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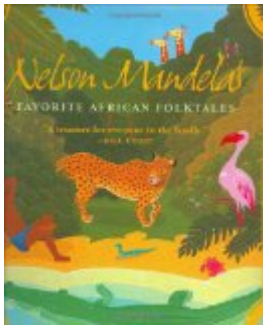
Nelson Mandela, ed. *Nelson Mandela's Favorite African Folktales.* New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002. 143 pp. $24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-393-05212-1.



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Published on H-AfrTeach (November, 2003)

Madiba's Magic: A Collection of Folktales to Charm Young and Old

Madiba's Magic: A Collection of Folktales to Charm Young and Old

When my review copy of *Nelson Mandela's Favorite Folktales* arrived in the mail, I opened the package, flipped through the contents and added it to the pile of books to review. My ten-year-old daughter promptly set aside the copy of the latest Harry Potter that she was reading, snatched the book off the pile and spent the next six hours reading the stories, delighting in showing me the illustrations, poring over the map at the beginning to check the distribution and commenting on the similarities between stories from different regions. Her reaction affirms Mandela's twofold desire in the foreword: that "children will discover again a variety of favorite themes in African tales, or perhaps unearth them for the first time" and that "the voice of the storyteller will never die in Africa, that all children in the world may experience the wonder of books, and that they will never lose the capacity to enlarge their earthly dwelling place with the magic of stories" (pp 7-8). This is a delightful collection of old favorites and new stories that illustrates the depth and diversity of African folklore. *Nelson Mandela's Favorite African Folktales* is a book that is meant to be read by children around the world.

The order of the stories has not been constrained by academic tradition. Pourquoi tales appear alongside trickster tales or creation tales; stories from different geographic regions in Africa appear side by side. Although the majority of the stories originate in southern Africa, other regions are well represented. Some Afrikaans stories appear in translation for the first time and are a welcome addition for readers who cannot access the original stories. The book is truly a treasure chest to dip into and explore–which is exactly what appealed to my daughter. The apparent arbitrariness should not suggest an unstructured melange–the stories complement each other well, and have been carefully chosen and presented in a way that will allow readers to explore the richness and texture of Africa's many narrative traditions.

At the beginning of each story there is a short comment on the origin of the tale. There is enough information to provoke the desire to find out more about the author, but not so much that it draws the reader away from the actual story–this balance is carefully maintained throughout the collection. The additional information at the back is succinct and interesting; however, it would have been nice if the editors had included the titles of other books by the authors of these tales for future investigation. The list of credits does tell us where these were originally taken from, but it is difficult to find the information and, at times, the trail stops there, as in the case of Kasiya Makaka Phiri. Phiri's biographical entry tells us that his poetry has been published in many countries (they are listed individually); the credits tell us that "The Mother Who Turned to Dust" is published here for the first time. There is no way that readers of this collection could possibly know about his wonderful collection, *The Old Man of the Waterfall and Other Stories.*

The lack of additional reading lists is a minor blight on an otherwise exceptional text. Readers will appreci-

ate the wide variety of artistic styles that complements the playfulness of the illustrations–from Mmadipetsane's impish grin as she teases the ledimo to the tangible exuberance of Fetiso bouncing along on the way to the market. The careful attention to detail is obvious throughout. Nelson Mandela's collection of folktales is a pleasure to read. At every level of the reading experience, this thoughtful publication was a delight.

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Citation: Peter Midgley. Review of Mandela, Nelson, ed., *Nelson Mandela's Favorite African Folktales*. H-AfrTeach, H-Net Reviews. November, 2003.

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