

Olympia Junior Programs presents

# **Anansi the Spider**

by Tears of Joy Theatre, Vancouver WA

February 9-12 & 27 & March 5

The Washington Center for the Performing Arts

A Study Guide for Teachers of Grades 1-3  
To prepare student for a positive theater experience  
(EALR references included)

## **What to Expect During the Play**

- There are two different sized Anansi puppets. During the second story, the stage will be split showing the animals on one side of the stage in regular scale and the other side will show the action of Anansi, in the melon, in a larger scale.
- Each animal is represented by its own distinct drum rhythm.
- This play calls for limited audience participation: As the play opens, clapping along to the music is encouraged. At one point the audience will be prompted to chant “stretch snake” along with Anansi. Also, the audience will be taught “The Talking Melon Song” and later asked to sing it in one part of the performance.

## **Background**

*Anansi the Spider* is based on two stories, “From Tiger to Anansi” found in Anansi, the Spider Man by Phillip M. Sherlock, and Anansi and the Talking Melon by Eric A. Kimmel. These are African trickster tales in which a resourceful animal hero (in this case a small, harmless spider) uses deceit and sly trickery to get what it needs from bigger and stronger animals.

Virginia Hamilton, in A Ring of Tricksters, (Blue Sky Press 1997) writes: “The first African Americans brought trickster tales with them to the southern United States and the Caribbean West Indies... Spider is a leading animal trickster of West African countries. Humorous yet often pardonable tricks are played on the unsuspecting. This gives rise to the sense that the animal tricksters were invented by the community to cast away acts of human misbehavior from more suitable deeds. These animal characters performed outlandish tricks because the people needed them to. We’re glad they did. They amuse us with their tricks, even when they escape punishment. They seem very human, very much like ourselves.”

## **Style of Puppetry**

Tears of Joy Theatre performs this play using an adaptation of Japanese **bunraku puppetry**. The puppeteers will be visible but unobtrusive. Since there are often more puppets on stage than puppeteers, the puppets were designed to stand by themselves.

## **Vocabulary**

watering hole.....a place the animals come to drink water  
calaban.....a trap  
musk melon.....an orange melon, a cantaloupe  
swoon.....to faint  
irresistible.....too strong to resist, something you want very badly  
cunning.....skillful in deception, clever, sly  
feisty.....quarrelsome, aggressive, belligerent  
sing the praises.....to praise someone  
to the victor go the spoils.....the winner gets all

## **Before the Performance**

1. Find Africa on a map or globe. List 5 countries in West Africa (Senegal, Guinea, Mali, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, and Cameroon). (Geography 1.1; Reading 1.5)
2. Find the Caribbean Sea on a map or globe. Locate Jamaica, Haiti, Cuba, Barbados, and Trinidad. (Geography 1.1; Reading 1.5)
3. Read stories about Anansi. (Reading 1.1, 1.4, 3.3)
4. Discuss the meanings of the vocabulary words. (Reading 1.2; Communication 2.4)
5. Review the OJP Theater Etiquette Guide regarding student behavior. (Civics 2.2, 4.1)

## **The Performance Itself** (Arts 1.1, 2.1, 2.3, 3.2)

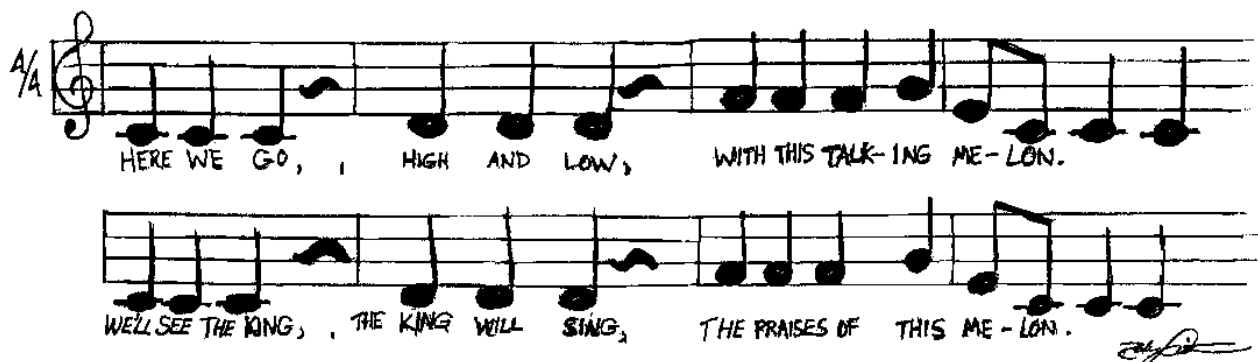
### **During the Performance**

1. Look for clues in the set about where the story takes place. (Arts 4.4)
2. Count the number of drums that are used during the performance. Are the drums all the same or are they different kinds? (Arts 2.1)
3. Learn the song in the play about the melon. Sing it with the characters in the play.

### **After the Performance**

1. Divide into small groups and do reports on the different animals from the play. Working as a group, draw a picture of the animal. List things about each animal and tell how it is different from Anansi. (Writing 1; Communication 2.2, 2.4, 3.2, 3.3; Art 1.4)
2. Make a WEB about Anansi (as a class or individually). Put Anansi in the center and then put descriptive words about Anansi around the outside of the web. (Writing 2.2)
3. Sing the melon song you learned during the play. (Located on bottom of page.)
4. Create simple drums and beat out different rhythms. Pound a rhythm on desks or tables that repeats the percussive sound in the play. (Arts 3.1)
5. Sing the song again with the percussive sound. (Arts 3.1)
6. Raffi has a song about Anansi on one of his albums (Raffi (CD) The Corner Grocery Store, 1976). Find this song and listen to it. (Arts 2.1)
7. Create your own puppets of Anansi or the other animals from the play. (Arts 1.4)
8. Learn more about the animals of Africa mentioned but not represented in the play: gazelle, cheetah and giraffe (Science 1.3)
9. Tell what you did or didn't like about the play, the characters, costumes, or set. Send letters or pictures to Olympia Junior Programs, P.O. Box 1371 Olympia, WA 98507-1371 (Writing 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.2, 3.2; Communications 1.3; Arts 1.5, 2.3)

## **THE TALKING MELON SONG**



The content of this study guide was provided to Olympia Junior Programs by Tears of Joy Theatre, with the exception of: What to Expect During the Play; Before the Performance 4 & 5; The Performance Itself; After the Performance 8 & 9 and all EALR references.

Visit Tears of Joy Theatre on the web at: [www.tojt.com](http://www.tojt.com)

This OJP study guide is also on our website. Visit us on the web at [www.olympiajuniorprograms.com](http://www.olympiajuniorprograms.com)