

African Cultural Center USA

Lesson Title: Folktales Writer's Workshop

Subject: English, English as a Second Language, History
Grade Level: 7 –9

Objectives:

- Students will learn about the oral tradition in Africa.
- Students will read and analyze African folktales.
- Students will be able to compose a folktale explaining a natural phenomenon.

Materials:

Why the Praying Mantis Still Shakes

Steps:

1. Discuss the oral tradition of storytelling in Africa. (Teacher's note: In Africa, many cultures developed a rich and sophisticated oral tradition of communicating history, teaching lessons, and entertaining. In some cases, *griots*, professional tellers of history whose roots can be traced back nearly 1,000 years, would fulfill this role. However, stories were also passed on from community member to community member in informal and formal fashions.)

2. As a class, read *Why the Praying Mantis Still Shakes*. (Teacher's note: Anansi the Spider is a mischievous character featured in many West African folktales.) Students may read the story individually. This story is also perfectly suited for reading aloud.

3. Discuss how people throughout the ages have created stories that explain natural phenomenon.

4. Writing Assignment: Have the students answer the following questions:

- What natural phenomenon is explained in *Why the Praying Mantis Still Shakes*?
- Why do you think Africans and people from many other cultures dreamed up stories like these to explain the world around them?
- Describe one story, myth, or folktale that you know that describes a natural occurrence. Think about Greek mythology, Native American tales, etc.

5. Present the student with the following list of natural phenomena around which they will construct their own folktales:

- earthquakes
- thunder
- sun
- hail
- clouds
- oceans
- flowers
- seasons
- snow
- wind

6. Writing Assignment: Have the students answer the following questions:

- What is the natural phenomenon you would like to explain?
- List five possible explanations for this phenomenon (other than a scientific one).
- From the above list, choose one explanation.

7. Using the writing process (brainstorming, drafting, peer editing, teacher review, etc.), have the students write their folktales!