

Storytelling Performance Study Guide

Practical Tips for Storytelling Performances
by

Baba Jamal Koram, Ed.S.
The StoryMan



© 2002, 2005 Baba Jamal Koram, Ed.S.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---------------------------------|----|
| Baba Jamal Koram - Bibliography | 2 |
| Introduction to the Study Guide | 3 |
| The Storytelling Performance | 4 |
| Story Animals as Symbols | 5 |
| Before the Storytelling | 6 |
| After the Storytelling | 7 |
| Folklore Vocabulary | 8 |
| Culture Specific Activities | 9 |
| Cultural Language | 10 |
| World African Instruments | 11 |
| More Things to Try | 12 |
| Contact Information | 12 |

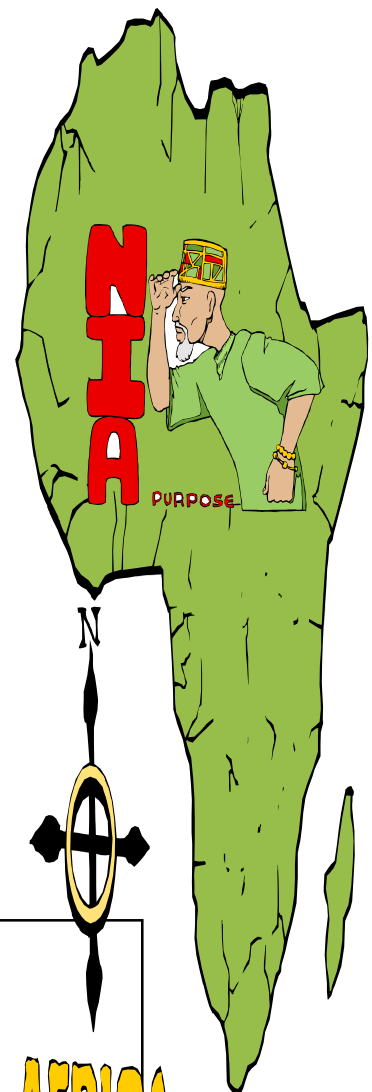
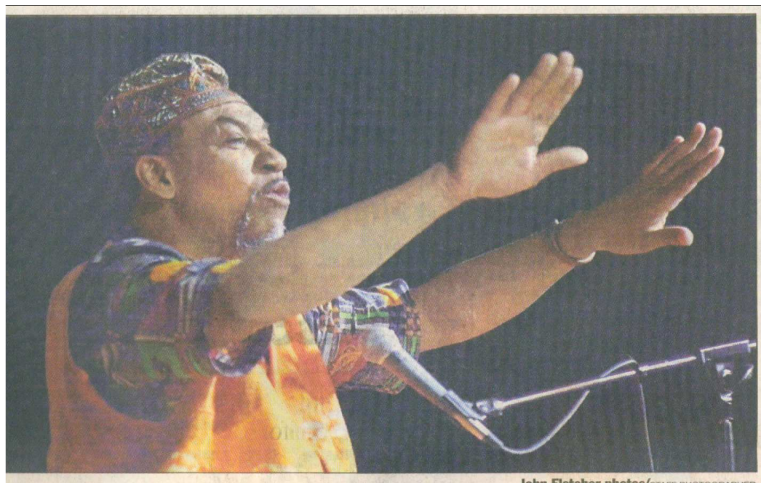


"... Koram's stories cut across all cultural and generational lines, and because he tells them so compellingly, you have to be neither African American nor a kid to get a kick out of them." The Baltimore Magazine

Baba Jamal Koram

His mission is to promote African/ American cultural heritage through stories songs, oral histories, books, audio and visual media. He is distinguished among contemporary tellers who acknowledge his ethical and professional leadership and artistic dignity.

Baba Jamal brings twenty plus years of academic



The material in this study guide has been adapted from
Baba Jamal Koram's
*Teachers' Performance Guide to African American
Storytelling and Cultural Heritage*,
published by Flying Lion Productions, a division of the
Ujamaa Systems, Inc. ©2000, 2002, 2005

Photo Credits Harlee Little, Washington Post, Asheville Citizen Times, Kenosha News
Artist Renderings of Baba Jamal by Marcy Dunn Ramsey

AFRICA

Children and Culture

Children should be taught about African/American culture in **positive and wholesome** ways. They must learn of the history and human contribution of World Africans who number close to one billion and whose influence, and cultures have touched every inhabited area of earth. These **World Africans** live in the United States, Brazil, Cuba, Central America, Britain, France, Australia,

African/American Contributions

India, in many other countries, and of course, in Africa.



History tells us that **mathematics**, writing, dentistry, aerodynamic theory, cosmetics, advanced architectural construction, and other important contributions, are traced to indigenous Africans. It is important to understand and to tell of the **scientific genius of African peoples**. Through storytelling, educators can bring issues, events, facts, and personalities to life. The story of the astronomical knowledge of the Dogon people of Mali is fascinating. It is a story of ancient peoples who **discovered planets** and star systems that have only recently been seen by modern scientists. Numbering systems found in the Congo 8,000 years ago, is important to tell. From the ancient Africans to contemporary black scientist and creative artists, African people continue to infuse humanity with their **technology and morality**.

Our youth should **memorize and analyze** the accomplishments of African peoples because their work has a continuing global effect on our lives. For example, Lewis Latimer's major contribution to the development of the light bulb needs to be studied. Benjamin Carson, from Baltimore, is a premier brain surgeon whose **story must be told..**

Learning Is Fun

learn. With a little

creativity and a lot of imagination, educators can make empowering statements which magnify the self knowledge and self esteem of **all children** but most specifically, for African American children.. Stories, **proverbs, games, songs, chants, plays and art projects** can all be used to educate students in math, history, civics, language, art and science.

Storyteller's Mission

Furthermore, **ethical lessons** can take cues from Aesop (Aethiop the African), by using stories in which animals have human characteristics. No area of civilized living need go unstudied or untold. Indeed, telling these stories is the mission of the African American **Griot/Storyteller**. Music, science, exploration and adventure are all part of the storyteller's lore and magic.

Please **take risks** in presenting new knowledge to our children. Feel free to adjust and adapt these suggestions to the needs and backgrounds of your students. Be true, however, to the intent and motive of this guide — to allow African American and other children to appreciate, and to learn, progressive information about **Africa and its descendants**. Send your suggestions, criticisms, ideas, and discoveries to me as you embark on this quest for new knowledge and relevant education. Thanks! Tutaonana!

Baba Jamal Koram, M.S., Ed.S.

The StoryMan

Alexandria, Virginia September, 2002

www.babajamalkoram.com

The Storytelling Performance

The performance of Jamal Koram the StoryMan is appropriate for all age groups. The performances are comprised of fables, myths, tales, stories and chants and songs from **African and African American** historical-cultural experiences. These include both contemporary and traditional **customs**, and call and response **methods**.

COMMON OBJECTIVES FOR THE STORYMAN'S PRESENTATION

1. To encourage an **understanding** of African American cultures
2. To demonstrate **traditional** storytelling performance methods
3. To facilitate an acceptance of the universality of human emotion, response, and thematic **spoken word expression**.
4. To create a **storytelling environment** for speaking, singing and participant interaction.
5. To help youth empower themselves by learning the skills of decision making, problem solving, and conflict resolution by **creating, telling, reading and listening to stories**.

As a storyteller, educator, organizer, and social scientist, Mr. Koram recognizes the value of enabling critical thinking, encouraging clarity of purpose, and allowing for flights of fantasy. Through stories, the imagination is allowed to open to new creative possibilities.

As a folklorist, he seeks to expose audiences to drum and voice rhythms and intonations. The StoryMan presents global images, and issues, and perspectives. Underlying all of these ideals, however, Baba Jamal wants folks to enjoy the stories, enjoy the rhythms – to enjoy!

BEGINNING

The StoryMan introduces himself and uses a call and response to open the performance. He involves the audience in a song or in a session of riddles and other proverbial and introductory remarks.

MIDDLE



After the introductory opening Baba Jamal continues with a couple of shorter stories, or with a longer dilemma or character story, depending on the theme of the program.

ENDING

During most programs, Mr. Koram will tell a story from the Griotic tradition (history, geography, culture), and/or will take questions from the audience about storytelling and African/American culture. He then tells another story and may finish with drumming and Ago! Ame!

Common Objectives In Storytelling

Story Animals as Symbols

Story animals have traits which have an impact on the plot and direction of the stories. These character traits have been passed to us through the centuries through the stories, songs, folklore, and the imaginations of African peoples - - where ever Africans have traveled throughout the world. Baba Jamal has researched animals characters in thousands of stories. Here's some of what he has found.

ALLIGATOR



Ignorance, easily duped

ANANSI THE SPIDER

A resourceful character; displays wisdom through intricate plots often involving his children: Nitikuma, Niwakumfweye, Ntikonokono, Afwedotwedotwe, and wife , Aso.

ANTELOPE

The bearer of news' grants gifts and favors.

BIRD

Messenger' bearer of news

BR'ER RABBIT

Resourceful. A planner. Cunningly outwits stronger enemies and friends. Is often called upon to help against seemingly more powerful adversaries.

BUSARA

Africans in America especially cultural artists, advocates for cultural dignity.

CHAMELEON

Clever; uses disguises.

CROCODILE

Death; ominous presence.

DONKEY

Ignorance and foolishness. Also, stubbornness.

ELEPHANT

Wisdom and strength

FOX

Cunning. Analyzes difficult situations. Shrewdness.

GOAT

Symbol of analysis, wisdom, and clarity.

GULLAH

African/ Americans especially, who live in the southeastern USA, also in the Caribbean and South America, especially in the coastal areas of the mainland

HIGH JOHN THE CONQUEROR

Resourceful. Planner. Spiritual upliftment. Embodies the will to be free.

HYENA

Cunning, strength, deception and treachery.

JACKAL

Symbol of cowardice and immoral behavior.

LEOPARD

Indicative of balance. Sometimes seen as royalty. Cunning.

LION

Symbol of strength and courage, pride, dignity, and African royalty. (See When Lions Could Fly, by Baba Jamal Koram the StoryMan)

LIONESS

Symbol of royalty, courage, and dedication. A fierce hunter.

MONKEY

Resourceful. Outwits powerful enemies by talking his way out of difficult situations.

POTTO

Symbol of quick thinking and weakness (See Aesop: Tales of Aethiop the African, Vol. I, by Jamal Koram the StoryMan)

SNAKE

Evil; ominous presence. Also symbolizes leadership, healing and forthrightness.

TREES

Wisdom; forewarners, advice givers, protectors.

TURTLE/TERRAPIN

Represents continuation and eternity. Also represents tenacity, wisdom, cunning and feigned naiveté.

WIND

Carrier of news (past and present); foreteller of events.

YARA MAH YAH HOO

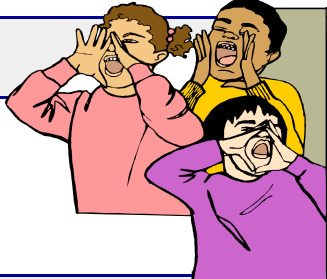
Used to frighten listeners into doing the right thing. A warning about what happens with careless or incorrect behavior.

ZEBRA

Symbolizes confusion and sometimes, betrayal. Opionated.

Cultural Language

Below are a few creative and colorful words which have evolved into the lexicon of standard English. You may even use a few of these yourself! **

| | |
|--|--|
| Asante Sana (AH SAHN tay SAH na) | In the Kiswahili language, "thank you very much" |
| Bumpin' | Describing something as being nice or cool. A descriptive emphasis. "That party was bumpin'" |
| Bust a Move | To initiate action. To boogie. To do what must be done. |
| Chill | Be cool. Relax. Stop whatever it is that you are doing. |
| Cold | A descriptive emphasis. "That's a cold ride." (A nice looking automobile.) Also use to describe unfeeling, unemotional activity. If a youth embarrasses or puts down another, one may say, "Man, that was cold." |
|  | |
| Gettin' Up | Running very quickly. |
| Habari Gani (HA BAR EE GAH nee) | A greeting in the Kiswahili language. The response may be <i>Njema (N JAY mah)</i> , <i>Asante</i> . |
| Hotep (HO tep) | A greeting from the Metu Neter language found in Kemet or Egypt. |
| Jambo | A kiswahili language greeting. The answer would be <i>Sijambo (See JAHM Boh)</i> . |
| Kwaheri (KWA HAIR REE) | Good bye in the Kiswahili language. |
| Trippin' | One's mind is somewhere else. Thinking or doing something totally inappropriate or out of harmony with the present situation. |
| Tutaonana (TOO ta OH NAH na) | See you later. In the Kiswahili language. |
| What's Up With That (Wassup wid dat) | In the short form "Wassuup" can be used as a greeting. More commonly used to ask why a situation is as it is; as in "Why are you acting like that?" |
| Word | I understand. I know. That's right. |

There are a ton of other phrases and descriptions, some of which creep into Baba Jamal's stories. Learn as many as you can. It's fun. Isn't it?

****Please note that the above words are subject to change meaning or form by the time you read this.
WORD!!!**

Folkloric Vocabulary

"Everything begins and ends with a story. No one ever goes through any day that doesn't begin and end with a story. All of the solutions in our lives are either solved by or are affected by a story. Therefore, the professional storyteller's responsibility is to set an easy to follow example steeped in integrity, which can be used to create positive and safe environments for learning and inquiry through storytelling." **Baba Jamal Koram**

What is storytelling? What are the different forms of storytelling? Below are just a few of the many examples of storytelling definitions. There are also a few terms used in Baba Jamal's storytelling.

| | |
|---|--|
| CABBAGE PATCH | African American dance characterized by shoulder movements. |
| CULTURE | The beliefs, social formalities, and historical expressions of racial, religious, social, business, or political grouping. Includes transmitting knowledge and human behavior to succeeding generations. |
| ELECTRIC SLIDE | African American group dance. |
| EPIC | A long story or poem about a historical event, tradition, hero, or legend, i.e., Sundiata, John Brown. Beli Bodapo Boomshakulakulak. |
| FABLE | A story used to compel a moral or useful truth. Usually animals have human characteristics. |
| FOLK SONG | A song made and handed down by the people. |
| FOLK TALE | A story, usually of unknown authorship, conceived and handed down, orally, by the people of a certain area or group. |
| FORMULA TALE | Story with a minimal plot, repetition, replete with lessons of character and morality. Baba Jamal tells a lot of these kinds of tales. |
| GRIOT/JALI/DJALI/KARISI/MUGANI WA LUGANO/IMBONGI/ONIJALA/DONSO- | Oral historian. praise singer, storyteller and musician. |
| LEGEND | A traditional story (or person whose activities are) regarded as historical, but not always verifiable. |
| MYTH | A traditional story that usually explains some phenomena of nature; or the origin or the customs of a people, usually involves the activities of deities, heroes and sheroes. |
| MYTHOLOGY | All of the myths of a people, For Africans, this would involve the myths from black peoples throughout the world. |
| PERSONAL STORY | Stories about incidents in the tellers life. |
| RAP SONG | Rhyming song spoken in rhythmic fashion. Associated with African American youth culture. Also known as Hip Hop and Dub. |
| VEGETABLE PATCH | A garden. |



World African Instruments

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| AGBA | A large shekere |
| AGO-GO BELLS | Small metal cone-shaped cylinders (2) connected by a curved solid metal tubing |
| ASHIKO DRUM | Long cylinder drum pioneered among African peoples in the Carribean, the Americas, and West Africa. (Ah SHEE koh) |
| BONGO DRUM | Two attached small cyliner drums with different diameters. (BONG goh) |
| CONGA DRUM | Cylinder type drum descended from the African Sangba drum. Developed among African Carribean/Island peoples. (KOOng Gahh) |
| JEMBE DRUM | West African drum shaped like a goblet; traditionally made of wood, rope, and goatskin (JEM Bay) |
| KORA | A twenty-one stringed, harp-like African insturment made with a gourd/calabash and cow skin. The instrument of the Jali/Jeli/Griot (KOR ah) |
| MBIRA/SANSA | Made with a gourd and metal tines. Can be made with a wooden block. Erroneously called a thumb piano. (M BEER Rah)/ (SAHN za) |
| SHEKERE (SÊKERE) | African gourd instrument strung with beads or shells, and played by shaking and striking. (SHAKE ker RAY) |
| SLIT/LOG DRUM | Made by cutting narrow slits in a hollow wooden cylinder or rectangular casing. Played with sticks or mallets. |
| STEEL PAN | Associated with Trinidad and Tobago. Made by indenting the bottoms of large metal oil drums. Played with mallets. |
| XALAM/NGONI | Two different stringed instuments made on the same principle. Direct forbears of the Banjo. Often played by Jalis (JAH lee) or Griots (Gree-oh) |
| | |



Cultural Activities

GEOGRAPHY

Refer to shapes of maps of African and of the Americas. Let children know what



these shapes are, and of the importance of these continents in the lives and historical

AFRICAN NAMES

Center a cultural activity around finding an African translation of their European or other names. Find the African equivalent by looking for names in the "Common English Name" section of an unabridged Websater's dictionary. Match meanings with those found in an African name book. There are several books on the market. Call Baba Jamal to come in and help with this activity.



AFRICAN ART



Identify a variety of African art forms, including traditional/classical wood and stone sculpture, paintings, woven fabrics, utensils, ceremonial masks, etc. Be aware of your terminology in describing the art. Use national or specific names of a people and not "tribes" which suggest primitive or inferior cultures.



Obtain, read, write and demonstrate books and stories with positive images that tell of the interests, aspirations, and accomplishments of African Americans and of other World Africans.



READ

Show films and videos and listen to audio cassettes, and cds about African Americans and other Africans. Be aware of projecting positive images. Children see enough negative images outside of the classroom.

VIDEOS



FIELD TRIPS

Field trips are always interesting. After studying a unit, take students to museums or other facilities which display African/ American art, science, and culture.



Before the Storytelling



A. SELECT STORIES

B. ONE PAGE STORY

C. REVIEW VOCABULARY

D. INTRODUCE HISTORY

E. DISCUSS AFRICA

F. STUDENT FEEDBACK

G. ASK STORY QUESTIONS



Remind children about behavior during the performance.

Let them know that they should applaud the storyteller when he is introduced. After applauding, the children should be quiet and listen for instructions and greetings from the teller. Emphasize the importance of listening to the storyteller - - with their ears **and** with their imaginations.

Very often storytellers will have special instructions during their show. The audience may hear phrases like "I went and I saw for you." The response is "See so we may see!" Baba Jamal Koram always makes the call, "AGO!" The response is "Ah May!"

"If you accept the clothes, you will learn to accept the person..." Baba Jamal almost always wears African clothes. Because of his **dual heritage** (African/American), he is most comfortable wearing them. They shouldn't be referred to as "garb" or a "costume." These are African clothes. Baba Jamal is not playing the part of an African storyteller, he **IS** a storyteller.

Select read one or two African/American stories and discuss them. Identify symbols and characterizations. Ask: *What is important about this story? What new vocabulary is introduced?*

Students should write a one page story that may be used for a class anthology. Include "raps/hip hop."

Revue the sections on Folklore Vocabulary, Story Characters, and African/American Instruments. Have students find stories which include selected characters. Let them explain the words and/or the messages/meanings.

Introduce the history of the African American (Read *They Came Before Columbus*). Please be sensitive to NOT describe Africans as slaves. They were captured, kidnapped, and stolen. Therefore, they were captives, at least - Africans, at best. To call Africans in the Americas slaves is to perpetuate the racist and dehumanizing effects of that barbaric activity known as slavery.

Discuss modern Africa. Talk about political and economic issues and events that project upliftment and hope.

Students should select favorite books or stories to discuss the action and characters and themes.

What stories were told? Where were they from? Who were the characters? What did the characters symbolize?

After the Storytelling

LANGUAGE ARTS

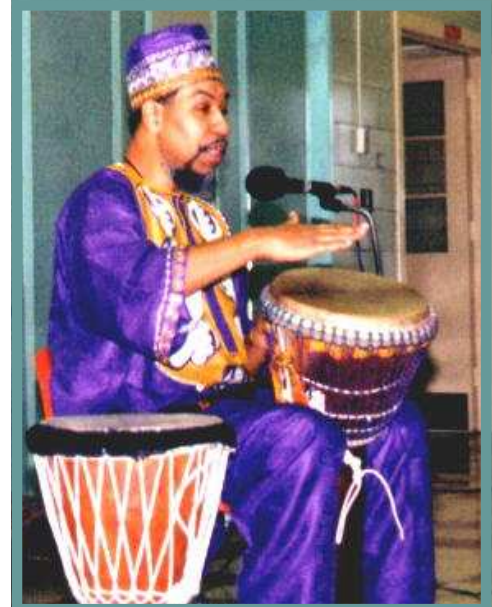
1. Encourage students to discuss how a personal experience may have helped them relate to a character or a story situation.
2. Use **vocabulary** words and story characters in writing assignments.
3. Have students **write** a letter to Baba Jamal. Ask them to describe a story situation from their imaginations.
4. Ask the class to write a description of either an **historic African American personality** (Bethune, Jonathan Jackson, etc.), a friend, or of some other creative idea.

PERFORMANCE ARTS

1. **Storytelling** - Students may write a short story of an enjoyable activity. Students should be encouraged to tell the story in front of classmates.
2. **Music** - Explore musical rhythms based on different African cultures, i.e. Ghanaian, Jamaican, Brazilian, New Afrikan (hip hop, R & B, Jazz, Blues) using instruments, voice, clapping, and singing.
3. **Dance** - Allow students to create a dance movement based on an AESOP fable or other story using dances, instruments clapping and singing.
4. **Visual Arts** - Students may create a series of illustrations, or a comic strip of stories from Baba Jamal's performances or from ideas about proverbs.
5. **Drama** - Have groups of students write different stories from African/ American history and act each part in the story. Focus on events rather than people.

READING ACTIVITIES

1. Children should read a story and then, from memory, reconstruct the story and tell it - obeying the rules or *opening, repetition, and closing*.
2. Teach children to use descriptive words by asking questions like *"How many ways can the sky look? What kind of ways can a tree feel? Can a pair of shoes look tired? How else might they feel?"*
3. Create similes with the children. True similes express likeness between unlike objects using the words *like* or *as*.



1998

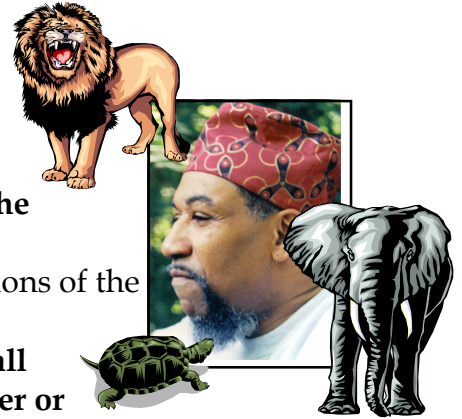


1991



More Things to Try

1. Students may explain how the StoryMan brought life to the story. Talk about voice inflection, gestures, clothing, and posture.
2. Assign students to repeat the stories they may have told prior to the performance. This time, they should use some of the techniques that Baba Jamal Koram used. Discuss the differences in their "before and after" performances. What did they learn about the art of storytelling?
3. What words, phrases, or images do students recall? Ask students to retell any of the stories that they heard during the performance. How close is their recall, based on classmates critique of their retelling?
4. Construct a class mural composed of artistic renditions of the favorite tales/myths, storyteller or of each student.
5. Guide students to write original stories and to draw illustrations of the stories.
6. Small groups may write, illustrate, design and produce small books. Create a display of written works. The Media Center or even a local bookstore, or bank may display the children's works.
7. Students should select an animal character found in African stories and write stories or rhymes around this central character.
8. Encourage students to compare live performance stories with stories on tapes or in books.
9. Consider the morals, themes, historic acts, or personalities from a variety of stories.
10. Identify poetic or prose pieces from the African American experience that students could memorize and recite (e.g. one of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speeches - other than the "I Have A Dream" speech, James Weldon Johnson's *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, *And Still I Rise* by Maya Angelou).



**Baba Jamal Koram the
StoryMan**

is Represented by

Class Acts Arts

for Bookings:

301.588.7525

www.classactsarts.org

www.babajamalkoram.com

Call, go online or write for tapes, CDs, CD-ROMs and books