

BOXTALES THEATRE COMPANY

DIGITAL ASSEMBLY LEARNING GUIDE

The Lion's Whiskers (Single Story)

Educator notes and prep are all in Blue

In myth and folklore, it can be hard to find a story about a good stepmother. Fairy tales like Cinderella and Hansel and Gretel are important to children trying to reconcile the 'good' and 'bad' aspects of their own mothers. In these times, however, when so many families are trying so hard to 'blend,' such tales can give stepmothers an undeservedly bad name. I hope that this tale can give stepparents and stepchildren some better examples and even tools to navigate these inherent challenges in a healthy way.

STORY SYNOPSIS

The Lions Whiskers (*Amhara Tribe of Ethiopia, Eastern Africa*)

Finaye, a woman past childbearing age, longs for a family of her own. When she marries Tesfa and meets his motherless son Abebe, she is overjoyed. Fanaye tries hard to please the boy, but he wants no part of her. Desperate, Fanaye seeks the wisdom of a shaman a tribal medicine man. He sends her on a mission to gather three whiskers from a fierce lion for a magic potion that will win her Abebe's love. She collects the whiskers very carefully, by slowly gaining the lion's trust. Once obtained, the whiskers are no longer needed, as Fanaye has also learned how she must likewise gain Abebe's trust and love, with patience, respect and discretion.

The following questions or exercises are designed to help generate organic conversation within a group that can support core SEL competencies, (Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills and Responsible Decision-Making), in different age groups. They can however be modified by the instructor to fit their respective groups. Feel free to listen carefully to the students and adapt questions, responses and timing as needed. You may also, borrow suitable questions from other grades if you like.

K-2

What do you think this story was about?
What were you feeling during the story?
Which character/characters did you most relate to? Why?
Did Abebe trust Fanaye?
How did Fanaye finally win Abebe's trust and friendship?

3-4

What do you think the story as about?
What were you feeling during the story?
Which character/characters did you most relate to? Why?

Did Abebe trust Fanaye?

How did Fanaye finally win Abebe's trust and friendship?

What did you learn about building better relationships?

What was the job of the Witch Doctor?

5-6

What do you think the story is about?

What were you feeling during the story?

Which character/characters did you most relate to? Why?

Did Abebe trust Fanaye?

How did Fanaye finally win Abebe's trust and friendship?

What did you learn about building better relationships?

Do you ever fight with your mom or dad? What are some things you could do differently to build a better relationship with them?

What was the job of the Witch Doctor?

5-6 Extensions:

Have the students write a journal entry on a family situation that has been difficult for them.

Matty: I wrote the following to address the death issue, but after developing the rest, I'm not even sure we need it. Maybe it's best not even to open the can of worms. Your thoughts?

“Some of the biggest value of these old myths and folktales, is that through presentational style, the use of animal characters or the fact that they are often fantastical in nature, will often be able to deal with the most complicated and difficult human issues and therefore help people process and make sense of tragedy when it strikes, but dealing directly with the death of a parent in an educational setting could prove too complicated. Therefore, we recommend letting the story do its work with regard to these issues and for the purposes of this program focus on Fanaye. Fanaye traditionally would be the protagonist here, as she initiates the action, goes on a journey and is transformed in the process. However, many students may identify with Abebe. He is like them, a child, is the first character, has suffered loss and is also transformed. Generally, we focus on Fanaye and just remain open to the students cues for anything else. Students seem to have an innate sense of what they can handle and what not to venture into.”

Vocabulary:

- **Wat-** Ethiopian's national dish, a hot spicy soup.
- **Shammas-** Sandals made with leather
- **Injera-** Large spongy pancakes eaten with wat
- **Timket-** Biggest holiday of the year in Ethiopia

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Lion's Whiskers by Len Cabral & **The Black Prince** by Laura Simms can be found in the collection Ready to Tell Tales (August House) edited by David Holt and Bill Mooney, 1994. This book has great tellable tales.

The Lion's Whiskers

The Lion's Whiskers: An Ethiopian Folktale, Nancy Raines Day, Scholastic Press Inc. New York, 1995