes**

Goal: The student will listen to an African American story read by the teacher or in a small group as either buddy reading, shared reading, or peer reading.

#### **10 minutes**

One student will read a story. The other student will retell the story.

#### **15 minutes**

The student will change the ending of the story or the characters, setting or plot. The student will rewrite the end of the story or any other part of the story he or she chooses to change.

#### **Alternative or Extension:**

**Buddy Reading-** Have an older student find a younger student to read to. After the older student has finished reading the story, have the student ask the younger student questions about the story? Questions that could be asked are who, what, when, where, and how types of questions. Have the student ask the younger student if he or she like listening to the story. Why or Why not? Ask if he or she enjoyed the end of the story. Why or why not? If not, how would you have like that story to end? Have the student rewrite the end of the story. The older student can write the words the younger student says. The older student can also come up with his or hers own questions to ask the younger student.

**Materials:** Books (A list of books are provided below) paper, pencil

### Day Two

#### **15 minutes**

**Goal:** The student will be paired up to interview a classmate.

#### **15 minutes**

The student will switch roles as interviewer and/or interviewee.

#### **10 Minutes**

The student will bring closure to the interview by taking their last notes, summarizing.

**Extension:** The student can create their own questions for the interview.

**Homework:** The student will interview a family member for a story.

**Materials:** Interviewing sheet, pencil

### Day Three

**25 Minutes**

**Goal:** The student will write a story to present to the class.

This story may be taken from the interview of family members or the student can write their own original story.

**10 Minutes**

The student will type their story on the word processor using the computer.

**5 Minutes**

**Closure:** Teacher will ask students to wrap up their lessons.

**Materials:** paper, pencil, computer

**Day Four**

**Goal:** The student will create either an illustration, collage, or cut shapes for a class storyboard quilt. The student should create more than one square to tell their story. No more than five are needed.

**Materials:** Construction paper cut 12x12 to paste storyboard shape on, different colored construction paper for students to cut different images to make shapes for their story board quilt, markers, pencils, glue, glitter

**Day Five—Culminating Activity**

**15 Minutes**

**Goal:** The student will paste their story board on butcher paper to generate one huge class story quilt.

**25 Minutes**

The student will present their section of the story quilt to the class orally.

**Materials:** Large butcher paper preferably 27x27. Have students paste their story board arranged in order of their story on the butcher paper to make a class story quilt. The students will tell the story of the quilt square applied to the class quilt orally to the class.

## Grading Rubric

### ***Excellent***

*The storyteller knows the story well and has obviously practiced telling the story several times. There is no need for notes and the speaker speaks with confidence.*

### ***Good***

*The storyteller knows the story pretty well and has practiced telling the story once or twice. May need notes once or twice, but the speaker is relatively confident.*

### ***Satisfactory***

*The storyteller knows some of the story, but did not appear to have practiced. May need notes 3-4 times, and the speaker appear ill-at-ease.*

### ***Needs Improvement***

*The storyteller could not tell the story without using notes.*

## Interviewing Questions

1. What is your name?
2. Who named you?
3. Were you named after someone in your family? Who was you named after?
4. Are there any stories in your family that someone tells frequently?
5. What is that story about?
6. What is your favorite family story or book story?
7. Tell me about it.

## List of African stories books

Appiah, Peggy, *Kyekyekulee! Grandmother's Tales*  
Asare, Meshack, *The Brassman's Secret*  
Bruce-Okine, Martha, *The Finders Go Out Again*  
Chocolate Newton, Deborah, *My First Kwanzaa Book*

*Daly, Niki, Fly, Eagle, Fly!*  
*Daly, Niki, Jamela's Dress*  
*Daly, Niki, Yebo, Jamela*  
*Hamilton, Virginia, The People Who Could Fly*  
*Hamilton, Virginia, Her Stories*  
*Hanson, de-Graft, J.O., Who Has Stolen the Sky*  
*Hanson, de-Graft, The Pot of Wisdom and Other Stories*  
*Hayfron-Benjamin, E. Why the White Ant is So Destructive*  
*Mankata, Ofori, M., Hohore The Magic Bowl*  
*Meshack, Asare, SoSu's Call*  
*Mensah, Isaac Dankyi, The Two hunter Friends*  
*Morrison, Toni, the Big Box*  
*Pong, Sarah F., Around the African Fire*  
*Pongo, Rose, The Greedy Boy*  
*Ward, Leila, I AM EYES*

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- Branch, Muriel M., *The Water Brought Us*, Sandlapper Publishing Co: South Carolina, 1995
- Copeland, Peter F., *The Story of the Underground Railroad*, Dover Publications, Inc: Mineola, New York, 2000
- Daise, Ronald, *Reminiscences of Sea Island Heritage*, Sandpaper Publishing Co: South Carolina, 1986 (picture history book, prayers, and songs)
- Gonzales, Ambrose E., *With Aesop Along The Black Border*, The State Company: Columbia, South Carolina, 1924
- Guy & Candie Carawan, *Ain't You Got A Right to the Tree of Life?*, The University Press: Athens, 1966
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Parrish, Lydia, *Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands*, Creative Age Press: New York, 1942

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Pyatt, Sherman E. & John, Alan, *A Dictionary & Catalog of African American Folk life of the South*, Greenwood Press: London, 1999

Tobin, Jacqueline L. & Dobard, Raymond G., *Hidden in Plain View: A secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad*, Anchor Books, 2000

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