



African Stories with Drums

(Target Audience: 5 -8, 9-12)

Text: *Bimwili and the Zimwi* by Verna Aardema

Tell this tale from South Africa using drums to interpret the story as you read it.

The story is about three young girls who go to the beach. The youngest, Bimwili, finds a beautiful shell that she unfortunately leaves at the beach but remembers when the girls have already started for home. But she loves the shell and disobeys her sisters and runs back to find it.

Back at the beach she finds the shell beside an evil, alluring creature, the Zimwi, who loves the way she sings. He kidnaps her in his drum and then poses as an itinerant musician who goes from village to village to play his drum and forces the girl to sing. Villagers love the wonderful voice coming from his drum and the Zimwi greedily collects money from them.

But one day he visits Bimwili's village where her mother recognizes her child's voice and the villagers pursue the Zimwi who unfortunately escapes in the form of a bird.

There are several ways to do this depending on the funding you have available.

1. If you have a budget, hire a musician to interpret the setting and the characters in the story as you read the story aloud to the children. Using an overhead projector or LCD show the cover of the book on a large screen. This will help establish the mood of the story. Results are excellent and you will be able to accommodate large groups of children and adults.
2. The next option is to find a staff person or a community person, a high student perhaps, who can play the drum, and perhaps a drama student will help read the characters or act it out.
3. The last option is to read and do sound effects, with the children. And upon your cues they can add in the sounds. Hold cards up and practise the sounds before you start.

Shell: a swishing sound, hold a conch shell to your ear to cue the audience

Bimwili: have audience sing her song in a high, plaintive way. Add a few sobs.

Zimwi: Identify him with a rhythm that you tap out on your drum or have the children clap it out on their thighs.

This rhythm is African according to Ella Jenkins:

Clap out:

1 2 3 4 , 1 2 3 4 , 1 2 3 4 , 1

Emphasize the first beat by clapping hard and wait a split second before you beat the second beat.

Throughout the story there are cheers and cries, ask the audience to participate by having them echo your lines.

Be expressive! There are many basic emotions here – fear, happiness, curiosity. Try to do your most interesting little girl voice and the evil, magical Zimwi.

Try these techniques using other stories:

Try storytelling these tales without pictures but with sound effects that the children can add:

Misoso: Once Upon a Time Tales from Africa by Verna Aardema

The Cow-tail Switch and Other West African Stories by Harold Courlander

Aaron Shepard has many African stories online
<http://www.aaronshep.com/indexes/index.html>