

# National Theatre Collection



## Anansi the Spider

**Cross-Curricular Learning Guide**

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# Introduction to the Production

## Recommended Age Group: KS1 & Year 3

This Cross-Curricular Learning Guide illustrates how primary school teachers can use this production to support teaching across curriculum subjects such as English, History, Geography and PSHE. This guide offers sequences of activities and suggested lesson structures.

Any activity highlighted in red can be found in the Creative Learning Activity Guide, a separate document found on the [National Theatre Collection](#) and [National Theatre Learning Hub](#). That guide offers step by step instructions on how to deliver the exercises.

The Unicorn Theatre's *Anansi the Spider* collection provides three of the Anansi tales, each told using dynamic storytelling techniques and bringing the cultural heritage of the stories to life.

In *Brother Anansi* and *Brother Snake*, we hear the tale of the lazy Anansi, who does not want to do the work but wants to reap the rewards. *Anansi and the Two Dinners* introduces young audiences to the role of Anansi as a father and exposes Anansi's greed. *Anansi and the Pot of Wisdom* tells of the skygod and her actions to help the animals and people live in harmony. Anansi very nearly stops her plan from working!

For some students, tales from Africa will allow for links to their own family heritage. For others, the story and culture will feel unfamiliar. For this reason, we believe that the world of the productions should be explored ahead of viewing. A Geography unit that allows students to engage with the world of Africa will ensure that all students are able to fully imagine the stories' events when they see the productions.

Cross curricular learning opportunities:

- Geography
- English
- PSHE

# Cross-Curricular Learning

## Geography

### Key outcomes of the curriculum targeted:

*Location Knowledge; Place Knowledge; Physical and Human Geography; Geographical Skills.*

### Prior to viewing the plays

The cultural heritage of Anansi and the world that each story sits in should be unlocked for students ahead of story exploration. For some students, Africa might be a familiar location. For others, it might be a world away from the everything they know. To understand the story, to engage with events, to be able to imagine the setting for each story, the geography of Africa and the location of Ghana should be fully explored ahead of viewing the plays.

### WHY NOT

- Use globes, atlases and Google Earth to find Africa and to locate Ghana within the continent
- Use ICT and information texts to establish the human and physical features of the country and the specific features of Ghana. Allow students to save images for printing and use in the following activity
- Offer a range of books, art and craft material and images (saved during ICT research) to carry out a **Soft Start** activity (see Creative Learning Activities), inviting students to write, draw or make the elements they know about Africa and Ghana in particular. They can affix images they have saved to the sheet. This can be added to as learning progresses and can be used to make a fantastic class display.
- Use the **World of the Story Mindmap** activity (see Creative Learning Activities) to bring this location to life using all senses and gathering images, textures, smells, sounds and tastes. These could be used to create a guide to the area, listing topographical features and land use patterns.
- Call on place knowledge to draw comparisons between Africa and the UK, Ghana and the students home town.

### **After watching play**

Each play allows students to develop a more detailed insight into the world of Anansi. To truly engage with events in each narrative, it is essential that students are given time to consider the information given and to add to the world they had started to build prior to viewing the play(s).

Where does Anansi live in Ghana? Where do the other animals live? What other geographical features are essential to the narrative. For example, in Anansi and the Pot of Wisdom, where is the bush? The cave? The river? The mountain?

### **WHY NOT**

- Use **Masking Tape World** (see Creative Learning Activities) to create a detailed map of the locations in the story. Invite students to recall previous learning to add in additional human and physical geography. Use labels to layer your detailed world with descriptive language.
- Create a guide to Ghana, using all learning from their research, the **World of the Story Mindmap** and the **Masking Tape World**.
- Use **Dioramas** (see Creative Learning Activities) to recreate specific locations from the story and adding further descriptive language. You could use these later for English learning, adding simple puppets to each scene and encouraging students to retell moments of the story.

# Cross-Curricular Learning English

## Key outcomes of the curriculum targeted:

*Spoken Language: Physical; Linguistic; Cognitive; Social and Emotional Oracy (Leading to high quality written outcomes)*

- The narrative in each play follows a clear arc that should be easy for young audiences to follow. However, to truly engage and empathise with the moral that underpins each story, it is essential that the narrative is fully explored and understood
- The character names may be unfamiliar for many audience members. For the purposes of retelling and discussing each story, their names should be explored and pronunciation supported
- Whether using the play as part of an English unit of study or for the purposes of Foundation subject exploration (see Foundation subject learning suggestions), it is important to ensure that students have a full grasp of the narrative and can retell, discuss and question it with confidence.



# English

The following activities can be used time and again for any narrative, ensuring your class possess a deep understanding of all events in the story:

## WHY NOT

- Use **Fruits** (see Creative Learning Activities) as a vocal warm-up prior to the following activities and adapt it to include the names of the characters in the story, using the characters of the fruits and applying them to character names from the story. For example, if you ask your class, 'which fruit do you think Anansi would be?', they may reply: 'Blueberry because Anansi is a trickster!', or select another fruit that they feel most links to the Anansi they have created in their minds. Move through all story characters in this way
- Follow a viewing of the production with **And Then** (see Creative Learning Activities)
- Building on from And Then, invite students to use **Group Speeds** (see Creative Learning Activities), to form partners and to carry out 3-2-1 (see Creative Learning Activities)
- Gather outcomes from **3-2-1** and consolidate thinking by establishing a shared set of 6 story beats before inviting students to carry out **Six-Part Story Method** (see Creative Learning Activities)
- Invite students to work in small groups or partners and to carry out **Story Stones** (see Creative Learning Activities), illustrating stones they have gathered as part of home learning or a class trip to a local outdoor area. These stones can act as a fantastic starting point for new story creation, with students making alternative character, setting or event stones and replacing the Anansi stones with new ingredients – who might Anansi meet in a new story? Where might the story take place?

Students will now be ready to carry out a written English activity with confidence and/or to apply their thinking to any of the following Foundation subject areas.



## English (Reading)

### **Key outcomes of the curriculum targeted:**

*Reading: word reading and comprehension.*

Anansi's stories are traditional African folk tales. Do the features link to the features of traditional tales from other parts of the world?

### **WHY NOT**

- Fill your reading corner with traditional tales from all areas of the world
- Guide students through study of and discussion around the features they recognise and any similarities and differences between tales from different areas.
- There are many differing Anansi stories. Which do students like best?

### **WHY NOT**

- Take a trip to your local library to find other Anansi stories
- Allow time for students to read them and then to write reviews and recommendations for their friends
- Add the texts and recommendations to your book corner
- For some students, the world of Africa and of Ghana specifically may appeal more than the story that takes place there. The factual text versus the fictional text might hold more interest.
- Retain the books used for research (in the Geography section of these notes) and place them in your book corner with pens and Post-its nearby.
- Encourage students to fact find and to write any facts they find on Post-its. These can be stuck to a temporary display in your book corner or added to your **Soft Start** display.

# Cross-Curricular Learning

## PSHE

### Key outcomes of the curriculum targeted:

*Health and Wellbeing; Relationships; Living in the Wider World*

With each play delivering a clear moral, they serve as a perfect tool to promote discussion around areas of the PSHE curriculum.

### *Brother Anansi and Brother Snake*

**Moral:** 'Hard work pays off'

### Key areas for discussion:

- As famine approaches, all the animals, except for Anansi, decide to plant crops. Only when the famine strikes and Anansi is hungry does he realise his mistake and come looking for food. Is he right to do this? Should the animals help him? How do the other animals feel about Anansi? Do they all have the same feelings?
- Snake offers food in return for being able to 'whip' him 'with his long, long tail'. Is Brother Snake doing the right thing by sharing if he is going to punish Anansi at the same time? Why does he offer food? How does he feel about Anansi? How does he show his feelings?



- Anansi tricks other animals into coming for tea and then letting them fall asleep so they are too sleepy to question him when he asks them to open the door for him. Both times, Brother Snake whips the innocent animals instead of Anansi. How could this outcome be changed? What should Anansi do? What should the other animals do? How do the animals who trusted Anansi feel about his betrayal? How does Anansi feel about his actions? How should he feel?
- Armadillo is Anansi's last guest. He is a vegetarian who does not want to eat Anansi's food and also does not want to open the door. Brother Snake finally gets to punish Anansi. Is this ending a good ending? Did Anansi get what he deserved, or should the ending have been different? How does Anansi feel at the end?
- Areas to consider could include the following (as listed in the Programme of Study for PSHE Education, PSHE Association):
  - Mental Health: H11–H19
  - Friendships: R6 and R8
  - Managing Hurtful Behaviour and Bullying: R10 and R11
  - Respecting Self and Others: R21 and R22
  - Communities: L5



## ***Anansi and the Two Dinners***

**Moral:** 'Sometimes you can be too clever for your own good.'

**Key areas for discussion:**

- Anansi is a father of two sons who idolise him. They think he is the best in every way. Why do they think that? Is he the best father in the world, better than all others? What role does a father play in our lives?
- Anansi and his sons are invited to two parties on the same day, at the same time, in opposing locations. Anansi wants to eat the food offered at both parties. He does not want to choose. He thinks he is clever enough to go both and tells his sons to tell their mother not to cook tonight as their stomachs will be full. Is Anansi right in thinking he can go to two parties? Is it right to go to both? Will the people at the party be happy or unhappy with his actions? Are his actions respectful?
- Anansi ties a rope around himself and gives an end to each son. One son is sent to one party and the other son to the other party. They are supposed to pull on the rope when food comes and Anansi will know which party to come to in time to eat all the food. At the parties, the boys forget about Anansi as they start to dance and then to eat. Who is in the wrong? Was Anansi's idea a good idea? Were the boys wrong to forget him?
- Anansi is angry when he realises he has missed all the food. The boys feel guilty and are worried when they remember they have told their mother not to make food for dinner. Should Anansi be angry with his sons? Should his sons feel guilty and anxious?
- Anansi's wife has made dinner despite being told it would not be needed. Why has she done this? What do you think reasons were for her actions? How do her actions help us to understand her role in the family?
- Areas to consider could include the following (as listed in the Programme of Study for PSHE Education, PSHE Association):
  - Families and close positive relationships: R1-R4
  - Respecting self and others: R21-R22

## ***Anansi and the Pot of Gold***

**Moral:** 'What use is wisdom if it is not shared.'

### **Key areas for discussion:**

- Nyame, the Sky God, looks down at all the animals and people on earth. Some are good and kind and some are wicked and lazy. There is much confusion and lots of arguing and yelling. Why do you think this is? Why would there be so much anger and confusion?
- Nyame throws down wisdom and, whilst no one knows what has happened, they notice that they are all happier and life is better. What is wisdom? How has wisdom helped the people and animals? What effect do you think wisdom had?
- Anansi knows what Nyame has done and gathers all of the wisdom into a pot. He wants all of the wisdom for himself. Is Anansi right to do this?
- Anansi tries to find a safe place to hide his pot, but he doesn't trust the other animals. Why doesn't he not trust them? Do you think he is right not to trust them?
- At last, Anansi finds a tall and spikey tree. He ties the pot to his front and starts to climb the tree, but he keeps getting stuck. A small girl, who has run away from the arguing in the village, sees him and suggests he tie the pot to his back. Anansi ignores her until she has gone and then takes her advice. He is now able to climb the tree easily. Why do you think the girl knows to tie the pot to his back? How does she know more than Anansi? Is Anansi right to pretend he does not respect her idea? What should he have done?
- On reaching the top of the tree, Anansi sees that the people in the town are in turmoil: arguing and shouting. He throws down all the wisdom from his pot. The people and animals in the town are once again content. How do you feel about Anansi's actions? How do you think the wisdom Anansi throws down changed the town? How do you think the people and animals change in their actions?

## PSHE

Areas to consider could include the following (as listed in the Programme of Study for PSHE Education, PSHE Association):

- Respecting Self and Others: R21–25
- Shared Responsibilities: L1–L3
- Communities: L4–L6

### WHY NOT

- Identify main story points in the story and then use **Freeze Frames with Reporter and Line Ghost** (see Creative Learning Resources) to bring moments to life and to question key characters as to their actions at specific moments
- Use **Role on the Wall with Statues and Thought-Tapping** (see Creative Learning Resources) to develop in-depth studies of key characters and to inner thoughts, feelings and reactions of key characters
- Follow Role on The Wall with **Group Speeds** (see Creative Learning Resources) and ask the class to get into partners with a ‘character’ from a different Role on the Wall group. Carry out **Character POV** (see Creative Learning Resources) to hear the stories from alternative viewpoints
- Hand out **Open-Ended Questions** (see Creative Learning Resources) to partners and use **Hot-seating** (see Creative Learning Resources) – invite them to ask each other three questions, following the Character POV activity.

## Reading corner

### WHY NOT

Select one of the events or locations from the stories and use them to inspire an Anansi’s cabin, party or tree-top-themed reading corner



## Linked texts

The following list of texts may be used to populate your class reading corner, as texts for research and/or shared reading, as a guided reading text or for carpet time reading sessions at the end of the day.

You may also want to expand the below selection to include traditional tales and folk tales from other cultures, reflecting your class' cultural heritage.

Note: Some of the titles listed below are out of print but may still be in school libraries or accessible via public libraries or second-hand bookstores.

### **Anansi Tales, Trickster Tales and Folk Tales from Africa**

- *Anansi and the Bag of Wisdom*, Lesley Sims and Alida Massari (Usborne First Reading)
- *Anansi and the Golden Pot*, Taiye Selasi and Tinuke Fagborun (Dorling Kindersley)
- *No Dinner!*, Jessica Souhami (Frances Lincoln)
- *Quill Soup*, Alan Durant and Dale Blankenaar (Tiny Owl)
- *African Tales*, Gcina Mhlophe and Rachel Griffin (Barefoot Books)
- *Hansel and Gretel*, Rachel Isadora (G.P. Putnam)
- *Anancy and Mr Dry-Bone*, Fiona French (Frances Lincoln)
- *Who is King? Ten Magical Stories from Africa*, Beverly Naidoo and Piet Grobler (Frances Lincoln)
- *The Leopard's Drum*, Jessica Souhami (Frances Lincoln)
- *The Barefoot Book of Trickster Tales*, Richard Walker and Claudio Munoz (Barefoot Books)
- *Anansi and the Magic Stick*, Eric A Kimmel and Janet Stevens (Holiday House)
- *Anansi the Spider: A Tale from the Ashanti*, Gerald McDermott (Henry Holt and Company)
- *No Dinner for Anansi: An African Myth*, Trish Cooke and Emma Shaw Smith (Franklin Watts)
- *Ananse and the Lizard: A West African Tale*, Pat Cummings (Henry Holt and Company)
- *How Anansi Captured Tiger's Stories*, Jenny Bent (Dutton)
- *Anansi and the Magic Yams*, Joanna Troughton (Puffin)
- *Anansi Does the Impossible*, Verna Aardema and Lisa Desimini (Atheneum Books)

### Further Picture Books and Short Stories Linked with the African Diaspora

- *Too Small Tola Makes It Count*, Atinuke and Onyinye Iwu (Walker Books)
- *Have Fun Anna Hibiscus*, Atinuke and Lauren Tobia (Walker Books)
- *Splash, Anna Hibiscus!*, Atinuke and Lauren Tobia (Walker Books)
- *Eco Girl*, Ken Wilson Max
- *Sleep Well, Siba and Saba*, Nansubuga Nagadya Isdahl and Sandra van Doorn (Lantana Books)
- *One Hen*, Katie Smith Milway and Eugenie Fernandes (Bloomsbury)
- *Catch That Chicken!*, Atinuke and Angela Brooksbank (Walker Books)
- *B is for Baby*, Atinuke and Angela Brooksbank (Walker Books)
- *Lulu's Nana Visits*, Anna McQuinn and Rosalind Beardshaw (Alanna Max)
- *Our Story Starts in Africa*, Patrice Lawrence and Jeanette Gonzales (Magic Cat)





## Non-Fiction Texts

- *Africa Amazing Africa*, Atinuke and Mouni Feddag (Walker Books)
- *Africana: an Encyclopaedia of an Amazing Continent*, Kim Chakanetsa and Mayowa Alabi (Wide Eyed Editions)
- *Maps*, Aleksandra Mizielinski and Daniel Mizielinski (Big Picture Press)
- *Furaha Means Happy! A Book of Swahili Words*, Ken Wilson Max (David Bennett Books)
- *One Day on our Blue Planet: In the Savannah*, Ella Bailey (Flying Eye Books)
- *What the Elephant Heard*, Charlotte Guillain and Sam Usher (Welbeck)
- *Wild Animals of the South*, Dieter Braun (Flying Eye Books)
- *The Season of the Giraffes*, Nicola Davies and Emily Sutton (Walker Books)
- *S is for South Africa*, Beverley Naidoo and Prodeepta Das (Frances Lincoln)
- *A is for Africa*, Ifeoma Onyefulu (Frances Lincoln)

## Folk Tale Collections for Teacher Reference or for More Experienced Readers

- *Once Upon a Time in Ghana: Traditional Ewe Stories Retold in English*, Anna Cottrell (Troubadour Publishing)
- *Tales from Africa*, K.P. Kojo (Puffin)
- *Tales from West Africa*, Martin Bennett (Oxford)
- *Folk Tales from Africa: The Baboons Who Went This Way and That*, Alexander McCall Smith (Canongate)
- *African & Caribbean Folktales, Myths and Legends*, Wendy Shearer (Scholastic)
- *Tales of East Africa*, Jamilla Okubo (Chronicle Books)
- *The Pot of Wisdom: Ananse Stories*, Adwoa Badoe and Baba Wague Diakite (A Groundwood Book)

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# **National Theatre Collection**

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