

# PUPPET ARTS THEATRE

presents  
A Study Guide for Classroom Teachers  
to



## *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters*

Feel free to make as many copies as needed.

A Production of PUPPET ARTS THEATRE  
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## **MUFARO’S BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTERS**

**By John Steptoe**

**Themes: African Culture, Relationships**

### **ABOUT THE STORY AND THE BOOK**

The book was written by John Steptoe and received CALDECOTT HONOR AWARD that is given to the best children’s book published that year. The play was dramatized for theatre by Karen Abbott.

Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters is an African folktale. A folktale is a story handed down from one generation to another by word of mouth. Folktales are also often used to teach a moral or lesson to children. There are several types of folktales: myths, legends, fairy tales, and marchens. Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters is an example of a marchen. Its characteristics include a magical land or fantasy setting, and involve an “underdog” who, with the help of magic, obtains a birthright. Generally this underdog character is asked to complete impossible tasks, but through the help of magic, things end up as “happily ever after.”Folktales are often told to children by their parents to teach them how to behave. These stories have been passed down through generations and are similar all around the world. Though the culture may differ somewhat, the message remains the same.

### **SUMMARY**

In a small African village lives a man named Mufaro and his two beautiful daughters, Manyara and Nyasha. Manyara, an ill-tempered girl, is jealous of Nyasha and vows to be queen and have Nyasha as her servant. Nyasha, on the other hand, is a gentle girl who works hard and is kind to animals and people alike. When the king orders that all the beautiful daughters appear so that he might select a queen, Manyara’s selfish ways are revealed. Nyasha is chosen as queen and Manyara becomes a servant in the queen’s household.

### **OBJECTIVES**

- Children will learn about African culture.
- Children will explore relationships between people.
- Children will investigate the outcomes of both positive and negative behaviors.

### **BEFORE VISITING THE PRESENTATION**

Share the book MUFARO’S BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTERS with the class. Locate the continent of Africa on a map. Talk about the climate, vegetation and animal life.

Ask:

- What can you tell from the illustrations about how the people of this small African village live?
- How does life in this village seem different from ours?
- What would you like most/least about living in a village like this?

Ask children if they have ever heard languages other than their own spoken. Give them the opportunity to share with the class the other languages that they may know. Then emphasize that language is only one difference that may exist between people of different cultures.

Explore the relationship between Manyara and Nyasha. Ask children to describe the way Manyara feels about her sister.

Ask:

- Why is Manyara jealous of her sister?
- What can Manyara do about her feelings?

Encourage children to discuss feelings of jealousy and anger that they may have had toward siblings or others. Have children share with the class things they may have done to resolve these feelings.

Ask:

- Why do you think Nyasha was chosen as queen?
- What kind of queen would Manyara have been if she had been chosen instead?
- How do you think Manyara feels about being a servant to Nyasha?
- What do you think might have happened to Manyara if she had behaved differently?

## **AFTER THE PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES**

Attending a play is an entertainment experience unlike any other. Because a play is presented live, it provides a unique opportunity to experience a story “as it happens. Puppet Arts Theatre brings to life stories through its performances. Many people are involved in the process. Writers adapt the stories you read in order to bring them off the page and onto the stage. Designers and technicians create lighting effects so that you can feel the mood of a scene. Directors help actors/puppeteers to bring the story to life and make it happen before your very eyes. All of these things make seeing a play very different from television, videos, computer games, or CDs and tapes of stories.

Many of the words used in Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters are of the Shona language spoken in Africa. With your students find these words in the story.

Mufaro (moo-FAR-oh) means "happy man"

Nyasha (nee-AH-sha) means "mercy"

Manyara (mahn-YAR-ah) means "ashamed"

Nyoka (nee-YO-kah) means "snake"

Comparing "Cinderellas"

A folktale is a story that has been told again and again, and eventually written down. Sometimes the same story gets told in different parts of the world. There are thousands of versions of the Cinderella story. Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters is an African folktale.

Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters is called a "Cinderella" story because it is about a young woman living in unfortunate circumstances, which suddenly change to fortunate circumstances. This one takes place in Zimbabwe, Africa and it teaches us about Zimbabwe's people, plants, animals, and even an ancient city.

After you read the tale Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters, read the classic fairytale Cinderella. Then do the following worksheet.

Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters

Describe the sister:

Friends or people who help:

Magic Person:

What is the test that shows the rightful [Cinderella-Nyasha character]?

How does the king/prince find out who Nyasha is?

The classic Cinderella story

Describe the stepsisters:

Friends or people who help:

Magic Person:

What is the test that shows the rightful [Cinderella character]?

How does the king/prince find out who Cinderella is?

What is different? (No ball to attend, no dress to acquire, no cruel guardian imposing harsh terms and conditions)

What's the same? (Cinderella finds joy in her life, treats all living things with kindness, and is eventually rewarded for her goodness)

Discuss how "good always wins out over bad" is a theme shared by different cultures. (Although from very different backgrounds, all human beings in all cultures have a sense of right and wrong and a sense of justice and kindness)

Hold a class discussion. Ask students the following questions, and allow them to write or draw pictures of their experience at the presentation.

1. What was the first thing you noticed when you entered the auditorium or the gym? What did you notice first on the stage?
2. What about the set? Draw or tell about things you remember. Did the set change during the play? How was it moved or changed? Was there any space besides the stage where the action took place?
3. What did you think about the costumes? Do you think they fit the story? What things do you think the costume designers had to consider before creating the costumes?
5. Was there music in the play? How did it add to the performance?
6. What about the actors and puppets? Do you think they were able to bring the characters to life? Did you feel caught up in the story? What things do you think the actors had to work on in order to make you believe they were the characters?

Supply children with a variety of materials (construction paper, markers, cardboard, etc.) that they can use to create an African village. Then have children write their own stories about life in the village.

You may want to help them by offering a story starter such as: A visitor to a small African village was so surprised when she saw...

After children have written their stories, encourage them to share the stories with classmates. Display stories on a bulletin board near the village.

Have children to dramatize their own version of MUFARO'S BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTERS. Supply simple props including white sheets for clothing, a stick to represent a staff, a long length of rope to represent a crown. Later ask children to describe how it felt to take on the personalities of the different characters.

If something is not clear in our suggestions, please feel free to call for help:  
601 956 3414.

We would like to hear about your experiences related to our production. Please let us know what you did with your children to enjoy the play and what kind of inspiration we provided. Send us some drawings done by your children so we can share them with the Mississippi Arts Commission. Let us know how helpful this guide was. It is work in progress and you can help us make it better. Your comments are greatly appreciated. Thank you.