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# Reading Differences

## Teaching sequence for *The Village that Vanished*

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Ragged Bears, 2002

### About the book

In this book words and pictures work together to give a picture of a rural African village and its way of life at the time of the slave trade. The names come from the Yao tribe in Mali. The story is told as if by a traditional storyteller recounting an episode from tribal history to children. The storyteller explains that stories are a way of 'hearing the voices of ancestors', and introduces a tale of courage and sacrifice. This short book contains three distinct dramatic episodes involving courage: the debate in the village that leads to Njemile's plan being carried out, the magical crossing of the deep river led by Abikanile and Chimwala's successful deception of the slavers. It gives an authentic impression of the life and setting of a West African village, a glimpse into its beliefs and customs, and an insight into the impact of slavery on such a village. It also introduces the role of storytelling as oral history in traditional societies.

### Structure of the teaching sequence

The teaching sequence focuses on the interaction between text and pictures in telling a story. It is developed through whole-class and shared reading, artwork and drama. The six sessions may be adapted in different ways according to the interest of the children, but the aim should be an in-depth engagement with the themes and context of the book.

### Links to the national curriculum and the primary national strategy (PNS)

This work relates to the requirement in the English national curriculum programme of study for reading: *a range of literature drawn from a variety of cultures and traditions; myths, legends and traditional stories* (8e and 8f).

It also connects with specific teaching objectives in the *PNS Framework for Teaching* for years 3 and 4 to do with reading and responding to texts from different cultures.

### Anticipated outcomes

Based on their reading and discussion of the book, children will:

- develop their knowledge of storytelling language and their skills as storytellers
- appreciate how the illustrations in a picture book contribute to the narrative
- learn how to frame convincing arguments through participation in a structured debate
- extend and refine their views of heroes and heroism by considering these qualities in a different cultural context.

### Resources and preparation

- At least one copy of the book between two or three children.
- Some understanding about the slave trade will help situate the story. This can be developed through the book itself and through discussion arising from it.

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# Teaching sequence

## Session 1: Initial reading and retelling

Read the story aloud to the class. Go back over the story showing the pictures to the class, using this as an opportunity to revisit the key scenes. Discuss some of the pictures at more length (for example the image of the slavers in the clouds, the first picture of the village or the confrontation between the slavers and Chimwala). What kind of an impression of the village, and the way of life of its people, do these pictures convey? List the children's ideas.

Organise the class into five groups. Let each group have a copy of the book so that they can use the pictures as a reminder of the shape of the story. Return to the opening of the story and the words of the storyteller. Ask the class to retell the story as if it was a story of their own ancestors. Ask one person to be in charge of showing the pictures while the others take it in turns to tell part of the story. Listen to two of the retellings and discuss how far they echo the original storyteller's language.

## Session 2: Mapping story and setting

Divide the class into small groups to map the village of Yao, showing the villagers' seven huts and their planted lands, the surrounding woods, the river and the forests on the other bank, and the direction that the slavers came from. Children should check their impressions of the setting against text and pictures, and annotate the map to show particular features, using words and phrases from the story. Pin up the maps and compare them, then discuss the importance of the setting in this story.

An art project could involve further discussion of Kadir Nelson's illustrations and how he uses detailed drawing, photocopying, and then painting in a few rich colours. Children can make a detailed picture map using some of Kadir Nelson's illustration techniques.

## Session 3: Debating dilemmas: foregrounding moral and cultural issues in the story

Explain to the children that they are going to stage the debate that led to the village vanishing. One person will be the lookout who brings news of the slavers, two children will represent Njemile and Chimwala, and the rest will be elders or women. This debate involves the village in dilemmas related to their customs and traditions. Some people are likely to oppose Njemile's plan. At the end of the debate Chimwala should speak and announce her intention of staying on in her hut. Some of the villagers should then try to persuade Chimwala to leave. A group of children will not speak but will listen to the arguments and judge who has spoken best.

The children prepare what they are going to say first, writing down their arguments or trying them out on a partner. Stage the debate and afterwards ask the children to decide who spoke most convincingly.

## Session 4: Heroes and heroines: foregrounding the moral issues in the story

Make a chart with the names of the three main characters (Chimwala, Njemile and Abikanile) at the top. Each of these characters has some claim to be called the heroine of the story. Ask the children to describe the heroic qualities of each character and record descriptions in columns beneath the characters' names. They should look carefully at pictures of the three characters to see what they can learn from them. Remind them of the qualities the storyteller picked out as

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important in this story – faith, courage and sacrifice. When the chart is complete, ask the children to debate which character is the most important, saying why they think so. They could compare these heroines with the heroes or heroines in other stories they know. Then ask them to vote on which character is the heroine. Why is it important for societies to remember heroic people? Do they know any stories from other cultures about heroic characters?

### **Session 5: Adopting the voices and perspectives of others**

Discuss the role the ancestors played in the story. As a piece of shared writing make up a prayer of thanks to the ancestors for having saved the village. Remind the children of the prayers that Njemile said, then compose as a class a prayer that the villagers could say in future to commemorate their survival.

### **Session 6: Inhabiting a new narrative role and using new language**

The children retell the story in writing, choosing to do so from the point of view of Chimwala, Njemile or Abikanile. They will need to take on a storytelling voice and use some of the language they remember from the story.