

Created by

THÉÂTRE À L'ENVERS

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Photo: Michel Pinault

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: Michel Pinault

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".



Illustration: Steve Beshwaty

The Creative Team

Ideator

Patricia Bergeron, Patience Bonheur Fayulu Mupolonga,
in cooperation with Marie-Ève Lefebvre and Steve Beshwaty

Text and adaptation

Patricia Bergeron in cooperation with
Patience Bonheur Fayulu Mupolonga

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Performers

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Illustrations, visuals and mask

Steve Beshwaty

Set and Costume Designer

Fanny Bisailon Gendron

Lighting Designer

Mathieu Marcil

Shadow Theatre

Marie-Ève Lefebvre

Music

Dumisizwe Vuyo Bhembe

Puppets and mask

Salim Hammad



Photo: Michel Pinault

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.

Introduction to oral tradition (talk).

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.



Photo: Michel Pinault

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

- *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.

Activities prior to or after the performance

Building a shadow-theatre silhouette

Required material: a silhouette cut-out, a (skewer type) wooden stick per puppet, hot glue, a glue gun or scotch tape, a box of cereal, cookies or tissue.

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.



Photo: Michel Pinault

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 on a drawing and build a silhouette that will become a shadow puppet.

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).





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).

Source: Wikipedia.



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

Percussion Workshop

The percussion workshop is designed to help participants play together, learn to listen to others and create rhythms helping to develop group cohesion.

Part 1

The first part of the workshop consists in understanding how a tom-tom is produced. Two types of percussion are shown, i.e. the Ngoma or Mbonda tom-tom that comes from Central Africa. Made from a hollow log, the tom-tom is made with the skin of a goat, a bull or a cow and fastened with nails. Heat tightens the skin as it is worked over a small fire. No ropes are used. In addition, the sound varies depending on the diameter and height of the instrument. As for the West African djembe, it is also made from a log and the skin of the animal is tightened with ropes. One last tom-tom is also shown. It is made by the participant him/herself from a recycled can of metal, a plastic grocery (type) bag and elastics that the individual puts together.



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



Djembé
(West Africa).



Photo: Patience Bonheur Fayulu Mupolonga

Part 2

The second part of the workshop consists in creating a handmade tom-tom.

Open a metal coffee, paint or powdered-milk can at both ends with a can opener. Cut out a plastic bag and cover one or both ends of the can. Tie the bag using large elastics. Make sure the bags fit tightly. Then using a wood sticks (Chinese chopsticks or small wood pins), create percussion sticks by rolling the elastics into a ball at the end of the sticks.



Mbonda (made with recycled material)



Part 3

The third and last part of the workshop consists in creating various sounds and rhythms with your own instrument. Split the class into small groups of four, five or six students and ask them to create specific rhythms. Then like an orchestra leader, direct the groups so they take turns playing, answering another group or overlaying certain sounds by varying the pitch (playing louder or softer, going faster or slower etc.).

To top off the activity, we suggest you review it with the students and evaluate if they understand the sequences of rhythms and sounds they produced. You could for instance ask them their impression and appreciation of the sound sequences as well as the ambiances created and find out what they liked the most.

The workshop can be shorter or longer. It can be offered by Patience Bonheur Fayulu Mupolonga before or after the performance.

Short workshop : 1h (without making tom-toms)

Long workshop : (1:45 h) (introduction to percussions and creation of a handmade tom-tom)



Photos: Maison de la culture Rosemont



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