Activity Guide

Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters

ABOUT THE STORY
Mufaro has two daughters: Nyasha, who is kind and gentle, and Manyara, who is ill-tempered and unhappy. When the king announces that he is looking for a wife, both girls travel to the city. Manyara is determined to become queen, no matter what; Nyasha is sorry to leave her home and the people and animals there. What happens to the two girls when they reach the king's city is revealed in this traditional African folktale.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR
John Steptoe (1950-1989) was born in Brooklyn, New York. He studied illustration at the High School of Art and Design in New York City and at Vermont Academy. His first book, *Stevie*, was published when he was only 18 and was followed by more than a dozen popular picture books. He was inspired to write *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* by a folktale published in 1895. His illustrations are based on the plants and animals of Zimbabwe and on the ruins of an ancient city found there. *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* won both a Caldecott Honor Medal and a Coretta Scott King Award.

INTRODUCING THE STORY
Ask children if they can think of any folktales or fairy tales that feature a prince or king who is looking for a wife. List responses on the chalkboard. Explain that the story they will read treats the same theme, but with a new twist.

READING ACTIVITIES
Comprehension/Thinking Skills
a. "What does Manyara think of Nyasha?"
b. "What animal does Nyasha befriend?"
c. "What does the old woman tell Manyara to do? Does she do it?"
d. "How does Nyasha treat the boy and the old woman?"
e. "How does Nyasha react when she sees the city?"
f. "Were you surprised at the snake's identity? Why or why not?" *(Make predictions)*
g. "How are the two sisters similar? How are they different?" *(Compare and contrast)*

Vocabulary
Write these words in a box on the chalkboard. Then ask children to choose the word from the box that best completes each sentence.

considerate   praise   servant   bountiful   proclaimed

1. Nyasha's vegetable garden was always _____.
2. Manyara never had any words of _____ for her sister.
3. Nyasha was very _____ to everyone she met on her journey.
4. Which sister will be the queen, and which will be the _____?
5. The king _____ that it was Nyasha he loved.

CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES
Science: African Animals
The illustrations show many different kinds of animals found in Africa. Have children work in pairs to choose one of the animals in the illustrations to identify. Partners can write a paragraph about the animal they have chosen, using an encyclopedia or other source material to find information about it.

Social Studies: Zimbabwe
John Steptoe's illustrations are based on the plant and animal life of Zimbabwe. Ask children to work in groups to find information on Zimbabwe. Using encyclopedias and other source material, they can write down important facts and statistics about the country to share with the rest of the class.

Health: African Ingredients
Among the crops that Nyasha grows are millet and yams. Ask children to look through cookbooks — especially African cookbooks, such as *The People of Africa and Their Food* by Ann L. Burckhardt — for recipes including either of these ingredients. Children can collect their recipes together in a class cookbook.

Language Arts: African Folktales
Ask children to look in collections of African or multicultural folktales to find another tale they like. Encourage them to retell the tale in their own words (noting the title and author of the original tale at the end). They can illustrate their folktales and collect them together in a class book of African folktales.

INTERNET ACTIVITY
Before you send children to do research using any of the keywords listed below, you may wish to try them yourself to be sure the sites are suitable.
The Shona Language
In the Shona language, Mufaro means "happy man," Nyasha means "mercy," Manyara means "ashamed," and Nyoka means "snake." Ask children to search the Internet to find more words from the Shona language, using the keyword *Shona*. Children can work together to create a Shona dictionary.