



PYA England Meeting Minutes

Tuesday 15 February 2022 @ Zoom

#25 Reflecting on African Fairy Tales

Present (20)
Jenny Smith, Curiosity Productions
Michelle, Theatr Iolo
Sarah Kemp, TSF
Ginni Manning
Michael Judge
Natasha Oxley, Chiffchaff Theatre and Greenwich Uni
Stefanie Reynolds
Natasha Holmes
Rebecca Lyon
Ruth Hill
Stacey
Isaac Boothman, Curiosity Productions
Lee Lyford
Lisa Difford
Martha Llyod-Evans, Half Moon
Katerina, Cloud Cuckoo Land
Steve Ball
Wendy Harris, tutti frutti productions
Mosa Mpetha, tutti frutti productions
Vicky Ireland
Apologies

1. Welcome and Updates – Mosa (10.30am)

Welcome to PYA England Coffee Meeting! A bit of protocol:

- Turn your screen off if you want to
- Keep your sound on mute whilst others are talking
- This is a friendly, open and sharing space. Please feel comfortable to contribute and share.
- Use the chat to feedback on what is being said or share thoughts.
- Zoom provides live captioning which you can turn on at the bottom of the screen
- We aren't resourced to facilitate access requirements every meeting, but do contact us if you need something and we can see what we can do

PYA England (Performance for Young Audiences) is the England sub group of [ASSITEJ UK](#), which is part of a global network, [ASSITEJ International](#). The PYA England sub group

welcomes its Irish, Welsh and Scottish colleagues to the zoom café's. ASSITEJ UK is a membership organisation and we would be delighted if any people new to this network want to become members. Wendy Harris is chair of PYA England, Pilar Santelices is the Vice Chair, Kate Cross is ASSITEJ UK Chair [*Information at the end of the minutes*]

We have a PR subgroup that looks after marketing, and a Lobbying sub group that is focusing at the moment on PYA data and Showcase events. There is also a PYA England steering group. Let us know if you would like to get involved with anything. Everything that we do happens because you are a part of it. Get in touch! wendy@tutti-frutti.org.uk

2. Notices (10.40am)

- Ginni DTEA Invite an MP to the theatre. <https://www.dtealliance.co.uk>

Now, more than ever, we need to get the message about the value of Drama and Theatre Education with children and young people to Government, MPs and school governors.

Drama in schools and universities in England is in crisis. Between 2010 and 2017 there was a 24% drop in students taking GCSE Drama. The government has reneged on promised funding for arts subjects in schools and slashed funding in higher education. The Covid pandemic has had a devastating impact upon theatres that produce work for young audiences.

On 18th March, we are asking teachers in schools, lecturers in universities and drama schools, youth theatre practitioners and learning officers in theatres and arts organisations to invite their local MP to come and visit them with the aim of involving all 533 English MPs. We are aiming to have one event in each constituency, and we encourage you to tailor the invitation to meet your local circumstances and passions.

The invitation, which would ideally come from the children and young people themselves, could be to attend either new or existing work, such as:

- A short performance by children and young people in a school
- A cross curricular drama project in a school.
- A drama-centred assembly
- A youth theatre performance in a local theatre or community setting
- A student production (or extract) in a university, perhaps with a local school invited to attend
- A professional performance for children, young people and families in a theatre, school, library or community setting.

Friday 18th March is timed to coincide with [World Day of Theatre for Children and Young People](#) on 20 March.

- IIAN's first international inclusive PYA festival, "Catch the Wave!" will take place in Esbjerg, Denmark 28th-2nd April - both live and on-line.

It is part of the larger annual Danish Aprilfest and is hosted with help from Danish ASSITEJ, Aprilfest, Glad Theatre and Perform Europe. IIAN won a grant from Perform Europe to start the creation of the first inclusive theatre for children and young people touring route, taking shows to Poland, Germany, Denmark, Italy, Romania and Cyprus and helping the festival.

Invitation to attend. Aim to discuss & learn in a safe atmosphere. *'Be bold, be brave & catch that wave'*. Shows, masterclasses, discussions, events. Dance class from Lithuania. Film made by Mind the Gap & Gecko. Opportunity to move on discussion about inclusive work to be excellent (in its own right), not as an add-on. Delegate package & day passes available; prices and more info coming soon. Please support. Contact Vicky Ireland for more info vicky.ireland@virgin.net

- Contact Pilar if you can help with comms or social media! Pilar Santelices pilar.santelices@gmail.com
- A group of us have started meeting every few months, anyone is welcome to join who is ethnically diverse and who experiences racism in our society. We talk about whatever we feel like, and it is a private and secure space. If you want to join, or you know someone who might, please email mosa@tutti-frutti.org.uk. The next gathering is Wednesday 2 March 2022 11am – 12pm Global Affinity PYA Group
- At 11.30am today the ASSITEJ UK AGM starts here, right after this meeting on this zoom.

3. Stefanie Reynolds Shares (10.45am)

Stefanie Reynolds. Writer. Current focus of research on African Fairy Tales. Working with <https://cloudcuckoolandtheatre.com>

Highlighting lack of diversity of stories in school settings. Why African fairy tales are less common as adaptations?

Research & findings

Western fairy tales have a lot of princesses waiting for a man to take action or make a decision.

African fairy tales have stronger female stories with action and hero.

More animals involved & closer to nature.

Tales finish up with a moral.

Stef shared an African fairy tale to the group.



The Gift of a Cow Tail Switch - A West African Tale

A great warrior did not return from the hunt. His family gave him up for dead, all except his youngest child who each day would ask, "Where is my father? Where is my father?" The child's older brothers, who were magicians, finally went forth to find him. They came upon his broken spear and a pile of bones. The first son assembled the bones into a skeleton; the second son put flesh upon the bones; the third son breathed life into the flesh.

The warrior arose and walked into the village where there was great celebration. He said, "I will give a fine gift to the one who has brought me back to life." Each one of his sons cried out, "Give it to me, for I have done the most."

"I will give the gift to my youngest child," said the warrior. "For it is this child who saved my life. A man is never truly dead until he is forgotten!"

Please contact Stefanie direct if you want to speak to her about her research.
Stefanie Reynolds <stefaniereyno@hotmail.com>

4. Questions for Breakout Rooms & Feedback: (10.55am – 11.15am)

1. *What did you think about the story read, how did it make you feel?*

Responses to family dynamics. Justice of the youngest being rewarded. How you inherit what came before you?

Interesting it being the youngest child who has the most wisdom.

Scary images are very prominent. Pile of bones. Fairy Tales are a good way of dealing with controversial topics, dealing with trauma. Children's experiences have changed because of Covid, & this is more needed now.

Concept of being a child & childhood is threaded into the story. Perspective of the youngest child asking, 'where is my father?' A good way for an adult to put themselves in a child's shoes.

2. *What do you know about African fairy tales? If anything. Have you ever encountered them?*

Discussion of putting on a play in S. Africa. Working with S. African theatre maker. Lalu from Lesotho. Closer to folklore. Some of the stories can be really scary. Devices to talk about different emotions.

- Theatr Sans Frontier – shows in different languages. Looked at West African Tales because French speaking. Did a story that resembled Cinderella. Also uses animals. European and African elements. Another show that had darker themes. Also tried to do one about a jumping fish with puppet shadows. Would work more collaboratively now so it isn't just a white company using African stories.



- Jenny Curiosity - spent a lot of time at storytelling festivals with diverse artists. Grew up loving African tales, because of the animals. Watch tinga tinga with four year old. Not produced any work around it yet, but chatting with Stef about it. Maybe there is opportunity for collaborations for storytellers.

Tinga Tinga Tales - <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWQLkOZV1aHXB0ihn2EwSbw>

Sarah – Long tradition of storytelling African stories but not so much theatre. It lends itself really well to children’s work. But the storytelling fraternity in Britain is more white.

Mosa - I also think African narratives are more loaded with more symbolism, each different animal, tree, scenario represents something else, or many things!

Ginni - Yes we talked about that too- the personification of nature

Tokalosh, about a creature that live under your bed. Terrifying. Possibility of exploring with Teenagers.

Memory of reading Anansi Tales. Loved the book & the illustrations.

With European fairy tales – working with a group of young people, the first thing they want to do is to change the female characters. Female characters have terrible thing happen to them, often victims.

Disney stories are often changed a lot from the original fairy stories. More sanitised.

However the original Brothers Grimm can be very dark & grim!

African stories can be cautionary tales to tell children. Entertainment & an exchange of morals.

Anansi, a trickster who can be naughty/wicked but still very attractive & likeable. Anansi can play a trick on someone he dislikes.

African stories morals less about the binary Good v Evil, than for example, Hans Christian Andersen with a strong Christian underpinning.

Similarities between African & European; for example Auta the Giant Killer, story from Hausa Land, Nigeria similar to English tale of Jack & the Bean Stalk.

Stories that travel, eg. The Swallowing Drum, different versions found in Nigeria, Jamaica & England.

Stories with musical instruments.

Black Panther.



Lack of diversity in schools when history lessons don't teach the legacy of Empire in a correct way.

However, some excellent practise in introducing stories from different cultures via drama & English.

3. Have you ever considered using or adapting African/Global stories? If not why not?

Desire to adapt stories in a respectful way. Important to know how you represent a story. Who has the right to tell a story?

Do you think the nervousness of white people to tell/work on these Black/African stories is the biggest barrier to going for it?

I think that's something which is big. It's also about structural and economic pressures. I think the nervousness of White Performers and writers of 'getting it wrong' is a worry, but we can't use that as an excuse. As Wendy is saying 'we need to get on with it'.

Need to do collaboration if a white company. Question of cultural appropriation. Lack of diverse artists locally if living in rural areas. Digital provides opportunities & enables.

Not done African stories before in lolo

Example of <https://www.fettleandfable.com/> story of Inkonjane – the Lightning Bird, the swallow that travels from Europe to Africa. Trailer here.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OHsf7tDKjPI> Myth of the Swallow traveling from Africa. White performer telling this story but done in a way that was well researched and with Yorkshire Swallow expertise. As a white performer, how to find the right balance, working with cultural guides. Rural area where demographic is predominately white. Swallow has a direct link with the 2 peoples for Europe & Africa.

Authors of colour telling contemporary stories.

Role of marketing and reliance on names. Apart from Anansi which is the exception. We all need to take more risks with global majority themed titles. PYA sector has historically been a pioneer in doing diverse work in 70s & 80s, how do we keep up that tradition.

<https://writingonthewall.org.uk/projects/superheroes-words-are-our-power-diverse-stories-for-a-diverse-world/>

That link is a project to address lack of diversity in literature in schools in Liverpool

<https://www.halfmoon.org.uk/programming/grandad-anansi/> - Grandad Anansi is a Half Moon and Z Arts co-production based around the Jamaican Anansi legend

I was thinking of Tomi Adeyemi's YA fantasy series – Children of Blood & Bone

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tomi_Adeyemi

<http://www.storyarts.org/library/nutshell/stories/gift.html>

<https://fairytalez.com/region/african/>

<https://criticalreading.net/2018/08/20/snow-in-cameroon-an-african-take-on-the-story-of-snow-white/>

5. Next Meeting Dates

- Tuesday 15 February 2022 11.30am – 12.30pm ASSITEJ UK AGM
- Wednesday 9 March 2022 11am – 12pm Global Majority Affinity Group
- Tues 19 April 2022 10.30am – 11.30am: Topic TBC
- Tues 21 June 2022 10.30am – 11.30am: Topic TBC
- Tues 20 Sept 2022 10.30am – 11.30am: Topic TBC
- Tues 22 Nov 2022 10.30am – 11.30am: Topic TBC

ASSITEJ UK Membership

This may seem like a weird time to be parting with cash, but please do read on....

Without support from our members, the PYA/TYA sector could have been cut adrift from one another and from our international colleagues. We may also have lost sight of our commitment and passion for high quality live performance for young audiences as being our sole and single-minded concern. On the Edge, Quality of Difference, Assitej regional showcases and countless opportunities for members to participate in Assitej International events would not have been made possible.

At a time when arts organisations are making tough choices and freelancers are facing an uncertain future. We understand how a membership fee is not going to be a number one spending priority. And yet, since lockdown began at the end of March, here are some of the things the **Assitej UK** network has achieved:

- Welcomed 15 new paying members.
- PYA England has reconstituted, recruited a new, diverse steering group, set out a marketing campaign, and hosted 3 coffee mornings, to which more than 30 people have attended each time.
- Members across the UK have contributed to articles in national newspapers, such as the recent article by Lyn Gardner in The Stage
- Members have lobbied their respective Arts Councils regarding the special case for young audiences.
- We have secured £555 funding from Action for Children's Arts Emergency fund.
- Submitted two bespoke PYA letters to Oliver Dowden, Culture Secretary.

Meanwhile, **Assitej International**, of which all Assitej UK members are by default a member, has hosted a raft of global coffee mornings, at which there has been representation from all continents. This is something you could not safely say about international festivals that are largely populated by delegates from wealthier countries and organisations.

It is quite possible that Corona Virus and Zoom have changed our idea of what is possible as a networking organisation, and our capacity to both celebrate our unique characteristics as individuals whilst staying well connected is looking rosier than it ever did! Could you consider joining the network at this time: for solidarity, a future facing approach, seizing the moment and making the next decade that of the child?

Covid-19 has hit our industry hard, therefore in 2021 if you are unable to pay your annual standard subscription of £70 for an Organisation or £25 for individual members, we are offering you the option to pay £25 as an Organisation and £5 as an individual member for the year.

- [Organisation Subscription Covid-19 Discounted Rate: £25](#)
- [Organisation Subscription Standard Rate: £70](#)
- [Individual Member Covid-19 Discounted Rate: £5](#)
- [Individual Member Standard Rate: £25](#)

Alternatively, please contact us by emailing info@tya-uk.org if:

- the cost of membership is too much for you at this time but you wish to make a one-off donation in lieu of your membership fee
- you would like to take a payment holiday for one year
- If you require an invoice

We very much hope that you will recognise the benefits of membership, and thank you in advance.