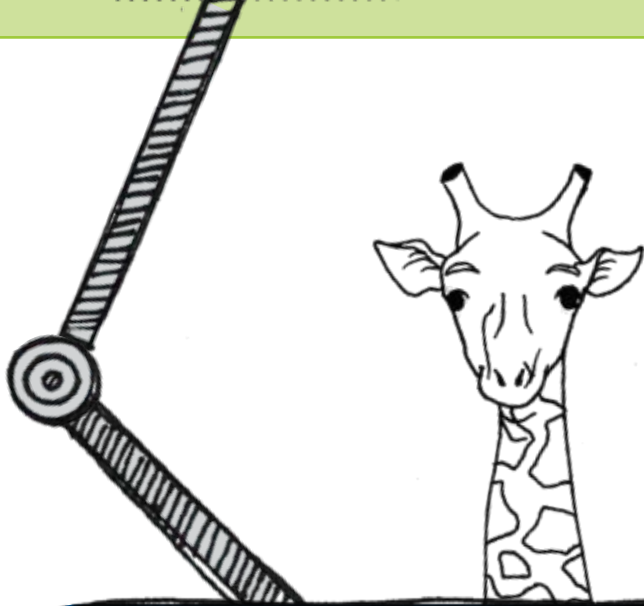




2010-11 HOT Season for Young People Teacher Guidebook

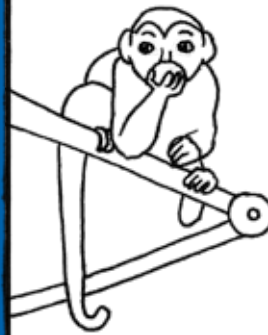


Before the People Came

The Amun Ra Theatre



PHOTO BY DAVID MCCLISTER



Tennessee Performing Arts Center



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DEAR TEACHERS,

Prepare for a treat! Amun Ra Theatre's *Before the People Came* will delight both you and your students with its lively story, language, movement and music. The playwright, Dr. Jeff Obafemi Carr, calls the piece a "jazz choreopoem", implying the fusion of all these elements into one unified genre.

We have included a plot summary for your use, but we ask that you don't share all the details, or the ending with students. The show is very accessible and has many fun surprises for them including the excellent plans of the trickster character, Rabbit.

A TalkBack is included in the performance time, so please encourage your students to ask questions. The cast will not be able to answer everyone, but the experience of seeing the actors as themselves will be an exciting one for young children.

We have a quick note about the spelling of the playwright's name. He capitalizes the abbreviation of doctor, "Dr.", with respect to others who hold that title. After a meaningful transition in his life, he chose to use lowercase letters for his personal name as a reminder of the need to be humble.

We know you will enjoy the show!

TPAC EDUCATION



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Guidebook compiled and written
by Lattie Brown with thanks
to Braden Bell and Jeff Carr

A note from our Sponsor ~ Regions Bank



For over 125 years Regions has been proud to be a part of the Middle Tennessee community, growing and thriving as our area has. From the opening of our doors on September 1, 1883, we have committed to this community and our customers.

One area that we are strongly committed to is the education of our students. We are proud to support TPAC's Humanities Outreach in Tennessee Program. What an important sponsorship this is – reaching over 25,000 students and teachers – some students would never see a performing arts production without this program. Regions continues to reinforce its commitment to the communities it serves and in addition to supporting programs such as HOT, we have close to 200 associates teaching financial literacy in classrooms this year.

Thank you, teachers, for giving your students this wonderful opportunity. They will certainly enjoy the experience. You are creating memories of a lifetime, and Regions is proud to be able to help make this opportunity possible.



Jim Schmitz
Executive Vice President
Area Executive
Middle Tennessee Area

PLOT SUMMARY



SETTING:

Afrika (spelling from the script)

TIME:

Before creativity made people, when animals spoke.



CHARACTERS:

Griot (The Storyteller)	Tortoise
Eagle	Giraffe
Owl	Rabbit
Elephant	Tiger
Monkey	Snakes

Before the People Came opens with animals filling the stage: Monkey, Giraffe, Elephant, Eagle, Owl, and Turtle. An African Griot calls the audience to hear a story about the animals and the drought. The animals begin to wander listlessly from hunger and thirst. They sing of their misery in the song “Heat”. They cannot figure out a way to solve the problem, but they try hard, proposing several unworkable solutions with the song “The Think Groove”.

Along comes Rabbit, who has been out scouting for water. She has good news and bad news, reporting that she has located no water but has found a pear tree which could stop both hunger and thirst. Unfortunately, there is a tiger guarding the tree and hoarding the pears all to himself. By now the animals feel so terrible that they immediately despair. They try brainpower, singing “The Think Groove” once more, and this time Rabbit thinks of a plan. She reviews all the gifts and strengths of each animal, and decides they will create the one thing they are all wishing for---a rainstorm.

Rabbit travels back to the pear tree, walks right up to Tiger, and begins flattering him. Tiger easily agrees with her with the song “The Right Stuff”. Rabbit shows her appreciation, but hurries away, dropping a hint about the dreaded MA-HEE-HEE-HAH. Tiger stops her short with questions about the MA-HEE-HEE-HAH, and she blithely tells him of the biggest storm in history. The animals begin to make the storm. Eagle and Owl make the wind, Elephant makes the thunder and the shaking of the ground, Monkey makes the screaming of the wind, and with Turtle, the beginnings of the heavy rain. Rabbit tells Tiger she must hurry to tie herself and the other animals down with a vine so that they will not be blown away by the MA-HEE-HEE-HAH. Tiger becomes frightened and demands that Rabbit make him safe instead by tying him to the pear tree. She does!

Once Tiger is tied, to his amazement, Rabbit stops the storm and brings all the other animals out into the open. They tell Tiger how wrong he was to try to keep all the pears for himself and even share a pear with him as he leaves. The animals sing the anthem “ It’s Not Mine”, and the African Griot returns to finish the story and recount its lessons.



Set in Africa when animals could still talk and before humans had come to earth, *Before the People Came* is an adaptation of an African folk tale, an oral tale that was handed down by generations of storytellers (or, as they are called in Africa, Griots) long before it was ever written. It is a play that is both simple and complex: the simple plot contains layers of rich symbolism and meaning.



Rajabi Chiwaya, *Gold Spot Tiger* -Tingatinga art

One key to the play is diversity. On a basic level, this play shows a group of creatures- each of whom has a special ability or skill. However, the individual skills of the creatures are not enough for them to overcome an obstacle they encounter. They learn that while no one creature can do everything, the combination of all their different abilities is powerful enough to accomplish great things.

This idea of diversity is reflected not only in the themes of the play, but in the play's structure as well. Indeed, Jeff Obafemi Carr, the director and playwright, calls the play a "true dramatic exercise in diversity." For example, in crafting the dialogue of the play, Carr was inspired by the meter and rhythm of African-American music styles such as Rhythm and Blues and Jazz, in fact, he describes the play as "Jazz in motion." He was also inspired by a modern African-American playwright named Ntozake Shange who developed a style she referred to as a choreopoem, a dramatic form composed of integrated movement and speech.

Underneath this simple, basic level are deeper meanings as well. Carr adapted this play from several folk tales, all of which contained similar motifs. Folk tales are a special kind of story. Found in every culture the world around, folk tales contain the accumulated wisdom and experience of a people. The tales are told, handed down as oral stories for generations, and then eventually they are written down. In Africa, the tales were told by griots. A griot (Gree-oh) was a special historian, who kept a mental record of local historical events, such as births and deaths, as well as sacred stories. The griots were so full of knowledge that it was said that when a griot died, a library burned to the ground.

~With thanks to Nashville Children's Theatre and Braden Bell for the use of this article.



Folk tales frequently make use of symbols to teach and instruct us. In carr's words, the theme of the play is this----All of us are different. We are born with our unique shapes, sizes and gifts. Instead of stressing the differences, we should figure out ways for us to come together and accomplish goals that will help us all.

Below, the playwright/ director carr explains the symbolic meanings of various elements of the play. The valuable lessons translate easily into language and concepts for younger children.

TRANSLATED FOR
YOUNG CHILDREN:

THE ANIMALS

The animals in the play represent the differences that exist among people in the world. The brilliant griots utilized animals because, metaphorically, they demonstrate the very stark differences that can exist among creatures. However, even with the differences, we see that life is a grand orchestra of its own. Each animal is a different creature with special skills and abilities. Think of the animals as instruments, unique in shape, size and sound. Although each animal can create its own music, that music is made sweeter when all the different instruments come together and create harmonious sounds. In this case, as is the case with many tales, "creatures" really represent human beings. Many stories are told utilizing animals to represent differing human moods and personalities. The reconciling of the issues for the animals offers the audience the opportunity to apply learned principles to similar situations in their own life.

*Differences
make us
special.*

THE DROUGHT

The drought is symbolic of life's general struggles, which strengthen us and build character. Note that the drought is a naturally occurring phenomena, something that is simply a part of life. The lesson here is that one cannot avoid struggles and challenges. What matters most is our response to the challenges; how we move through the antagonistic forces in the paths we choose to walk. In this piece, there is a symbiotic relationship between two antagonists: the drought and the tiger.

*Difficulties
help us be
strong and
smart.*

THE TIGER

The Tiger represents the immediate obstacles we encounter, obstacles which seem impossible to overcome. This force stands in the way of reaching the goal(s) we strive for. We all face this type of obstacle in some shape or form. This major obstacle invokes feelings of fear and anxiety, insecurity and despair and even hopelessness. And yet, the obstacle also reminds us just how close we are to our goal, a realization which can either depress us or inspire us to be creative.

*Keep
trying
and you
can do it.*



THE STORM

The Storm (a.k.a. “The Ma-hee-hee-hah”) is representative of both chaos and collaboration, hence the infusion of the jazz element even further into the symbolism of the work. In its normal definition, the storm is a disturbance. However what appears to be a natural occurrence is, in this case, a choreographed synchronized undertaking, created for a single purpose. It is much like a musical composition that features crashing cymbals, dueling saxophones, stinging trumpets, soaring trombones, and singing strikes, each of them coalescing into a single creation that moves the listener to some innate reaction. For the Tiger, it stirs him to get the “idea” (conveniently dangled by Rabbit) that he must be tied up to survive the great Ma-hee-hee-hah. Through the use of the Ma-hee-hee-hah, the animals-as-orchestra add duality to the meaning of the storm.

*Working
together
can be
exciting.*

THE PEAR TREE

The Pear Tree represents life itself. A fruit tree is a continual reminder that life replenishes itself. In the case of the animals, the tree represents salvation, the one element that can save them from starvation and dehydration. It is also, as the play concludes, the resolution of the entire piece of music. It is the reward for united efforts, similar in music to the last bars of the orchestral composition that reconciles all of the instruments from their different tones into a unified chord.

*You can
make good
things
happen.*

*All of us are different, but we should
figure out ways to come together, to
work together, to help each other.*



TIGER AND THE BIG WIND

a Tale from Africa

Once upon a time, long ago, a terrible drought hit the land. The rains had not come that year, and the crops were doing very badly. Without much food and water, all of the animals were very hot, very thirsty, and very hungry.

It just so happened that there was a field, and in the middle of this field was one large pear tree full of the juiciest pears you ever did see. They were big and yellow and just waiting to be picked. Unfortunately, at the base of this tree was a very mean tiger.

Tiger was greedy and selfish and refused to let anyone near the tree. He would sit all day in the shade of the pear tree and growl at anyone who came too close. He'd say, "Growr, growr, I'll eat you up! Stay away from my tree or I'll eat you up!"

Eventually, Rabbit happened by and heard what was going on. "Oh, Rabbit, what are we to do?" wailed the animals. "Tiger is so mean and won't share the juicy pears! Oh, we are so hungry and thirsty!"

Rabbit thought about this, and being such a clever animal, he immediately devised a plan. "Come close, come close. Listen to me and I will tell you what to do."

The next morning all of the animals secretly gathered in the forest near the field where Tiger was sleeping. All of the animals who lived on the ground, like Turtle, Elephant, Ox, and Donkey all stood near big hollow logs. All of the monkeys and birds who lived in the trees quietly sat in the branches and waited for Rabbit to arrive.

Soon Rabbit did show up, carrying a large, thick rope. He ran across the field and made a lot of noise. "Oh, my! Oh, my!" he shouted.

Tiger sleepily opened an eye and growled, "Why are you making so much noise, Rabbit? Can't you see I am sleeping?"

"Tiger! You must run! A big wind is coming that will blow everyone off the earth!" Just at that moment, the animals hidden in the forest began to make a great racket.

Eagle and Stork and Owl and all the rest of the birds flapped their wings, causing the leaves to shake and twist. Elephant and Ox and Otter and Crocodile and all of the animals on the ground beat on the hollow logs and smacked the trees. They scurried around in the brush and altogether set the entire



forest to swinging and swaying like it was the end of the world!

Tiger was terrified! “What do I do? What do I do?” he screamed.

“You must run,” Rabbit said. “I cannot help you now. I have to go tie the other animals down with this rope so that they do not fly off of the earth!”

“You must tie me down!” Tiger demanded. Rabbit shook his head, “But I must go help the other animals or they will all blow away! You are big and strong, you have a very good chance of escaping alive!”

“No!” Tiger roared, “You must tie me up now!”

“Very well,” Rabbit sighed. “I will tie you up now.”

And so he tied Tiger to a tree on the edge of the field. He tied the rope tight, but Tiger kept shouting, “Tighter, tighter! I don’t want to be blown off of the earth!”

When he was done, Rabbit stepped back and called for the other animals to come out of the forest.

“Look here,” he said out loud. “Look here at the one who tried to keep all of the juicy pears to himself instead of sharing them. Well, food was put on the earth for all to enjoy. Nobody has the right to be selfish with what is meant for everyone.”

And then all of the animals sat in the shade of the big pear tree and happily feasted on the delicious fruit... together.

AFTER THE PERFORMANCE~

- ◎ Read the story of *Tiger and the Big Wind* aloud to students.
- ◎ Compare the differences between this version and the adaptation of Dr. Jeff Obafemi Carr.
- ◎ Discuss the ways that stories can change when different people tell them.
- ◎ Read *Brer Tiger and the Big Wind* by William J. Faulkner, Roberta Wilson (Illustrator)



Amun Ra Theatre (ART) is a not-for-profit, professional performing arts ensemble. The mission of Amun Ra Theatre is to explore, in a public and educational forum, the universal themes of humanity as experienced through the worldview of African-American Drama, Music, Dance and the Spoken Word. Youth ages 9-13 have the opportunity to train under the top performing artists in Nashville for 6-weeks of rigorous daily instruction in the areas of Drama, Dance, Music, Public Speaking, Creative Writing, and Visual Art.

THE NAME

The Name Amun Ra comes from ancient Egypt (Kemet), where world civilization and culture reached its zenith. The word Amun translates as "The Hidden," representing the deep and powerful hidden energy of the creative force of the universe. Ra translates as "Light" and represents the warm and nurturing energy of the sun. Therein lies our purpose: to utilize the world of Theatre and its related arts to expose the hidden light that exists within. Whether it is within our Actors in one of our high-quality productions, the youth who we train through our outreach programs, or even the audience members who witness the work, we strive to touch the human mind and soul in a way that leaves all involved transformed in a positive way.

***Artists** have two things in common: we are creative, and we are fearless. If we don't step out there with new and exciting ideas, we grow stagnant. ART has the distinction of being the first black theater with its own facility in Nashville since The Majestic in 1906—that's 103 years. Our philosophy is to be a professional theater ensemble, located in the heart of the community. People who live across the street from the theater actually helped us build it."*

Dr. jeff obafemi carr in Nashville Arts Magazine



DR. JEFF OBAFEMI CARR FOUNDER AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Jeff Obafemi Carr earned his nickname “The Media Scientist” as a social commentator, actor, playwright, director, essayist, and producer of radio, television, stage, and film. He is also an ordained minister with a Doctor of Arts in Divinity and Spirituality. His leadership and vision in the arts resulted in an appointment to the Metropolitan Nashville Arts Commission, where he currently serves as a Commissioner and member of the Grants & Awards Committee.

An alumnus of Tennessee State University ('90), Dr. Carr served as president of the student body and led hundreds of students in a nationally-publicized sit-in and hunger strike that resulted in 140 million dollars in capital improvements to the campus and equalized funding in higher education in Tennessee.

Carr has hosted or produced radio talk shows for almost 2 decades. A regular commentator on National Public Radio's *News and Notes* program he previously provided regular commentaries on NPR's *The Tavis Smiley Show*. He recently debuted as a roundtable member on TV-One's hit show, *Black Men Revealed*. An insightful commentator, Carr creates honest and open dialogue, a trait that has made him a sought-after consultant and presenter in the corporate community.

A veteran of over 30 professional stage productions as an actor or director, Carr has written 8 plays and 2 musicals, and his essays have been published in 3 books and national publications including *Essence Magazine*. He has been a featured guest on Radio One and VoiceAmerica Network, where he is a freelance Executive Producer. He co-starred alongside music legend Michael W. Smith in the Sony Pictures film, *The Second Chance* (2006). His latest book of essays was published in the fall of 2010.





DRY AND THIRSTY

Pre-K-2 (adapt concept discussion as needed)

- ⊙ Discuss the words wet and dry.
- ⊙ Ask children to describe things that can be wet and dry-give examples: clothes, hands, etc.
- ⊙ Point out that dirt can be wet or dry, too. Ask students to assess the dirt conditions today.
- ⊙ Ask students what happens when the ground is too wet or too dry or just right?
- ⊙ Explain that when the Earth gets too dry, so do plants, animals, and people, and it's called a drought. (Discussions should certainly touch on the reverse condition of flood that students most recently experienced last year.) Use the pictures or find additional images on the web to see the immense difference in watered, fertile land and land in drought.



IMAGINE THE CONDITIONS in Africa at the beginning of the play. All the animals are looking for water. They are hot and dry and thirsty. (Older students can look at satellite footage of the drought in Africa at the NOAA Environmental Visualization Survey web site, www.nvvl.noaa.gov. Click More Animations on the right and then click the Miscellaneous category.)

- ⊙ Ask students to imagine what that's it's like to be in a drought.
- ⊙ The actors in the play have to imagine it and make the audience believe they are desperately hot.
- ⊙ Ask some cueing questions (continued on the next page) to help students imagine and remember how they feel when they are too hot and too thirsty like the animals in the play.
- ⊙ Ask them to tell you with words and show you in their bodies and their faces how it feels to be hot and thirsty.

When you are too hot do you feel like jumping around?

When you are too hot do you feel like standing up straight?



When you are too hot do you feel strong?
When you are hot do you feel like moving fast?
When you are hot do you feel like doing anything?

Show me how you sit when you are too hot.
Show me how you stand when you are too hot.
Show me how you walk when you are too hot.

Imagining they are thirsty will make young children actually thirsty. Tell them that you have found some water! Let them all come and drink from the water fountain or from small Dixie cups.

WRITE A NEW VERSE FOR "HEAT"

The animals sing this song with several verses describing how they feel about the heat. They sing about what they wish they could do to get away from the heat.

- ⊙ Help students pull material from their answers above.
- ⊙ Work together as a class to write a new verse for the song.
- ⊙ Remind students that they are helping each other to try to solve a problem just as the animals in the play do.

FROM THE SCRIPT

ALL: HEAT!
SOLO: GOT ME A NOTION
TO JUMP INTO THE OCEAN

ALL: HEAT!
BUT I CAN'T MAKE IT THERE
MOVIN' IN SLOW MOTION

EVAPORATION

Students in second grade (and some younger) can learn that water changes forms. The play is a perfect complement to studying evaporation.

Drying out experiment (with thanks to www.shirleys-preschool-activities.com)

You will need:
2 small cloths
small plastic bag and tape OR ziploc bag
plate

Method: Soak the two cloths in water and then squeeze them out well.
Place one cloth in the plastic bag and seal it with the tape.
Spread the other cloth on the plate.
Leave both cloths in a warm place until the next day.
Ask your children which cloth they think will dry first.

Result: The cloth in the bag stays wet because the water cannot escape into the air.
The water on the cloth on the plate could escape into the air through the process of **evaporation** and so the cloth dried out.

Variation: Repeat this experiment, but place one cloth in a cool place and the other in sun, wind, by a heater or fan to demonstrate that heat and wind will speed up evaporation.

Talk about what would be the best time of day to water the garden or crops to minimize the effect of evaporation. The best time is the evening or the early morning.



COLORS

Pre-K and K

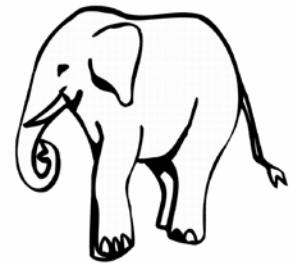
- ⊙ Ask students to identify the colors of animals in Africa (especially those in the play.)
- ⊙ Ask them to point out which animals have more than one color. Call attention to animals that have patterned coats.
- ⊙ Talk about patterns and the way shapes or designs repeat.
- ⊙ Have students draw simple patterns (spots or lines) with crayons. Have students make patterns with construction paper and cut outs, noticing which color combinations please each student the most.
- ⊙ Ask students to look at their own clothes to find who is wearing patterns.
- ⊙ Look online or in school for visual examples of African fabric. The costumes in *Before the People Came* each contain some African patterned cloth (except for Tortoise.) If you can, bring in some cloth and experiment with making “costumes.” Children are naturals at this task.
- ⊙ Help students to know there are special people who have the job of designing and making the costumes. They do not want to make people look exactly like animals. The costumes in this play suggest each animal’s shape and imply the setting of Africa. The actors and the audience’s imagination must do the rest to make us believe there are talking animals on stage.



ANIMAL WALKS

Pre-K and K

- ⊙ Tell students you are going to move like animals. Ask students to think of an animal they would like to pretend to be. (Animals that are not from Africa are fine.)
- ⊙ Ask students to walk around the room (in a rough circle.) Students must stand on their two feet instead of crawling on hands and knees.
- ⊙ Help them explore and refine their body movements with a series of questions and use picture references if needed.
 - If you are this animal, will you walk with light steps or heavy steps or somewhere in between?
 - If you are this animal, will you move in a quick or a slow way?
 - If you are this animal, will you always go forward or sometimes sideways?
 - If you are this animal, will you hop or jump?
 - If you are this animal, will you stand tall or bend low?
 - How can you use your arms to become this animal?
 - How can you use your face to become this animal?
- ⊙ Make this primarily an acting activity; try to let them use all of their own choices. If they choose something that is inconsistent with the animal, make a statement like “Most elephants walk with a heavy step, but Janie’s elephant walks with a light step.”
- ⊙ Help students to notice all the different levels and speeds that their classmates are using to create animal walks.
- ⊙ Have an animal parade! Be the parade announcer for your students.
- ⊙ After the performance, ask students to describe the choices that the actors in the show made in portraying their animal characters.





RHYTHMS IN LANGUAGE~ RHYMING IN CLASS

K-2

The rhythms in the language of *Before the People Came* feel like improvised jazz music. Dr. Jeff Obafemi Carr calls the play a jazz choreopoem. He has a great deal of jazz music as well as rhythm and blues in the piece (including very witty references to many jazz standards) but the language itself also has a feeling of “jazz” to it.

It has a beat, a groove that seems to move in a different way from regular spoken language. The characters seem to make music instead of talking with their speech; it’s as if their words and phrases are dancing in all directions instead of walking straight ahead. The playwright rhythms change and move in a way that defies the regular meter of most poetry. It is closer to Shakespeare’s blank verse in its way than his iambic pentameter, more informal language than formal.

Read this selection from the script, the Griot’s opening lines, to get an idea of the shifting rhythms.

*Hello ‘dere/ lil’ ones.../ An’ some of you not/ so small/ fall into place now/ get quiet/ so i can show you/
an old tale/ without fail/ one dat so old/ you and me wasn’t even around/ found it written in the clouds/
thought i’d pluck it down for you/ so that you can see/ a story/ of what happened/ before you/ before
me/ before there was a We/ when animals spoke to each other/ by name/ it ‘twas long Before/ The
People/ Came*

© Ask children to play with rhymes for a day in the classroom. After every sentence they say, ask them to tack on another rhyming phrase. The phrase does not have to be as many syllables as their first sentence. It can be short or long, wherever their fancy takes them.

Examples: “Mrs. Jones, I stepped in a puddle and my shoes are wet. *Won’t dry, not yet.*”
“When are we going outside to play? *We’ve been waiting all day.*”

Students can also make up nonsense words to rhyme.

Example: “I need help with the computer. *Plumduter, frumpmutter, stuntooter.*”

After a few examples, First and Second graders will enjoy the language play and adapt it into their day. Pre-K and K will need to have a more focused play with the teacher providing the sentence and then helping them to make a following rhyme.

© At the end of the day, ask students to remember their favorite rhymed sequence and add a gesture or a movement to it.

One of the best ways for kids to hear rhythm in language is to listen to rhyming poems. Lyrics from jazz songs work very well also. (See the verses from “Straighten up and Fly Right” by Nat King Cole and Irving Mills and “I Got Plenty of Nothing” by George and Ira Gershwin and DuBose Heyward.)

Below are some web sites featuring excellent poems that have a variety of different rhythms. For this activity, don’t use nursery rhymes as examples. Their rhythms are excellent but very basic and don’t move with as much freedom and variety as the language in the play and the poems on these sites.



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