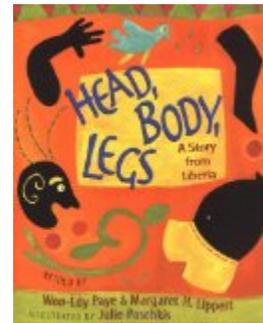


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Won-Ldy Paye, Margaret H. Lippert. *Head, Body, Legs: A Story from Liberia*. Illustrated by Julie Paschkis. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002. 28 pp. \$16.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8050-6570-1.

Reviewed by Jo M. Sullivan (Cambridge Public Schools, Cambridge, Massachusetts)
Published on H-AfrTeach (October, 2002)



Liberian Folktale Finely Retold

Liberian Folktale Finely Retold

This Liberian tale is clever, humorous and accompanied by colorful illustrations. As described by the authors, this is a story from the Dan people of northeastern Liberia, a small country on the west coast of Africa. Paye is a Liberian and a trained storyteller. Lippert is a teacher who has collected and published many folk stories. These two have collaborated on other stories.

This original and educational tale engages with the first words, "Long ago, Head was all by himself" (p. 2). As it turns out, head, arms, legs, and body were not together and could not accomplish basic tasks. For example, head met arms when he was trying to eat cherries from a tree. When they attached themselves and worked together, they were able to pick and eat the cherries. This is followed by body bouncing by and later legs joining the others. Each encounter begins with humor and miscom-

munication and ends with cooperation.

Liberian families use such tales to amuse children and to teach them about cooperation. Each part of the body is important and needs to work with the others to be successful in life, as families and communities must also.

This is a retelling, where authors and illustrators have creative license. It is unfortunate, however, that they did not make the effort to be more authentic. To my knowledge, there are no cherries in West Africa and using a local fruit would have been just as easy. In addition, a note on the back cover states that the illustrator was inspired "by the Asafo flags of the Fante people from coastal Ghana." The art and artifacts of the Dan of Liberia are well documented in African art literature and in museums and could have complemented this story well.

Children will enjoy reading this book themselves, or listening as it is read aloud.

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