

ANIMATED TALES — OF THE — WORLD™

South Africa: Ummemo



Background

The African continent is rich with folk literature that recounts the encounters and adventures of many memorable characters, such as Ananse the spider, Nogwaja the tortoise and Zomo the hare. In this thoughtful tale from South Africa, another character is introduced that is revered as a warm friend, Ummemo. 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.

beast tale — A tale in which most of the characters are animals. They often talk and act like humans.

Program Summary

Ummemo (translated “the echo”) lives in a cave atop a mountain. Considered a dear friend by many, Ummemo shares in the joy and sorrow of each animal friend that visits — from birds to monkeys to jackals. Even though Ummemo is always there for each friend, no one has ever seen Ummemo. One day, a storm sweeps through the area, causing a pair of mongoose twins to take cover in Ummemo’s cave. They enjoy the shelter of the cave and Ummemo’s company until lightning strikes, causing a large boulder to come crashing down, covering the cave’s opening. The mongoose twins escape the confines of the cave just in the nick of time and return home unscathed. The next day, animals that stop by Ummemo’s cave no longer hear the voice of their friend. When the animals think that Ummemo might be trapped and hurt inside of the cave, they enlist the help of an African elephant to move the giant boulder. However, the boulder is too large and too heavy for even an elephant to move. When they see that they can use the tree wedged under the boulder as a lever, the animals all climb atop the tree until enough weight is applied to force the boulder from its position. The animals are thrilled that they have helped their friend, and even though they do not see Ummemo, they hear the soothing voice of their friend.

Pre-viewing Discussion

- What does it mean to be a good friend? Invite students to write and share their own definitions of friendship.
- Have you ever been able to come to the aid of a friend in need? Allow students a moment to reflect upon and share responses to this question. How did this experience make them feel? What did they learn from it?

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- Spend some time viewing a map of the African continent. Find South Africa’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 that 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

- At the end of this tale, the elephant marvels at “how good it must be to love a friend as much as the animals and birds on the mountain loved Ummemo.” In what ways is Ummemo a good friend to many? Even though none of the animals ever see Ummemo, why do they care about their friend so much?
- 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 South Africa?
- Discuss the cultural elements of the characters, setting and plot by asking students which aspects of the tale appear to be unique to South Africa and which ones are more universal in nature.

Follow-up Activities

- *South Africa: Ummemo* is an example of a beast tale — a story in which the main characters are animals. Have students compare this tale to other beast tales. Consider watching *Pakistan: Podna & Podni* and *India: The Multi-Coloured Jackal*, and discuss the characteristics of the animals in each tale. In what ways are they humanlike? Encourage students to get creative and come up with their own beast tales, perhaps using local wildlife as the characters. Students can write and illustrate their stories or prepare for a dramatic storytelling.
- South Africa is home to a rich diversity of wildlife. In this tale, we see large and small mammals, lizards and birds. In addition to these, what other animals are found in South Africa? Some students may wish to focus on mammals, while others may research reptiles or birds. Create a classroom display about the wildlife of South Africa. 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.southafrica.info/ess_info/sa_glance/fauna_flora/wildlife.htm for additional information and images.
- When sound waves are reflected, you hear an echo. In fact, an echo is what the animals hear when they talk to their friend Ummemo. This is a great opportunity to make connections to science and investigate how sounds travel. Visit www.dsokids.com/2001/dso.asp?PageID=499 for simple sound experiments that can be replicated in the classroom. After completing some of these investigations, challenge students to explain why the animals hear the echo and what causes them to stop hearing it after the storm.
- Using the tree to move the boulder shows simple machines in action! Introduce students to the different types of simple machines (e.g., wedges, levers, pulleys and inclined planes). Visit www.fi.edu/qa97/spotlight3/spotlight3.html for easy-to-understand explanations of different types of simple machines. Students can use what they learned and evidence from the program to determine what type of simple machine is used to help Ummemo. As an extension, students can demonstrate how other simple machines work using materials from home.
- 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.

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- 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.

Suggested Internet Resources

- www.katw.org/pages/sitepage.cfm?id=72
This "Kids Around the World" web site highlights South Africa. Discover what a kid's life in South Africa is like as well as some geographical and cultural information about the country.
- www.southafrica.info/
This web site by the International Marketing Council of South Africa provides comprehensive information about the history, geography, people, economy and politics of South Africa.
- www.timeforkids.com/TFK/teachers/aw/wr/main/0,28132,590829,00.html
Discover South Africa and what it is like to live there! This web site by Time Inc. presents information about South Africa's famous sites, history and language in addition to an interview with Nelson Mandela.
- 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 South Africa:

- Blauer, Ettagale and Jason Laure. *South Africa*. Children's Press, Danbury, CT; 2006.
 - Brownlie, Alison. *We Come from South Africa*. Hodder Children's Books, London, UK; 2002.
 - Rosmarin, Ike and Dee Rissick. *South Africa*. Marshall Cavendish, Tarrytown, NY; 2004.
- If you are interested in tales from Africa, you might also enjoy:*
- Aardema, Verna. *Misoso: Once Upon a Time Tales from Africa*. Knopf Books for Young Readers, New York, NY; 1993.
 - 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.
 - Seeger, Pete. *Abiyoyo*. Aladdin, New York, NY; 2005. Inspired by a South African folktale.

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