

# ANIMATED TALES — OF THE — WORLD™

## Namibia: Omuninyan



### Background

Namibia is located on the Atlantic coast of southern Africa. It is home to some of the most ancient nations in the world. Even today, oral tradition plays an important role in the traditional education of these people. Oral tradition is the method in which histories, stories, culture and beliefs are passed on from generation to generation. Folk literature terms relevant to this tale are provided below:

**folk literature/folklore** — Traditional tales, knowledge and beliefs handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth.

**folktale** — A type of folk literature that has grown from the lives and imaginations of people. Folktales often tell of the adventures of human or animal characters and sometimes attempt to explain the physical or spiritual world. Folktales can be organized into several different categories.

**magic and wonder tales** — A type of folktale. These stories contain some element of magic. This magic can be used for good or bad. Transformations from human to animal or animal to human are common in this type of folktale.

### Program Summary

Poor Omuninyan. Each day, she must endure harsh mistreatment by her stepmother and stepsister while her father is away. She is forced to cook, clean and do other chores while she is taunted with the name, “Ash Girl.” When an invitation arrives for a feast hosted by Chief Totwe, Omuninyan is denied the opportunity to attend when she is given the large task of making a big pot and is left behind. While crying, Omuninyan is visited by a wind spirit who magically helps her travel to the feast. The wind spirit requires just one thing of Omuninyan — she must return home before “the new sun strokes the sky.” At the feast, Omuninyan captures the eye and heart of Chief Totwe’s son, Sibata, during the dance of the young maidens, but leaves before anyone is able to find out her name and who she is. Only an anklet is left behind. Sibata is intent on finding out who the mysterious young maiden is and searches tirelessly for the woman he wants as his bride. Many women try on the anklet, including Omuninyan’s stepsister, but it fits no one. When Sibata is told to return to the homestead of Omuninyan’s family, he finds Omuninyan there and she shows that the anklet fits her perfectly. Sibata asks for her hand in marriage and they live happily ever after.

### Pre-viewing Discussion

- Have students list some of the major elements of Cinderella-type tales (e.g., fairy godmother, mean stepmother, a grand ball, etc.). As they watch this tale, look for parallels to the elements listed.

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- Spend some time viewing a map of the African continent. Find Namibia’s location and identify bordering countries and bodies of water. Use the map and other geographical information to make inferences about the landscape and people of this place. How might this information be relevant to a story set in this location?
- Review some of the different types of folktales so that students can classify this tale after viewing.

### Follow-Up Discussion

- Omuninyan was able to get to Chief Totwe’s feast with the help of the wind spirit. If you could seek the help of the wind spirit for one thing, what would it be?
- Motifs are recurring elements found in many folktales. They include everything from stock characters, such as tricksters, to magical objects, such as flying carpets. Recall the events, characters and details of this tale. What motifs can be found in this tale from Namibia?
- Discuss the cultural elements of the characters, setting and plot by asking students which aspects of the tale appear to be unique to Namibia and which are more universal in nature.

### Follow-up Activities

- Cinderella-type stories are a part of folk literature around the world. Have students compare *Namibia: Omuninyan* to another Cinderella tale. Consider watching *England: Cap O’ Rushes* to see a Cinderella tale with roots in Western Europe. Students may also enjoy Ai-Ling Louie’s *Yeh-Shen: A Cinderella Story from China* (Penguin Young Readers Group, 1996) or Robert San Souci’s *Sootface: An Ojibwa Cinderella Story* (Random House, 1997). Use a Venn diagram or other graphic organizer to compare and contrast these tales. Have students think about why these types of stories are so widespread. As an extension, encourage students to get creative and come up with their own Cinderella tales. Students can write and illustrate their stories or prepare for a dramatic storytelling.
- Namibia is home to a rich diversity of wildlife. This is especially evident at Namibia’s Etosha National Park — a salt pan desert, surrounded by grasslands and woodlands. When Omuninyan’s father briefly returns home from a hunt, he describes to her his run-in with a lion. Besides the mighty lion, investigate what other animals are found in Namibia, particularly in Etosha National Park. Some students may wish to focus on mammals, while others may research reptiles or birds. Create a classroom display about the wildlife of Namibia. Students can share their findings in a variety of ways (e.g., clay or papier-mache models, labeled diagrams, posters, informational booklets or even poems about the animals and the environment in which they live). Visit [www.culturefocus.com/namibia.htm](http://www.culturefocus.com/namibia.htm) for additional information and images.
- Happily ever after.... At the end of this tale, we see that Sibata has asked for Omuninyan’s hand in marriage. It seems that she will no longer have to do the chores for her stepmother and stepsister, nor will she be taunted with the name “Ash Girl.” But what really happens? What is life like for these characters one year later? Students can select a character from the tale and write a journal entry from that person’s point of view one year later. As an extension, students can bring their characters to life by role-playing them on a classroom-created talk show called “Where Are They Now?”

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- Namibia is the site of thousands of works of rock art. These works are pictures, designs or images that are painted or engraved onto rock surfaces and are often found in cave shelters and on large boulders. Many engravings and paintings date back thousands of years. Twyfelfontein, located in Namibia, is one of the most impressive and extensive rock art sites in all of Africa. Visit [mc2.vicnet.net.au/home/vhra/web/twyfelbirds.html](http://mc2.vicnet.net.au/home/vhra/web/twyfelbirds.html) to see some of the rock art found at Twyfelfontein. There is no certainty about the reasons why the rock art was made, but some believe it served as reminders of past events. Turn a classroom wall or bulletin board into a Namibian cave wall by covering it with brown paper. Invite students to create their own rock art by drawing images on the cave wall that depict a memorable event from the tale of Omuninyan.
- Act it out! Recreate this tale in your classroom. This can be done as a puppet show, a mime skit, a student play, etc. In preparation for the production, examine and critically think about the story's elements of characters, setting and plot. Consider how the story might change if the setting was a different time and place.
- Before folk and fairy tales were written or turned into films, they were passed down orally, from one generation to the next. Introduce students to the art of storytelling. Discuss different ways in which the storyteller can engage listeners (e.g., using sound and gestures, giving vivid sensory details). Practice storytelling techniques by having each student retell a portion of this tale.
- Compare modern-day Namibia with the setting and people portrayed in the folktale. Organize these similarities and differences using a Venn diagram.

## Suggested Internet Resources

- [www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5472.htm](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5472.htm)  
This site, assembled by the U.S. Department of State, presents information Namibia.
- [www.namibia-travel.net/index.htm](http://www.namibia-travel.net/index.htm)  
Learn more about Namibia's history, culture, geography, economy, government, people and spectacular wildlife.
- [www.darsie.net/talesofwonder/](http://www.darsie.net/talesofwonder/)  
This archive of folk and fairy tales from around the world presents a sampling of the many stories that make up our world's oral tradition.

## Suggested Print Resources

*To learn more about the land and people of Africa:*

- Croze, Harvey. *Africa for Kids: Exploring a Vibrant Continent*. Chicago Review Press, Chicago, IL; 2006.
  - Diagram Group. *History of Southern Africa*. Facts on File, New York, NY; 2003. A resource for teachers.
  - Mitchell, Peter. *People and Cultures of Africa: Southern Africa*. Facts on File, New York, NY; 2006.
- If you are interested in tales from Africa, you might also enjoy:*
- Aardema, Verna. *Koi and the Kola Nuts: A Tale from Liberia*. Aladdin Paperbacks, New York, NY; 2002.
  - Badoa, Adwoa. *The Pot of Wisdom: Ananse Stories*. Groundwood Books, Toronto, ON; 2000.
  - Mandela, Nelson. *Nelson Mandela's Favorite African Folktales*. W.W. Norton and Company, New York, NY; 2002.
  - Vernon-Jackson, Hugh O. *West African Folk Tales*. Dover Publications, Mineola, NY; 2003.

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