



Classroom Guide

Title: **Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters**

Author: **John Steptoe**

Illustrator: **John Steptoe**

Theme: By celebrating the African heritage of Black Americans, we learn about cultural traditions and see how these traditions have shaped the culture of America.

Program Summary: This is an African tale of two beautiful daughters (one bad-tempered, one kind and sweet) from which the king will choose a wife. In New York City's Central Park, LeVar learns how African drums are made and plays some authentic African instruments. Finally, he joins in the festival fun with an African dance troupe called Forces of Nature.

Topics for Discussion:

Nyasha and Manyara had very different personalities, even though they were sisters. Discuss ways in which students are both alike and different from their siblings.

Invite students to share an incident in which they disagreed with their brother or sister and tell how they resolved the problem.

Discuss why learning about the music, dance, art, stories, and customs of many different cultures is important in today's world.

Curriculum Extension Activities:

Locate Africa on a map of the world and then find the country of Zimbabwe, the setting of this story.

Have students working in small groups make a map of the story. Beginning with Mufaro's village, they will need to recall details from the story that relate to both the setting and events and decide which are the most important to include. Display the maps in the classroom and use them to review the story.

Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters is a folktale. Good vs. evil (as in the contrast between the two sisters) is a classic motif, or pattern, of folktales. Tell students about other motifs in folktales, such as the inclusion of magical objects in the story, magical transformations that take place, the appearance of the numbers 3 and 7 in the story (in characters, events, trials, places, etc.), and a long sleep. Have them identify motifs that appear in this story. Discuss other familiar folktales that include some of these motifs.

As a class, do character analyses of Manyara and Nyasha by making "character wheels." On the board or on a large piece of chart paper, write Manyara's name in the



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center of a circle. On spokes radiating from this circle, write words that describe her. At the end of each spoke, draw another circle. In that circle, write an event from the story that provides evidence of the descriptive word written on its spoke. Make the same kind of wheel for Nyasha. Compare and contrast the descriptive words for both characters.

Invite members of a band or orchestra who play percussion instruments, including different types of drums, to bring their instruments into the classroom. Have them demonstrate the sounds created by their instruments and explain their function in the orchestra.

Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters is an example of a "Cinderella" story. There are hundreds of variants of Cinderella from different cultures. Obtain several Cinderella stories and read them to the students. (See the "Supplementary Booklist" for suggested titles.) Brainstorm a comparison chart with the students. List the different versions of Cinderella down the left side of the chart. Across the top, list items of comparison, such as the story setting, what the Cinderella character is called, who or what the "fairy godmother" is, under what circumstance Cinderella meets the prince, the magical elements in the story, the outcome, etc. Discuss the similarities and differences of the versions after the chart is completed.

Book Reviews:

Who's in Rabbit's House? by Verna Aardema, pictures by Leo and Diane Dillon

Jambo Means Hello: Swahili Alphabet Book by Muriel Feelings, pictures by Tom Feelings

Jafta by Hugh Lewin, illustrated by Lisa Kopper

Supplementary Booklist:

The Egyptian Cinderella by Shirley Climo, illustrated by Ruth Heller

The Korean Cinderella by Shirley Climo, illustrated by Ruth Heller

Yeh-shen: A Cinderella Tale from China retold by Ai-Ling Louie, illustrated by Ed Young

The Rough-face Girl by Rafe Martin, illustrated by David Shannon



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The Talking Eggs: A Folktale from the American South by Robert D. San Souci, illustrated by Jerry Pinkney

Sootface: An Ojibwa Cinderella Story retold by Robert D. San Souci, illustrated by Daniel San Souci

Best Loved Folktales of the World compiled by Joanna Cole

Juan Bobo: Four Folktales from Puerto Rico illustrated by Ernesto Ramos Nieves

The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales by Virginia Hamilton

Her Stories: African American Folktales, Fairy Tales, and True Tales by Virginia Hamilton

More Stories to Solve: Fifteen Folktales from Around the World by George Shannon, illustrated by Peter Sis

Favorite Folktales from Around the World by Jane Yolen

Related Themes:

- world cultures
- folktales
- music

Related Reading Rainbow Programs:

- Program #96 — Follow the Drinking Gourd
- Program #117 — Uncle Jed's Barbershop

About the Author & Illustrator: A native of New York, John Steptoe published his first book, *Stevie*, at age 19 and devoted his career to writing books that he hoped would encourage African-American children to accomplish their dreams. *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* was the result of two-and-a-half years of research and earned Steptoe Caldecott Honor Book recognition. He was also the author of Reading Rainbow review book, *Daddy Is a Monster...Sometimes*.