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Margaret Musgrove. *The Spider Weaver: A Legend of Kente Cloth.* New York: Blue Sky Press, 2001. 40 pp. Ages 4-10. $16.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-590-98787-5.

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Published on H-AfrTeach (August, 2002)

Magical Legend of Kente Cloth's Origin Retold

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I was charmed by this beautifully illustrated picture book and highly recommend it for use in elementary schools. It re-tells the folk tale of Kente cloth woven by the Asante from Bonwire, a village in Ghana. The book begins by introducing Nana Koragu and Nana Ameyaw, two men who weave *nwen-ntoma*, a simple cloth that everyone in the village wears. Each page has painted scenes from village life poetically presented with lush vegetation and all human forms shown in silhouettes. The legend is told in the third person with quotes to indicate words spoken by the two weavers. The process of Kente cloth weaving is not explained nor are the illustrations of weavers at the loom painted in detail. The author's intention is to show how the discovery of a spider's beautiful web affected the two weavers. Both men feel that they have seen "a small miracle". They are inspired to weave a new cloth, one that reflects the elaborate patterns in the spider's web. The exquisitely painted illustrations of the Kente cloth, village life, and the surrounding forest will catch the imagination of young readers and could be used to stimulate art projects in the classroom. Teachers will be able to use the story in additional ways: to discuss history, family relationships, man's respect for nature and to stimulate interest in nature's impact on human creativity.

The legend corresponds to recent research published by UCLA's Fowler Museum of Cultural History for the "Wrapped in Pride" exhibition on Ghanaian Kente cloth (1999-2002), where: "…the Asante say that during the time of Oti Akenten in the middle of the 17th century, two brothers named Nana Koragu and Nana Ameyaw were in the forest hunting when they came across the spider Ananse weaving a web. After observing the spider for some time, they returned to their home village and introduced weaving". Margaret Musgrove's tale elaborates on this theme by showing that the intricate structure the weavers saw in the spider's web inspired them to create more complex woven patterns. Nana Koragu and Nana Ameyaw decided to redesign their looms to better imitate the "weaving dance" they saw while watching the spider spin her web. They copied the spider's patterns with their threads, and this led to more and more elaborate patterning in the Kente cloth they wove. The new Kente was called *kente-nwen-ntoma*. It was so intricate and elegant that only the King of the Asante was allowed to wear it at first.

This folk tale, set in the seventeenth century, has pre-industrial man as part of nature's enchanting environment. As the weavers walk into the forest to check their traps there is a feeling of awe for nature's miracles. They express gratitude for the grasscutters captured in the traps, since they will provide food for their families. The wild animals in the illustrations are not frightening. Great respect is shown for the magical work of the spider and the weavers make every effort not to destroy the web, its home. Each new web the spider spins is unique. The spider's imagined smile seems to be a sign of approval, like a teacher nodding at a student. The author and illustrator have reached a level of pure harmony that is reflected in the peace between man and nature.

The consistency of the stylized characters will allow young readers to easily recognize the weavers and their family members. Teachers will find information in the "Afterword" to assist them in situating the story in the context of Ghana and of Africa. It gives a basic history of Asante Kente cloth weaving, when it is worn, by whom, the proverbial meaning of several colors and patterns, and how the tradition is passed down from one generation to the next. The "Afterword" mentions the popularity and use of Kente cloth in the United States and how the machine-woven imitation, industrially produced on a wide loom, has lowered the cost but cannot compare to the high quality of the hand-woven narrow strip cloth made on the traditional West African loom.

This folk tale of the spider Ananse, who inspired man

to weave Kente cloth, is accurately retold, well-developed and engaging. The main characters are honorable and positive members of the village. This book is an excellent contribution to literature about Africa for children.

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Citation: Louise Meyer. Review of Musgrove, Margaret, *The Spider Weaver: A Legend of Kente Cloth*. H-AfrTeach, H-Net Reviews. August, 2002.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=6651

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