



Young  
Audiences  
Arts for  
Learning

Northern California

## Curriculum Guide

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# DIANE FERLATTE

## *Wickety Whack, Brer Rabbit is Back*

### Teacher Guide

K-6

### About the Artist

Diane performs in the tradition of the traveling troubadours of the Middle Ages & the Griots of Africa. She has performed in virtually every state in the USA and has toured internationally many times over.

Diane tells true-life personal & historical stories, as well as folktales, legends, myths, and fables. Being fluent in American Sign Language, she frequently incorporates it into her stories along with music and song. While Diane loves to tell stories to adults and families, school performances are what she loves the most. Her main focus is to promote reading-readiness, visual imagery, imagination, and character/moral development.

Each of her recordings is an award winner, including Parents' Choice, American Library Association, National Parenting Publications, and Storytelling World Awards. In 2008 she was a Grammy nominee. Erik Pearson accompanies Diane on banjo & guitar.



### About the Program

Diane will sing songs and tell stories about Brer Rabbit. Brer Rabbit tales come to us from the African American South of the plantation/slavery era. They no doubt emanate from the animal trickster tales of Africa that had the hare, tortoise, & the spider as the tricksters who usually got their comeuppance from their protagonists, the lion, leopard, & elephant. These African tales generally had a strong moral component wherein the trickster gets what's coming to him.

While Brer Rabbit tricks frequently backfire on him also, more often than not he gets away with putting one over on Brer Fox, Brer Bear, & Brer Gator, all more powerful animals than he. It is felt that the weaker animal, Brer Rabbit was able to get away with his tricks because these entertaining tales provided enslaved African Americans with a sense of relief, survival, & overcoming the oppressive conditions of slavery.

## Learning Objectives

- To inform students about the history of trickster tales.
- To educate students regarding the purpose & function of trickster tales for enslaved peoples.
- To laugh & to have fun.
- To introduce students to the joy & art of storytelling.
- To increase students' imagination.
- To increase emotional development (stories provide role models for encountering & overcoming adversity).
- To increase awareness of story form (beginning, middle, end).

## Teacher Preparation for the Program

The four most important things in Africa are music, dance, religion, and storytelling.

- How far is Africa from here? Is Africa a country?
- How long ago was 1619 when Africans were first brought to America as slaves?

### Discuss the Issue of Slavery

- What did it mean to be a slave?
- How long has slavery been abolished?
- What happened to the slaves after they were granted their freedom?
- Were there slaves in California?

### Brer Rabbit the Trickster

- What is a trickster? Many cultures have tricksters in their folktales such as coyote in Native American tales, Anansi the spider in African tales, Bouki in Caribbean tales.
- What is a dialect and how many can you think of?
- What does Brer mean? (Brother in slave dialect)

## Follow-Up Ideas and Activities

### *Learning How to Tell a Story*

The Ingredients:

- The main characters.
- The setting.
- Uh oh! A problem!
- The problem grows.
- Something big happens!
- What is the result? Does anyone learn anything?

The techniques:

- Tell the story in your own way.
- Create sound effects.
- Talk to the audience.
- Show feelings with your face and body.
- Use a different voice for the different characters.
- Practice, but do not memorize everything.
- Most of all, enjoy yourself!

## Be Expressive!

Say the following aloud to your students without expression. (These sentences are not grammatically correct, but Diane tells the stories in dialect)

“ Come here, come here, I got something to show you.”

“ Don't nobody drink from this well but the ones that dig it. Dig it?”

“ I can dance better than I can sing.”

“ Look at these shoes and tell me if these your shoes.”

Invite students to repeat the phrases above and sharpen their storytelling tools by:

- Emphasizing certain words by saying them loudly or softly or changing the speed.
  - Using facial expressions.
  - Adding hand and body movement.
1. Ask the students how Diane makes the stories more interesting and fun than they are in the books. Ask them to give examples.
  2. Have the students select a short story and tell it to the group in their own way, using the methods suggested above. Encourage them to use their imaginations to add and create in the telling—think of Diane's telling.
  3. Have the students tell a story from a personal experience or a family experience using the methods from above.

Some possible story ideas might be:

- My Funniest Mistake.
- The Scariest Moment in My Life
- The Biggest Surprise I Ever Had
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## Story Geography

Maps help us find places, but they can also help us find stories. Look at the map of North America and the map of Africa, two of the primary locations from which Diane draws her tales. Identify a place on these continents and learn a story that originated there or is associated with that particular area. Examples might be: A Native American legend from the Southwest of the U.S., an Eskimo story from Alaska, an African-American folktale from the U.S. South, a French Canadian story from Canada, or a Latino legend from Mexico. Africa is a rich resource with so many countries and so many stories.

## Vocabulary and Key Concepts

Folktale: A story that came from the common people and was handed down from generation to generation; for instance the Brer Rabbit tales were handed down through generations of slaves.

Uncle Remus...Fictional storyteller of Brer Rabbit tales invented by white researcher Joel Chandler Harris & popularized in Walt Disney movie 60 years ago.

Critter...Any animal that lives in the wild.

Croaker Sack...burlap bag or sack used to catch & carry frogs.

Famine...A very serious shortage of food which can lead to starvation.

Trickster..In folklore, usually an animal with human characteristics, who survives by wit & guile by tricking the other animals.

Brer...Word for brother in slave dialect.

Dialect...Different way of pronouncing or using words because of the place or part of the country that the language is spoken.

Lay Low...Phrase in dialect which means hiding, watching, waiting.

Cooter...Tortoise, also called a snapping turtle.

Dew...Small drops of water that form from the air and collect on a surface.

## English-Language Arts Content Standards

This storytelling program meets the VAPA and ELAC standards:

- 1.1 Artistic Perception: storyteller, plot, character, conflict, audience
- 2.1 Creative Expression: students participate in cooperative storytelling and assisting with the storytelling experience
- 3.1 Historical and Cultural Context: students participate in exploring specific aspects of African American historical and cultural experiences

## Resources

Joel Chandler Harris, Uncle Remus, His Songs & Sayings, Penguin Books, 1986

Harold Courlander, *Terrapin's Pot of Sense*, Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1957

Julius Lester, *The Last Tales of Uncle Remus*, Dial Books, 1994

John W. Roberts, *From Trickster to Badman*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989

Priscilla Jaquith & Ed Young, *Bo Rabbit, Smart For True*, Philomel Books, 1995

Florence Baer, *Sources and Analogues of the Uncle Remus Tales*, Folklore Fellows Communications, 1981