West African Folktales

West Africa
What is a folktale?

- Story/legend handed down from generation to generation
- Usually by oral retelling
- Often convey a lesson about life
Traditions & Customs

- Folk tales and myths serve as a means of handing down traditions and customs from one generation to the next in Africa.
- For several generations, stories from Africa have traditionally been passed down by word of mouth.
Tales by Moonlight

- Often, after a hard day’s work, the adults would gather the children together by moonlight, around a village fire and tell stories.
- This is traditionally called Tales by Moonlight.
- Usually the stories are meant to prepare young people for life, and so taught a lesson or moral.
Animals Abound

- In the African folk tales, the stories reflect the culture where diverse types of animals abound.
- The animals and birds are often accorded human attributes.
- It is not uncommon to find animals talking, singing or demonstrating other human characteristics such as greed, jealousy, honesty, patience etc.
Setting

- The setting in many of the stories exposes the reader to the landform and climate in Africa.
- References are often made to different seasons such as dry or rainy season as well as the climate’s effect on vegetation.
Many of the same folk tales from West Africa exist in North America, South America, and the West Indies.

WHY would these West African stories exist in places other than West Africa?

Think about Grade 5 social studies lessons..........hmmmmmmmm........
Common Types of West African Folk Tales
Anansi

- Anansi, the Spider, is one of the major trickster figures in African folk tales.
- This spider can be wise, foolish, amusing, or even lazy--but always there is a lesson to be learned from Anansi.
- Sometimes the spelling is changed from Anansi to Ananse.
- Anansi stories came into the United States through South Carolina. The Anansi spider tales are told as "Aunt Nancy" stories by the Gullah of the southeastern part of the U.S.
Use of Nature

- The monkey, elephant, giraffe, lion, zebra, crocodile, and rhinoceros appear frequently along with a wide variety of birds such as the ostrich, the secretary bird, and the eagle.
- Through their behavior, many valuable lessons are learned.
- The surroundings in which the tales take place reveal the vastness of the land and educate the reader about the climate.
Uncle Remus Tales

- These are very well-known folk tales from Africa.
- In the Uncle Remus stories, Bre'r Rabbit is the outstanding trickster figure.
- The tortoise is a primary trickster figure in the Nigerian tales.
- Bre'r Rabbit and the Tar Baby is similar to Anansi and the Gum Doll of West Africa.
In African versions of this tale, the tortoise wins because he uses his wits.

In the European versions, on the other hand, the tortoise wins through sheer endurance and grit.

The triumph of brain over physical strength is a common thread that runs through the trickster tales from Africa.

The trickster figure is clever, witty, and unscrupulous, as are trickster figures all over the world, but the African trickster almost always wins out because of his brilliance.
Dilemma Tales

- Many stories are deliberately left without an ending.
- This leaves the ending wide open for audience discussion and participation.
- The ending of the tale would be determined by the group of people involved in the exercise.
String Stories

- Making a simple loop from string and telling a tale with the string by twisting and turning the string to represent different parts of the story, is one of the oldest forms of storytelling in the world.
- In parts of Africa, the native children who cannot speak a word of English can often communicate with an English-speaking foreign visitor via a string story.
- It is a way of getting acquainted without words, and is a form of communication as different cultures share string stories.
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lJJPULFwl60](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lJJPULFwl60)
The Voice of the Drum

- Language can be conveyed by drums.
- The Ashanti and other West African tribes, just by the rhythms and intervals in beating their drums by their fingers, the flat of their hand, or the thumb, can convey messages and be understood over long distances.
- Many different tones can be made by the pressure of the arm under which a drum is held.
- The stick for beating the drum came later. We still refer to a turkey leg as the "drum stick."
The Kind Lion

- This type of tale is from Africa, where lions live in the wild.
- It is the idea that the Lion, King of the Beasts, lets his victims go for one reason or another, and then this good deed is rewarded in the end by the victim saving the life of the lion.
- It is the "one good turn deserves another" motif.
The Sacred Vulture

- "Opete" is the Twi term for the vulture.
- This bird is believed to be an instrument of the gods by the Ashanti and other West African peoples.
- This feeling of the sacred bird has survived in the New World and in the Caribbean.
Review
Elements of a Folktale

- **Moral lesson** (theme)- illustrates a moral belief.
- **Human characteristics in animals, objects or gods** (*personification*) Characters may be animals or gods and goddesses who deal with the same weaknesses humans have such as greed, kindness, vanity, wealth, poverty, etc.
- **Contains a hero or heroine** may contain a character who goes to extraordinary lengths to rescue another character.
- **Explain some event in nature as in “Why” stories**, explanations of events in nature such as rainbows, thunder, stripes on some animal, etc.
More Elements

- A supernatural element usually explains some basic questions about the world such as creation, humanity conditions, or other natural occurrences.
- Good triumphs over evil - desirable human qualities are rewarded in the end. Foolish or dishonest characters are exposed. The story often teaches a lesson, and may state a moral outright.
- Tricks played on character - tricks are played on a character, frequently poking fun at human weaknesses.
- Stereotyped character (good, bad, foolish, tricky) one or more characters are stereotyped as the example of human qualities (greed, curiosity, kindness, etc.)

From: http://www.tip.sas.upenn.edu/curriculum/units/2007/05/07.05.04.pdf
Title:

Magical element?

Trickster traits?

Human characteristics?

Repeated words or phrases?

Moral?