



**OVATIONS OFFSTAGE**

*presents*

A Study Guide for the  
School-Time Performance

# Queen Nur: “Sweet Potato Pie and Such”

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2019

10 AM & 12 PM • 60 MINUTES

HANNAFORD HALL, USM CAMPUS

PORTLAND



STUDY GUIDES ARE FREE AND AVAILABLE ONLINE:  
[PORTLANDOVATIONS.ORG/STUDY-GUIDES](http://PORTLANDOVATIONS.ORG/STUDY-GUIDES)

Portland Ovation has brought a dynamic season of exceptional performing artists to Portland, Maine, including classical music, jazz, opera, dance, theater, and Broadway since 1931. Portland Ovation believes that cultural enrichment should be accessible to all and provides quality live performances and education experiences. Ovation collaborates with other arts organizations, nonprofits, education systems and the business sector to promote cultural enrichment and lifelong learning and celebrates the power and virtuosity of the performing arts.

In addition to live performances, we bring the exhilaration of the performing arts out into our community with season-long educational and outreach programs called Ovation Offstage. Ovation Offstage creates resonating moments when artists and audiences connect. Whether it's an unexpected "art happening," a workshop or masterclass with a visiting artist, a lively community discussion, or a pre-performance lecture, Portland Ovation invites you to join us as we explore together the relevance and connection of the performing arts to our lives.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Ovation Offstage is made possible in part with support from Culture Club-Portland, Bank of America, TD Bank, Machias Savings Bank, Unum, Maine Arts Commission, Dead River Company, and the Sam L. Cohen Foundation.



## Queen Nur: "Sweet Potato Pie and Such" STUDY GUIDE

This guide includes information about "Sweet Potato Pie and Such" broader cultural and literary connections; suggested activities designed to engage and sustain your students' learning before, during, and after the show; as well as a number of local resources to help you extend your learning. Please note connections to Common Core State Standards.

Use this guide to help your students anticipate, investigate, and reflect upon your live performance experience.

- COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS:**
- Reading Literature
  - Reading Informational Texts
  - Writing
  - Speaking & Listening
  - Language
  - Maine Learning Results: Theatre
  - Movement
  - Character
  - Improvisation



### THEATER ETIQUETTE

Audience members play a special and important role in the performance. The performers are very aware of the audience while they perform and each performance calls for different audience responses. Lively bands, musicians and dancers may desire audience members to clap and move to the beat. Other performers require silent focus on the stage and will want an audience to applaud only when they have completed a portion of their performance. As you enjoy the show, think about being a part of the performance.

- What are the differences between attending a live performance and going to a movie or watching television?
- What are some different types of live performances? Name a few as a class.
- What kind of responses might an audience give in each circumstance?
- What are the different cues that a performer will give you so that you know how to respond? For example, might they bow or pause for applause?

*Also, remember that a theater is designed to magnify sound and even the smallest whispers or paper rustling can be heard throughout the auditorium. You are part of a community of audience members and you all work together to create your theater experience.*

## LOCAL RESOURCES

### Storytelling:

**Maine Organization of Storytelling Enthusiasts (MOOSE):** [www.facebook.com/MooseTellers](http://www.facebook.com/MooseTellers)

**Northeast Storytelling (NEST):** [www.nestorytelling.org](http://www.nestorytelling.org)

**Rhode Island Black Storytellers (RIBS):** [www.ribsfest.org](http://www.ribsfest.org)

**The Telling Room:** [www.tellingroom.org](http://www.tellingroom.org)

### African American History in Maine:

**Abyssinian Meeting House:** [www.abyme.org](http://www.abyme.org)

**Portland Freedom Trail:** [www.mainehistory.org/PDF/walkingtourmap.pdf](http://www.mainehistory.org/PDF/walkingtourmap.pdf)

**USM African American Collection:** [usm.maine.edu/library/specialcollections/aacm-history](http://usm.maine.edu/library/specialcollections/aacm-history)

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### ABOUT STORYTELLING

Storytelling is older than all other creative arts. It is said to be older than history. Storytelling transcends time, continents, and civilizations. It originated on the African continent and spread throughout the world. Stories may differ from place to place. In some cultures, such as in Ghana, the teller is expected to repeat a story as it has been told for generations. It is not unusual to find a storyteller being interrupted by a listener if the style or content of a traditional story has been altered by the teller. In other instances, stories often change to fit the time and context in which they are being told, but universally, storytelling has continued to fill the same basic social and individual needs.

The early storyteller was established as the bringer of good news, the historian, the disperser of the culture, the upholder of religious belief systems and morals, and an entertainer. In many West African cultures there was the “resident storyteller” (griot, djali, or Jali) who was assigned to chiefs, royalty, and others with status in the community. His position was one of high honor, great respect, and power. The “travelling storyteller” went from village to village with tales, anecdotes, fables, accounts of natural disasters, births, deaths, successions, songs, and any event that affected the welfare of the people.

In the mid-to-late 1800's, folklorists began to seek out and preserve traditional African tales in written form. Collections of narratives became an important part of the preservation of the oral tradition. Out of this work came many anthologies of African and African American folktales by folklorists and researchers such as Roger Abrahams, Harold Courlander, B.A. Botkin and William Faulkner.

### Stories are:

- ...the way in which the history, traditions and cultural values are passed on from generation to generation.
- ...the way in which the rules of the community are reinforced with children.
- ...a way of explaining natural phenomena (why or pourquoi stories)
- ...a fundamental unit of knowledge.
- ...the foundation of memory.
- ...essential to the way we make sense of our lives: the beginning, the middle and end of our personal and collective trajectories.

# Queen Nur: “Sweet Potato Pie and Such” STUDY GUIDE

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“Sweet Potato Pie and Such” will include stories selected from the following repertoire:

**Sweet Potato Pie Call:** an original work song sung in a traditional format.

**Ruth Oree’s Sweet Potato Pie:** a contemporary version of Red Riding Hood written by Queen Nur. It shares folk ways of city life and lessons of truth centered around a family’s traditional sweet potato pie.

**John The Rabbit:** a call and response traditional song from the time period when Africans were enslaved in America. It was used to teach children how to follow directions. Its primary function was as a coded message; while singing about a rabbit and a garden, the captives were planning their escape.

**Harriet Tubman Didn’t Take No Stuff:** a retelling of Eloise Greenfield’s popular poem. The storytellers add to the verses a phrase involving the audience through motion and singing.

**Zora Neale Hurston and the Chinaberry Tree, written by William Miller:** a story that embodies the pursuit of hopes and dreams and overcoming circumstances. The story shares the childhood experiences of one of America’s greatest folklorists.

**The Lion and The Hare:** an interactive retelling of a favorite animal tale. The hare tricks the lion into acting like a horse. Students learn lessons of self-esteem and self-determination while engaging in thigh pats, singing and call and response.

**Healing Hands:** a telling of a traditional African tale. The written version is entitled “The River That Gave Gifts.” A very special celebration will take place for an elder mother. One little girl believes that she only has ordinary hands and cannot make her a special gift. However, nature reveals her inherent gift of healing. This is a story of self-discovery and identifying and appreciating the gifts each of us have.

**In The Time of The Drum:** embodies life lessons learned by a young boy named Mentu. His teacher is Twe, his grandmother. The story takes place on an island during the time when African people were in captivity and bondage. This story comes from the Georgia Sea Island Tradition.

**Baba Rabbit & The Coconut Tree:** a tale of how Baba Rabbit’s cousin Brer Rabbit, deals with the greed of his neighbors. The story ends with an African American proverb that says, “Ashes fly back into the face of those who throw them.”

**Rafiki:** written and illustrated by Nola Langner, this animal tale speaks to gender equity. The animals all live in the same house and are told “animals do not clean, only little girls clean.” Then, one day a little girl comes walking through the forest. Lessons are learned and attitudes are changed in this dancing story.

**The Black Inventors Rap:** an original call and response rap that teaches the inventions of various African and African American inventors.

**Women’s First:** an interactive rap honoring women who made first achievements. “It’s alright to rearrange. It’s all right to make a change.”

**The Kwanzaa Yam Story:** Queen Nur’s repetitive retelling of a traditional Russian animal tale. It includes the seven principles of Kwanzaa, and the Kwanzaa symbols, and shouts of “Harambee” (“let’s pull together”) as all try to pull up a stubborn yam.

**Jump Down Turn Around:** a traditional work song used while picking cotton. Introduced by having the audience use math skills, the song bellows the emotion of working with family, while enduring the work. Selected participants join the storytellers to perform the work movements.

**Mary McCleod Bethune Story:** a story about a little girl who turned her desire to read (at a time when she would not have been allowed to pick up a book) into a life-long mission. As a civil activist and advocate of education, Mary was a soldier of truth, faith, and determination.



### **Introduce your students to folktales and storytelling.**

- Read aloud or have your students read several folktales.

#### **READING SUGGESTIONS:**

*Misoso: Once Upon a Time Tales from Africa* by Verna Aardema

*The Hat-Shaking Dance and Other Tales from the Gold Coast* by Harold Courlander

*The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales* by Virginia Hamilton

- Choose an Anansi story, a tall tale, a dilemma tale (the resolution of a conflict is left for the listeners to discuss), a story that offers an explanation for natural phenomena (a porquoi or why tale). Ask your students about the morals and lessons in the stories.

#### **READING SUGGESTIONS:**

*A Story, A Story: An African Tale* by Gail E. Haley

*Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears: A West African Tale* by Verna Aardema

- Find two versions of the same story. Have children make comparisons between the two.

#### **READING SUGGESTION:**

*Goldilocks and the Three Dinosaurs* by Mo Willems

- Encourage students to tell – not read – a story they are already familiar with. Discuss the differences between telling a story and reading that same story from a book.

#### **READING SUGGESTIONS:**

*The Storytelling Handbook: A Young People's Collection of Unusual*

*Tales and Helpful Hints on How to Tell Them* by Anne Pellowski

- Have your students brainstorm what they think a storyteller might do to make a story interesting to the audience. Make a list on chart paper. Encourage them to watch and listen carefully during the performance to observe the storyteller's voice, facial expressions, and body movements. Are there instruments used? How are they used in telling the story?



### **Familiarize your students with the names, locations, and diverse cultures of the African continent.**

**REMEMBER:** It is important to refer to the African continent as just that – a continent. It is as diverse, if not more so, than the European continent. There are 52 separate countries and hundreds of ethnic groups, languages, cultural traditions and belief systems within each country’s borders. Just as we make a point to clearly identify Poles, Czechs, Armenians, Scots, Celts, Welsh, Bosnians, Serbs, Croats, or the Hmong, we must also make a point to do the same when referring to inhabitants of the vast and ethnically diverse continent of Africa.

**FOR EXAMPLE:** Anansi stories were created by the Ashanti people of what is now Ghana in the western part of the continent. The trickster rabbit Sungura comes from Kenya on the opposite side of the continent. The land areas, peoples, and lifestyles are all different.

**LEARNING OPPORTUNITY:** Identify the ethnic group, culture, and country associated with each of the stories you use. Write and speak the name of the group or region of origin when referring to the story. Find the country or region on a map or a globe. Research and explore the cultural traditions, foods, clothing, family structures, and languages of that region.



“Burundian drummers of Batimbo United perform in Daniel Bernard Roumain’s En Masse, presented by Portland Ovations in May 2018.”

# Queen Nur: "Sweet Potato Pie and Such" STUDY GUIDE

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- Algeria
- Angola
- Benin
- Botswana
- Burkina Faso
- Burundi
- Cameroon
- Central African Republic
- Chad
- Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Republic of the Congo
- Cote d'Ivoire
- Djibouti
- Egypt
- Equatorial Guinea
- Eritrea
- Ethiopia
- Gabon
- Gambia
- Ghana
- Guinea
- Guinea-Bissau
- Kenya
- Lesotho
- Liberia
- Libya
- Madagascar

- Malawi
- Mali
- Mauritania
- Morocco
- Mozambique
- Namibia
- Niger
- Nigeria
- Rwanda
- Senegal

- Sierra Leone
- Somalia
- South Africa
- Sudan
- Swaziland
- Tanzania
- Togo
- Tunisia
- Uganda
- Zambia
- Zimbabwe



### **Discuss the performance with your students.**

- How did the storytellers use their voices?
- What additional items did the storytellers use to enhance the story?
- What parts of the stories made you laugh? When did you feel excitement, sadness, or fear? Did any of the situations in the story sound familiar to you? What were they?
- If the story had animal characters, how did they behave? Do they take on human characteristics?
- Did any characters – human or animal – learn a lesson in the stories?
- What did you learn from the stories?

### **Try the following activities with your class:**

- Review the list from your pre-performance brainstorm on what a storyteller might do to make a story more engaging to the audience. Ask your students to see if there are any items on the list that the storyteller incorporated into her storytelling style. Ask them to recall anything the storyteller did that was not on the list.
- Have your students retell their favorite stories.
- Illustrate one of the stories.
- Create your own story as a class.



## Rhythm Cards

**Help your students develop early literacy skills and learn to understand music notes with this easy game!**

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1. Start by having your students clap the syllables in their name (i.e., “Kris-ten” = clap-clap, “John” = clap).
2. When your students are able to relate clapping to the syllables in their names, you’re ready to start learning notes! Make your own rhythm cards or print the cards on the following page Add in a variety of parts of speech so that the cards can make a story.
3. Select 3 random cards and help your students count the number of syllables in the word on each card. Notice that the number of syllables is the same as the number of notes on the page! (Cat = 1 note, Turtle = 2 notes, Basketball = 3 notes). Clap along with each syllable.
4. Connect the words into a story. For example, “the cat and the turtle play basketball together.” Clap along with the syllables and add a tune.
5. Keep the story going and add verses as you wish!

*\*Exercise adapted from [www.storytimesongs.com](http://www.storytimesongs.com)*



**Car**



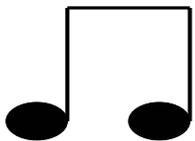
**Cat**



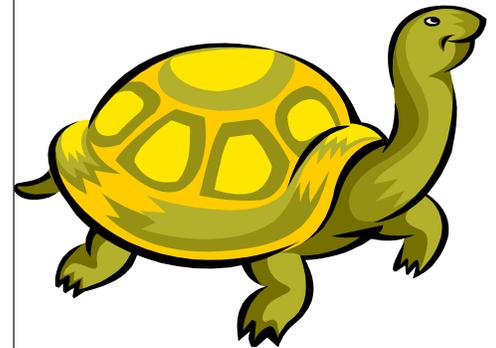
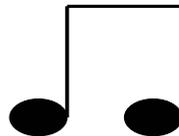
**Truck**



**Ballet**



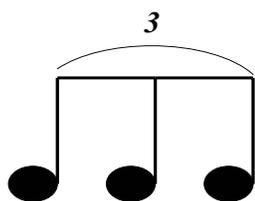
**Monkey**



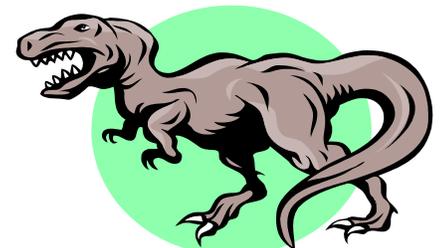
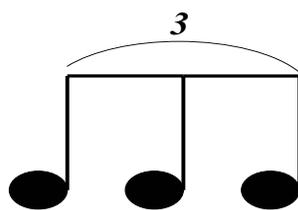
**Turtle**



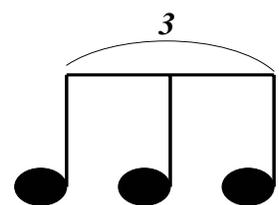
**Basketball**



**Butterfly**



**Dinosaur**



# Student Response Form

Please guide your students through this form. Students may write and/or draw pictures to respond to the performance.

**PERFORMANCE:** "Sweet Potato Pie and Such" • FEBRUARY 2019

**SCHOOL NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**STUDENT NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_ **GRADE:** \_\_\_\_\_

## VISUAL RESPONSE:

Draw your favorite moment from "Sweet Potato Pie and Such" below.

What did you really like about the performance?

What would you tell other kids about the performance?

Please print your name below to give Portland Ovarions permission to use your comments in future promotions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Your Name Here

**MAIL RESPONSES TO:**  
Ovarions Offstage  
50 Monument Sq, 2<sup>nd</sup> Fl.  
Portland, ME, 04101

# Teacher Response Forms

Please take a few moments to fill out and return this form after the performance. Your response to our School-Time Performance Series helps us plan for the future. Include any comments from class discussion as well!

**PERFORMANCE:** “Sweet Potato Pie and Such” • FEBRUARY 2019

**SCHOOL NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**YOUR NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_ **GRADE(S) OF STUDENTS:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**What made this a valuable experience for your students?** (If it wasn't, why not, what can we do better?)

**How did this live performance connect to or enhance your curriculum?**

**If you used this guide, how did it help you prepare for and reflect upon the performance with your students? Why or why not? OR if you knew about the guide but opted not to use it, tell us why you chose not to use it.** (We want to design the guides so that they are helpful tools for teachers—your feedback is key!)

**Tell us about planning the trip:**

How did you hear about this School-Time Performance? How was the process when arranging transportation?

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Please take a few moments to fill out and return this form after the performance. Your response to our School-Time Performance Series helps us plan for the future. Include any comments from class discussion as well!

**Tell us about the trip itself:** How was the arrival and dismissal process? Were all of your specified seating needs met?

**What types of performances would you like to see in the future (topics/themes, genres, specific artists, etc.)?**

**A number of generous individuals and organizations make it possible for us to offer these School-Time Performances at extremely discounted rates. Is there anything you'd like them to know in terms of your experience or its impact on your class?**

Please sign below if Portland Ovation has permission to use any of your comments in future promotions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sign here

**RETURN TO:**

Ovation Offstage  
50 Monument Sq, 2<sup>nd</sup> Fl.  
Portland, ME, 04101