

Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters Lesson Plan | Scholastic.com

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Activity/Visual Literacy

Explain to the class that the Caldecott Medal is named after an English artist, Randolph Caldecott (1846-1886), who is considered the originator of children's picture books. The medal is given annually to an illustrator in the United States for the most distinguished children's picture book published during the previous year. Review the art in *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* with the class to see why it won this award. Then have students find other Caldecott winners to see what made them "the most distinguished" that year.

Genre: Folktale

Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters was inspired by an African folktale. Share with students that folktales are stories handed down from one generation to another by word of mouth; these tales are told by ordinary folks. Folktales are found in just about all cultures. Explain that long ago before books were available, people told stories as a way of preserving them. Today, many folktales have been retold and handsomely illustrated as children's books.

Activity/Reading Focus

On the chalkboard create a chart such as the one shown here. Explain that the chart shows some of the main characteristics of a folktale. Ask students to look for these as they read *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters*. Use their responses to complete the chart.

Folktale Characteristics

The characters are all good or all bad

There are magic or make-believe parts

There is a lesson or moral

The story takes place in a long-ago setting

Cultural Connections

Remind students that this story takes place in Africa, and point out that the characters' names come from the Shona language. After reading the story through, explore the following with students:

- How do the plants and animals reflect an African setting?

- What else in the illustrations suggests an African setting?
- Does this story remind you of Cinderella? In what ways?

Activity/Comparing Stories

Vocabulary

These words may be unfamiliar to students.

ignored	bountiful	grieve	millet
considerate	stole (moved secretly)	silhouetted	grove
acknowledge	garments	commotion	plumed
transfixed	enclosure	hysterically	chamber
proclaimed	rent (tore)		

Activity/Word Search

Try this activity to help make some of the unfamiliar words in the story familiar. Have students work with partners or in small groups. Assign each team a page or two in the book, and ask them to identify four or five words that they find difficult. Provide dictionaries and tell the teams to look up their words and write them on a sheet of paper. Then have students pass around the paper so that each team member can write a sentence using the word. Conclude by having the teams present their words and sentences to the class.

Introducing the Book

Here are a few strategies for introducing the book to the class.

- **Build Background** Write this question on a large poster pad: What is beauty? Call on volunteers to share their conceptions of beauty. Make a list of students' ideas. Explain that the book students will read is titled *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters*. Ask students to note how beauty is treated in this story.
- **Preview the Cover** Hold up the book so both the front and back covers are visible. Tell students that the covers show Mufaro's two daughters. Ask students to study the illustrations and then comment on the girls. Ask: *What is each one doing? What expressions do they have on their faces? What preliminary conclusions might students make about the girls from these pictures?*
- **Locate the Setting** On a globe or world map, help students locate Africa. Tell students that the story comes from an African country called Zimbabwe. Have a volunteer find Zimbabwe. Then locate the city of Nyanda. Explain that the story takes place just south of Nyanda in and near the walled city of Great Zimbabwe. Explain that the modern nation is named after this ancient city.
- **Enrich Students' Appreciation** Explain that the illustrations in this book show the fortress-city of Great Zimbabwe in ancient times. This city was a main trading center of the Shona people starting in the 1400s. There, the Shona sold gold, copper, and ivory to Arab merchants. The remaining ruins

of the city show that the Shona were skillful builders. The ruins of three of their stone structures—the Hill Complex, the Great Enclosure, and the Valley Complex—are still visible. Ask students to see if they can find any of these in the book illustrations.

Curriculum Extensions

Use these ideas to help students relate the literature to other areas of the curriculum.

Science: *Snake Search*

Remind students that the king is disguised as a garden snake (also called a garter snake in some places) in the story. Budding herpetologists might find out about the habits of such snakes and why they are helpful to gardeners. Point out that although there are many kinds of snakes in the world, most are not poisonous and only about 50 are truly dangerous to humans.

Art: *Wedding Bells*

Students might create fanciful invitations to the wedding of Nyasha and the king. Their invitations might include time, place, guests of honor, and appropriate dress. Students might also draw pictures of the wedding gift they would give to the newlyweds.

Social Studies: *Building a Building*

Tell students that the stone buildings at Great Zimbabwe are considered architectural marvels because they were made with dry walls. In a dry wall, the stones are cut and placed so exactly that no mortar or cement is needed. To help students understand the skill this requires, have them try to build a mini wall with small stones. How many layers can they add before the stones start to fall?

- Part of Collection:

[Fairy Tales](#)

- Subjects:

Africa, Literature, Literature Appreciation, Manners and Conduct, Teacher Tips and Strategies

- Skills:

Reading