

# Robbi Kumalo

## THE TURTLE'S SHELL

### Meet the Storyteller



**Robbi Kumalo** is known across the nation for her enthusiastic and contagious performances, Robbi K keeps audiences enthralled with her storytelling, singing, dancing and more. The compelling music sets the tone, but Robbi K's stunning voice, facial expressions and dynamic interchanges with her audiences make her a family favorite. She speaks and sings in Spanish, French, German and Italian and incorporates a host of accents, dialects and idioms in Zulu.

When singing for television commercials, animated voiceovers, classroom workshops, recording sessions, club dates or on the theatrical stage, Robbi Kumalo is a natural. As a child growing up on eastern Long Island, she sang and recited selections in church and took dance and piano lessons. She got her first and lasting taste of children's theatre in 1981 when she composed and produced a family performance for a local university. Although she now concentrates on working with and performing for youth and families, Robbi K has recorded and/or performed with Chaka Khan, Aretha Franklin, Vieux Diop, Eileen Ivers, Daniel Rodriguez, Deepak Chopra, Michael Amante, John Hiatt, Arif Mardin, Bakithi Kumalo, Jewel, Diana Ross, Rod Stewart, Mary J. Blige and Harry Belafonte, among others.

Robbi K's more than 20-year career has been greatly inspired by family. In fact, her company, BaliDali Productions Inc., is a tribute to her daughters Mbali and Daliswa. She and her husband, Bakithi Kumalo, a Grammy-winning bassist, often perform together.

In addition to live performances, Robbi is a teaching artist with the Lincoln Center Institute and C.W. Post Institute for Aesthetic Education and a professional voice over artist. Robbi also performs jazz concerts as well with her band, KUMALO - jazz flavored with South African bass.



### Performing Arts: Meeting Arizona Arts & Academic Standards

The learning activities in this study guide address specific standards to assist classroom teachers in integrating the performance to meet Arizona Arts and Academic Standards. The specific standards will be noted in a text box accompanying learning activities.

\*using updated state standards\*



### Theatre Etiquette

YOU, the audience, are the most important part of any live theatre event. Performers depend on you to:

- ☺ Remain seated
- ☺ Listen
- ☺ Refrain from talking during the performance
- ☺ Laugh when something in the show is funny
- ☺ Clap to show appreciation

Please turn off cell phones, pagers, and other devices. Cameras and other recording devices are prohibited.

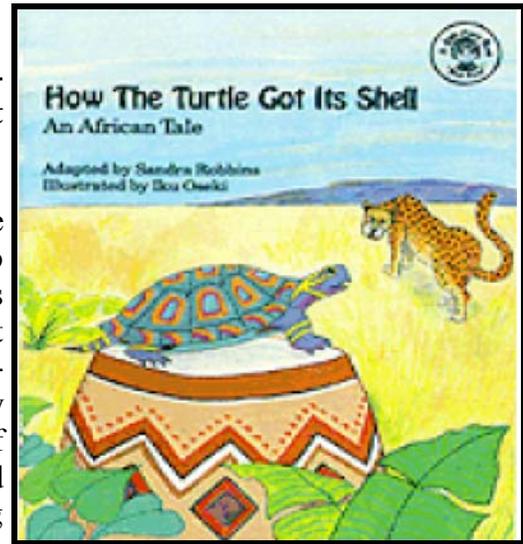
**Demonstrate respectful audience behavior.**

*Arizona Theatre Standards,  
Strand 3: Concept 2.*

## About the Story

**Parents' Choice Award winning storyteller Robbi K presents the West African folktale about how The Turtle Got Its Shell.**

Synopsis: This is a tale about a little turtle that outwits a fierce leopard and is rewarded with a shell, a home of his own to carry on his back wherever he goes. As in *How the Animals Got Their Colors*, his is another "How" creation myth that tells of a time when the animals were not yet finished; the turtle does not yet have his hard protective shell. Nyame, the Sky God, wants to have a great festival and needs the drum of Osebo, the Leopard, in order to call everyone to come and feast and dance at his able. He asks the animals to bring Osebo's drum to him.



Both Tembo, the mighty Elephant and Kinyanga, the swift Ostrich, try to get it. But Osebo is fierce and powerful, and they cannot take his drum. Then Akykiegie the Turtle tells Nyame that he will try. No one believes that the little turtle can do it, but they're willing to let him try.

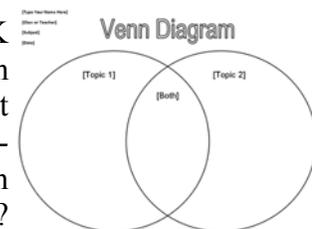
And so Akykiegie, using his wits, teases Osebo, the Leopard, telling him his drum is not as large as Nyame's, that it is not large enough for him to crawl into. Trying to show off and prove the turtle wrong, Osebo squeezes himself into the drum and gets stuck. Akykiegie rolls the drum, with Osebo trapped inside, all the way back to Nyame, the Sky God.

He presents not only the drum to Nyame, but Osebo himself! Nyame asks the little turtle what he would like in return. Akykiegie the Turtle asks for a hard shell to protect his back from the sharpness of the claws of Osebo the Leopard. And that is the creation story of how the turtle got its shell. The theme of this story is that in life, wits may be more powerful than size or strength. This is an important lesson for children who may feel vulnerable, yet can be clever and know how to accomplish many things.

## Suggested Activities

### Before the Show

By telling the story of *How the Turtle Got its Shell* to an audience, Robbi K brings the book to life on stage. Ask the students what other works of fiction have been adapted to theatre, film, dance, or musicals. Use an example that many students have both seen and read such as *Harry Potter*, *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, and *Beauty and the Beast*. Incorporate list making and Venn Diagrams to describe the book, film, etc. In what ways are they the same? How are they different?



**Extract information from graphic organizers (e.g. webs, Venn diagrams, flow charts) to comprehend text.**  
 Arizona Language Arts Standard 1: Reading, Strand 1: Reading process, Concept 6: Comprehension Strategies.  
 PO 5.

In preparation for writing a critical review of the performance afterwards, have students look at newspaper or magazine review of movies they have seen. Discuss the elements of a written review. What should they be thinking about during the performance so that they can write a review of *How the Turtle Got its Shell*.

**Develop criteria to analyze, interpret, and evaluate a play script..**

*Arizona Arts Standard: Theatre, Strand 3: Evaluate, Concept 4: Playwriting. PO 201.*

Read books on African animals, the geography of the African continent, as well as *Anasi the Spider* and other African folk tales.

### After the Show

Discuss the story's characters, their emotions and motivations. What does it feel like to be defensive and angry? How does this affect the others around you? Are the animals in the story clever? Why is it so hard to confront Osebo the leopard? Is Akykeigie afraid? Does the leopard think about what he is doing or feel that he is part of his community?

**Infer a character's motivations and emotions and predict future actions.**

*Arizona Arts Standard: Theatre, Strand 2: Relate, Concept 2: Acting.*

Storytellers use movement and facial expressions to bring their words to life. Encourage students to describe something nonverbally using only the body to convey a message.

Create a new story about the what would happen if the turtle encountered the leopard again in the jungle!

**Write a creative story that includes a plot and show the reader what happens through well developed characters, setting, dialog and themes, and uses figurative language, descriptive words, and phrases.**

*Arizona Language Arts Standard: Writing, Strand 3: Writing Applications, Concept 1: Expressive. PO1.*

Challenge the students to invent a new situation for the story by having other animals ask for the drum, or what would happen if the animals went in groups.

Have the students discuss Robbi K's use of music and props for the production. Did using these things make the story different? How would the story have felt without music? Without props? Did the music make the storytelling more or less effective?

Have students write a review of the performance as if they were writing for a newspaper. What aspects of the performance impressed them the most? Why? Was there any part they did not like? Why?

**Use Developed criterion to analyze a variety of dramatic works according to style, genre, dramatic elements and character.**

*Arizona Arts Standard: Theatre, Strand 3: Evaluate, Concept 4: Playwriting. PO 203.*



## STORYTELLING

Storytelling is a great way for students to practice the skills of balanced literacy, and when dramatic elements are added, they can be fun as well. The following sections offer some ideas and activities.

**The Storytelling Circle:** Make a space in the classroom where students can move or sit in a circle. Do these activities soon after they see the show. It is a good way to test your students' sequencing skills, and it provides them with an opportunity to reflect on the themes of the play and express them creatively. Storytelling empowers children with the ability to know, own and share a story.

- Character Circle:** Each child has a chance to go into the center of the circle. They mime their favorite character from the story without telling the class which it is. The rest of the class guesses which character they are portraying.

- Circle telling:** The class sits in a circle. Each student gets to tell one sentence of the story, starting at the beginning and adding on until everyone has had a turn or the story is finished.

Remember, in *The Turtle's Shell*, the story was told orally and musically by the storyteller, as well as by the chants, songs and movements. When telling the story in the circle, add an element of sound with instruments, voices, and movement. If you have rhythm instruments in the classroom, use them, or/and you can make simple rhythm instruments such as shakers by putting beans in covered containers, or make maracas. Percussive drumming sounds can be made by hitting two wooden blocks against each other, or drumming on a block, or your hand, or a piece of wood, or against a desk or book, or a box. Make drumming sounds with your body parts by clapping your hands together; different sounds can be made, depending upon whether your palms are cupped, flat, or fingers are hitting against the palm. Make snapping sounds with your fingers, or slapping sounds by hitting your hand against your leg. Or make many different rhythmic sounds with your voice. These are just a few ideas that can be improvised spontaneously.

Different methods of telling the story:

1. You can start with just the verbal telling of the story, and a discussion of its meaning.
2. Second go round you can add instrumentation. This could be done by assigning specific people to play the music and others to tell the story.
3. You can add movement in the center of the storytelling circle by letting some choose which animal they would like to portray.
4. You could also create a puppet play with simple finger puppets of the animals, stick puppets of the animals, simple paper plate puppets, and even shadow puppets.
5. Perhaps as a creative writing assignment, the students could compose stories that use animals as speaking characters. Pick a few of these compositions and try to dramatize them. It is very challenging to transform a story into a play. These are just a few ideas. Use your uniqueness come up with your own original story idea. Mostly make it fun!

**Sequence a series of events in a literary selection heard or read.**

*Arizona Language Arts Standard 1: Reading, Strand 2: Comprehending Literature, Concept 1: Elements of literature. PO 3.*

### Talking Drums Fun Fact:

Throughout Africa the talking drum has been used as a telephone or telegraph. Even though there are now modern communication systems, drums are still used in ritual and ceremony. One type of drum has strings around the outside. When the drummer squeezes the drum, the skin is drawn tighter, and the pitch changes. In African languages, each word has its proper sound. The drum can mimic these sounds and truly communicate.

**Check out our NEW website!!!**



**Resources**

The Creative and Performing Arts department takes great pride in providing resources for district employees. Material such as artifacts, exhibits, books, art prints, process kits, and lesson ideas are available for circulation. Log on to our website for detailed views and descriptions of the items sampled below.



**Culture Exhibit** – For display only. Wooden display box housing various artifacts from each culture or era. Each country/era has multiple exhibits to choose from.



**Art Prints** - Large selection of prints available for you to check out and display in your class.



**Culture Kit** – Cardboard box containing artifacts from each culture/era for a more hands on experience. Only one kit per country/era.



**Process Kit** – Cardboard box containing a variety of curriculum based activities with directions and examples.



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