
I LOST MY TOOTH IN AFRICA

Author: Penda Diakité

Illustrator: Baba Wagué Diakité

Publisher: Scholastic

THEME:

No matter where in the world we live, we meet the challenges of growing up and celebrate our accomplishments...with a little help from family and friends.

PROGRAM SUMMARY:

I Lost My Tooth in Africa, written by a girl and illustrated by her father, tells the tale of a young girl who loses a tooth while visiting her father's family in Africa. In the African tradition, she places the tooth under a gourd and in return gets two chickens from the Tooth Fairy. Host LeVar Burton explores with youngsters how things have changed for them as they've grown, and how taking care of our teeth is part of that process. Then it's off to attend a quinceañera -- a celebration for a 15-year-old Hispanic girl in honor of her transition into womanhood.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

Discuss with students the "big moments" in their lives—those events in which they accomplished something they had wanted to do for some time but had not been able to do because they were too young, too small, not strong enough, not skilled enough, and the like. How did their eventual success make them feel?

Some aspects of growing up happen as a result of physical development, such as losing teeth. Others are achieved through experience and practice. Discuss various activities at which young people can become skilled through repeated practice.

Brainstorm with students what they expect to be able to do in the future that they cannot do at their present age.

There were many instances in the story in which Amina had to be patient (i.e., waiting for her tooth to fall out, waiting for her chicken, waiting for the eggs to hatch, waiting to return to Africa). Invite students to share their own stories about the difficulty of patiently waiting for something to happen.

Just for fun, ask students to imagine what the Tooth Fairy does with all those teeth that are collected.

CURRICULUM EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

Write "Tooth Tales." Make paper cut in the shape of a tooth available. Have students write about an experience losing a tooth. Possible details for their stories include where they lost it, how they lost it, who helped them (if any-one), where they left the tooth for the Tooth Fairy, what the Tooth Fairy left in place of the tooth, how their mouth feels to have a space where a tooth once was, and similar related information. Bind the pages into a book for the classroom library.

Invite a dentist or dental hygienist into the classroom to talk with the students about the importance of good dental health and what they can do to maintain healthy teeth.

Make a class graph of lost teeth. Cut a large piece of paper in the shape of a tooth. Draw a bar for each month of the school year and divide it into squares. When students lose a tooth, have them color a square in the appropriate month to build the graph. At the end of each month, compare the number of teeth lost in each month by creating math problems, such as "How many more teeth did we lose in January than we lost in November?" or "In what month did we lose the most teeth?"

In a year-long classroom project, use a digital camera to take pictures of students with big smiles (showing the empty space after they have lost a tooth). Put the pictures on a bulletin board entitled, "I Lost My Tooth in _____ Grade." Have students write a short caption for their picture(s) telling the circumstances in which they lost the tooth/teeth.

Have students draw pictures of the Tooth Fairy. Encourage them to use their imaginations as they consider how she (or he?) looks, travels, and carries all those teeth.

Write "When I Was Little" books. Invite students to think of everyday tasks in their lives that have changed or become easier because they have grown older. Give students paper divided in the middle. On the left side of the page, write "I used to..." for the heading; on the right side, write "But now I" Have students complete the thought on each side and illustrate it. For example, "I used to stand on a stool to wash my hands" and "But now I can reach the sink."

The author of this book wrote it when she was eight years old. The idea for the story came from an experience of her younger sister, Amina, who lost her tooth in Africa. Discuss the concept of "authorship" with students to find out what they know about the kind of work authors do. Work with the library media specialist to find other books written by young authors and make a display in the classroom. Also locate autobiographies of children's book authors.

Read some of them to the students, noticing where authors get their ideas for stories. Make a chart of the findings and post it in the classroom where students can refer to it when they are thinking about their own story ideas.

Revisit the book with the class. Loosing a tooth is only one of the experiences in the story with which the students are familiar. Have them compare and contrast other daily activities in the African village with what they do in their home (e.g., eating, sleeping, brushing teeth, and many others mentioned in the story).

Make ceramic tile art. Obtain other books illustrated by Baba Wagué Diakité: *The Hunterman and the Crocodile* (Scholastic), *The Hatseller and the Monkeys* (Scholastic), and *The Magic Gourd* (Scholastic). Study the images and patterns in the illustrations. (Some of the patterns are discussed in author's notes at the end of the books.) Note the borders around the pictures and discuss why the artist chose those particular images for the borders. Obtain some ceramic tile samples or close-outs from a home improvement store. An 8 x 8-inch square tile will allow ample space for a border and a picture. Use a water-based paint that will adhere well to the surface. Have students make a drawing that tells a story about an important event in their lives related to growing up. Place the drawing on a piece of paper cut to the size of the tile before painting. Make a display of the finished story tiles.

Research the role of animals in the lives of people around the world. Locate nonfiction books about world cultures. Skim for information about animals as pets, animals that live with and work for families, animals used for travel or commerce, animals used for recreational purposes, and other relationships between animals and people. Compile the information on a chart with the following headings: "Name of Country," "Kinds of Animals," "Purpose for Keeping Animals," and "Interesting Facts."

RELATED THEMES:

embryology
African culture
traditional ceremonies from world cultures
rites of passage

RELATED READING RAINBOW PROGRAMS:

Program #38 Chickens Aren't the Only Ones
Program #119 Owen

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Born in Portland, Oregon, Penda Diakité visits Bamako, Mali, whenever she can. She wrote this story when she was eight years old. It was inspired by an experience of her younger sister when she lost her tooth while in Africa. Penda lives in Portland with her family, which includes the book's illustrator Baba Wagué Diakité, and a variety of pets.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR:

Baba Wagué Diakité was born in Mali, West Africa, and now lives in Portland, Oregon. He credits traditional stories told by his mother and grandparents as the greatest influences in his life. He recalls bringing these stories to life in his imagination as a child. He views storytelling as a "true way of learning" and is committed to passing this gift to his own children. "Storytelling is the best means of communication between people from different cultures.... Stories help us to accept each other's differences and to be kind to nature." Educated in a French school in Bamako, Mali, he did not begin his ceramic art until he moved to the United States. Since then, he has exhibited his hand-painted ceramics here and abroad.

BOOKS REVIEWED BY CHILDREN:

MY WOBBLY TOOTH MUST NOT EVER NEVER FALL OUT
by Lauren Child (Grosset & Dunlap)

rites of passage: coming of age
by Mandy Ross (Heinemann Library)

MADLENKA
by Peter Sís (Frances Foster/Farrar Straus Giroux)

SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKLIST:

THROW YOUR TOOTH ON THE ROOF: TOOTH TRADITIONS FROM AROUND THE WORLD
by Selby B. Beeler, illustrated by G. Brian Karas (Houghton Mifflin)

THAT'S HARD, THAT'S EASY
by Margery Bernstein, photographs by Dorothy Handelman (Sagebrush)

SALLY JEAN, THE BICYCLE QUEEN
by Cari Best, illustrated by Christine Davenier (Farrar Straus Giroux)

TOOTH TALES FROM AROUND THE WORLD
by Marlene Targ Brill, illustrated by Katya Krenina (Charlesbridge)

ANOTHER IMPORTANT BOOK
by Margaret Wise Brown, illustrated by Chris Raschka (HarperCollins)

WHEN I WAS FIVE
by Arthur Howard (Harcourt)

CELEBRATING A QUINCEAÑERA
by Diane Hoyt-Goldsmith, photos by Lawrence Migdale (Holiday House)

JANE VS. THE TOOTH FAIRY
by Betsy Jay, illustrated by Lori Osiecki (Scholastic)

SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKLIST Continued:

MAKE WAY FOR TOOTH DECAY

by Bobbi Katz, illustrated by Steve Bjorkman (Scholastic)

OPEN WIDE: TOOTH SCHOOL INSIDE

by Laurie Keller (Henry Holt)

BIG BOY

by Tololwa M. Molel, illustrated by E.B. Lewis (Houghton Mifflin)

FIRST TIME ABC

by Melinda Beth Radabaugh (Heinemann Library)

VERA GOES TO THE DENTIST

by Vera Rosenberry (Henry Holt)

VERA RIDES A BIKE

by Vera Rosenberry (Henry Holt)

THE MILESTONES PROJECT: CELEBRATING CHILDHOOD AROUND THE
WORLD

by Richard Steckel & Michele Steckel (Ten Speed Press)

In Mali, her father explained, children who lose a tooth are given a chicken by the African tooth fairy. Amina is thrilled when she wakes up one morning and discovers a space where her tooth used to be. Later that day she finds not one chicken but two—a hen and a rooster—under a calabash gourd. Soon the hen has laid eggs, and just before Amina leaves for America the first chick hatches. Marvelous details of the time Amina spends with her extended family—things they do, foods they eat—enliven this story grounded in her appealing, first-person voice. Penned by teenager Penda Diakit, about her y