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THÉÂTRE À L'ENVERS
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3 - 8
years

Photo: Isabelle Stephen

MWANA and the turtle's secret

www.theatrealenvers.ca

STUDY GUIDE

The mission of Théâtre À l'Envers

Established in 2007, Théâtre à l'Envers (TAE) seeks to develop original plays based on a process that incorporates artistic and drama art forms such as shadow theatre, puppets, video, mask and dance. TAE hopes to offer unique theatre performances in which image theatre and puppetry offer an added dimension, both playful and poetic. *Mwana and the turtle's secret* is the company's fourth original production.



Photo: Isabelle Stephen

Play summary

Based on a popular African story tale, *Mwana and the turtle's secret* chronicles the hardships experienced in a small African village that has to deal with a monster thief who loots the food warehouse every day. One day, a little girl named Mwana proposes to the chief that she get rid of the monster. How can a little girl go up against a monster that nobody has managed to stop? How will she reach her goal? Does she have a secret or a power that the villagers know nothing about? Such is the premise of the story tale staged with shadows and puppets, all of which help revisit Aesop's fable: "A mouse may be of service to a lion".

Video link

Trailer : <https://vimeo.com/477997968>



Illustration: Steve Beshwaty

Creative Team

Ideator: Patricia Bergeron, Patience Bonheur Fayulu Mupolonga, Marie-Ève Lefebvre and Steve Beshwaty

Text and adaptation: Patricia Bergeron in collaboration with Patience Bonheur Fayulu Mupolonga

Director: Patricia Bergeron

Assistant director: Marie-Ève Lefebvre

Performers: Robine Epanda Kaseka Kia and Patricia Bergeron

Set and costume designer: Fanny Bisailon Gendron

Illustrations, visuals and mask: Steve Beshwaty

Puppets and mask: Salim Hammad

Shadow theatre: Marie-Ève Lefebvre

Lighting: Mathieu Marcil

Music: Dumisizwe Vuyo Bhembe



Preparing for the performance

To better prepare the youngsters for their theatre outing, we suggest activities that educators, workshop leaders and teachers can adapt to their group.

Discussion: the oral tradition

Mwana and the turtle's secret is like most story tales, i.e. an imaginary adventure designed to have audiences think about the place of children in our society.

Mwana and the turtle's secret is adapted from a Congolese story tale originating in oral tradition. It is called Satonge-Bia.



Photo: Michel Pinault

You can suggest to children that they take a world map and find out where Africa and more specifically the Democratic Republic of Congo are.

Oral tradition (story tales) is very important in African culture, but also in other cultures across the world. Traditionally it is intended to pass on the history, beliefs and customs of a country or a community from one generation to the next.

In the African tradition, the storyteller is called a "griot". This character is very important. At a time when writing not yet existed, the griot's function was to orally pass on the history and values of the community.

In most African countries, the griot function was reserved for the members of a specific family (man or woman) from generation to generation.

In this play, there is no griot. The actor-puppeteers play the role of the storyteller by relating the story through words and images and using puppets, shadows and objects.

Reviewing the play

Here are a few questions that can help children remember a number of visual details in the play.

What language does the painter and sculptor speak in the play?

Answer: Lingala

Lingala is one of the languages spoken in Republic of the Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo, two countries in Central Africa. To differentiate the two countries, the Republic of the Congo is called Congo-Brazzaville (Brazzaville being its capital city) while the Democratic Republic of Congo is called RDC or Congo-Kinshasa (Kinshasa being its capital city).

Reference: Wikipédia.



According to the storyteller, what does Mwana mean in lingala?

Answer: Mwana means "child". Mwana is also the name given to the little puppet girl.

What is the turtle's name?

Answer: Koba

In lingala, Koba means "turtle".

In what ways is Satongué (the monster) visually depicted?

Answer:

- a) as a silhouette (a hairy hand with nails grabbing a fish to eat it);
- b) as a silhouette showing the silhouette of Satongué's head;
- c) as a very large mask worn by the storyteller at the end of the performance.

What is the famous secret the turtle knows about?

Answer: Koba knows that Satongué loves eating mangosteens.

Where does Mwana find the fruit that helps her save her village?

Answer: in the forest at the top of a mangosteen tree (the tree that produces mangosteens).

How did Mwana manage to catch the monster?

Answer: She made him believe that there were mangosteens under the shell of the turtle in order for him to slip his hands under the shell and as a result be immobilized.

How was the village chief visually depicted in the play?

Answer:

- a) by using stacked baskets and a paint brush as arms;
- b) through the acting of the friend of the storyteller who wears an African piece of cloth over his shoulder.

What solutions did the village chief unsuccessfully offer to fight the forest monster?

- a) positioning the strongest man in front of the food warehouse of the village;
- b) positioning 3 men in front of the warehouse at night (represented by the paint tubes);
- c) getting the most ferocious lion in from the savanna.

In the play, is Satongué really mean?

Answer: No, he is mostly hungry and very fond of food.

What was the solution that the villagers found to end the pillaging of the warehouse after Mwana managed to capture Satongué?

- a) to adopt it and as a result keep an eye on the entrance to the village;
- b) to give it mangosteens to thank it for its services.

What was your favorite part of the performance?

Which character did you like the most? And why?

Would you like to draw them and send your scanned drawing to the people at Théâtre À l'Envers?

You can do so by sending it to the following address: info@theatrealenvers.ca

Activities prior to or after the performance

Building a shadow-theatre silhouette

With the characters in the play as a starting point, children will be asked to build a shadow-theatre silhouette and explore its expressive qualities using a lamp, a flashlight, the sunlight or the sun.

Using the patterns of Koba (the turtle in the play) and another character in the play, the children are asked to build a shadow-theatre silhouette.

We also encourage you to suggest that children create their own characters from a drawing and build a silhouette that will become a shadow puppet.



Photo: Michel Pinault

Required material :

- a silhouette template to cut out
- a wooden stick by puppet (kebab type)
- hot glue, glue gun or tape
- cereal boxes, cookies or handkerchiefs.

Production stages

1. Trace the character by drawing its contour using the cut-out model on a cardboard or a box of cereal. It is also possible to draw directly on the cardboard if the child is creating the character.
2. Cut out the character.
3. Fasten the cardboard silhouette on a wooden stick using hot glue or scotch tape on.
4. Experiment shadow puppeteering using a flashlight (projecting shadows on the wall, ceiling, floor or a screen, such as a curtain or a large sheet).







Percussion Workshop

The tam-tam manufacturing workshop has a purpose to allow participants to manufacture their own drum from recycled material. Then, there is a teacher or an adult, the participants can then be reproduced and rhythmic and thus be their group cohesion.

In Mwana and the turtle's secret, two kinds of percussion are presented. The first tam-tam is called *ngoma* or *mbonda*. It is a percussion originating from Central Africa. Made in a hollow tree trunk, this drum is characterized by the fact that the skin of goat, beef or cow is fixed by nails. The skin is stretched by the heat, working it over a small fire, and not by ropes. In addition, the sound varies depending on the diameter and the height of the instrument. The second percussion used in the piece is the *djembe*, from West Africa. It is also made from a tree trunk and the skin of the animal is stretched by ropes.

The second part of the workshop is the creation of a homemade tam-tam.

From a tin of coffee or paint or baby milk powder, open the box at both ends using a can opener. Then, cut a plastic bag to cover one or both ends of the container. Attach the bag using large elastics. Be sure to tighten the bag. Then, using a wooden stick (Chinese chopsticks or small wooden studs), create percussion rods by adding at the end of the rolled elastics forming a small ball.



Ngoma or Mbonda
(Democratic Republic of Congo and Republic of the Congo, Central Africa).



Djembé
(West Africa).



Required material:

- metal can (coffee pot, paint can, etc.)
- plastic bag (grocery bag)
- long rubber band
- small elastics
- 2 wooden sticks or 2 chinese sticks
- scissors
- can opener
- hammer



Here is a mbonda made from recycled materials

Workshops given by the artists in class

Théâtre À l'Envers offers introductory shadow theater workshops. It is also possible to finance this activity through the Culture à l'École program.

See the link below for more informations:

<https://cultureeducation.mcc.gouv.qc.ca/repertoire/30382> (Artist: Patricia Bergeron)
and <http://www.theatrealenvers.ca/TAE/ateliers/>



Hand-Crafted percussion workshop and play: contact the company



Photos: Maison de la culture Rosemont



Contact :

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