



# Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters

by John Steptoe

## Teacher's Guide

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## Synopsis

In this African folktale, Mufaro and his two beautiful daughters, Nyasha and Manyara, live in a small village not far from the king's palace. The two daughters are very different. Nyasha is gentle and kind, while Manyara is bad-tempered and selfish.

The king announces that he is looking for the most beautiful woman in the land to be his wife. In disguise, the king meets both Manyara and Nyasha. Through these experiences, he finds Nyasha to be the most worthy and beautiful woman in the land. As the story ends, the lesson is revealed: kindness prevails.

## Timeline

- Beginning** Mufaro lives in a small African village with his two daughters.
- Then** The king announces he is seeking the most beautiful woman in the land to be his wife.
- Later** The king, in disguise, visits the daughters and discerns their true character.
- Finally** The king chooses Nyasha for her kind and gentle nature, which represents true beauty.

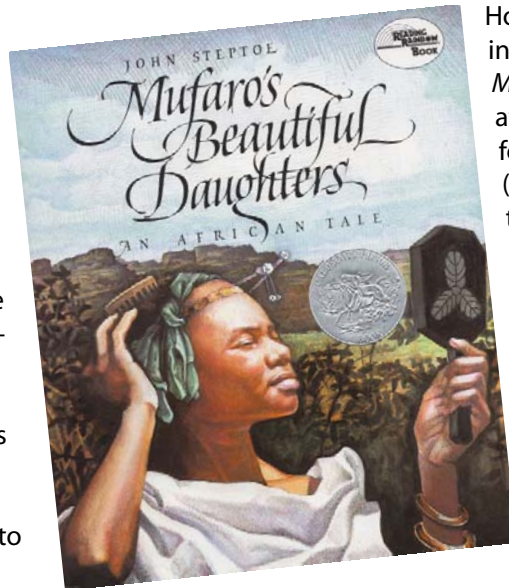
## Author Sketch

John Steptoe was born on September 14, 1950, in Brooklyn, New York. He attended the New York High School of Art and Design and the Vermont Academy. During his career he was an artist, author, and illustrator of children's books. Through his work, he shared pride in his African-American heritage. Steptoe died on August 28, 1989, at Saint Luke's Hospital in Manhattan after a long illness.

## Critic's Corner

Award-winning picture book author/illustrator John Steptoe came to national attention in 1969, at the age of 18, when his first book, *Stevie*, was published in its entirety in *Life* magazine; Steptoe had started writing the book, hailed as "a new kind of book for black children," when he was only sixteen. During his subsequent twenty-year career, Steptoe illustrated an additional fifteen picture books, ten of which he also wrote, and garnered numerous awards in the process, including two Caldecott Honors (for *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* in 1988 and *The Story of the Jumping Mouse* in 1985); two Coretta Scott King awards; a *Boston Globe/Horn Book* Award for illustration; and a Milner Award (voted by Atlanta schoolchildren as their favorite author). *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* was hailed by critics for its illustration and breakthrough use of African-American folklore. The story, based on an old African tale, required Steptoe to research African history and culture, awakening pride in his heritage which he hoped to transmit to all children, and especially African-American children. In speaking of his many accomplishments, he said, "I am not an exception to the rule among my race of people. ... By

that I mean there are a great many others like me where I come from." In his honor, the American Library Association established the prestigious John Steptoe Award to recognize outstanding African-American authors and illustrators.



## Selected Other Works by John Steptoe

- Baby Says*
- Birthday*
- Daddy Is a Monster...Sometimes*
- Jeffrey Bear Cleans Up His Act*
- Marcia*
- My Special Best Words*
- Stevie*
- Story of Jumping Mouse*

*Train Ride*  
*Uptown*

## Bibliography

"John Steptoe Biography,"  
[www.harpercollins.com/authors/12770/John\\_Steptoe/index.aspx](http://www.harpercollins.com/authors/12770/John_Steptoe/index.aspx)  
"American Library Association,"  
<[www.ala.org/ala/emiert/corettascottking-bookawards/winners/newtalentaward/newtalentaward.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/emiert/corettascottking-bookawards/winners/newtalentaward/newtalentaward.cfm)>

## Cross-Curricular Resources

"John Steptoe Teacher Resource File,"  
<[falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/steptoe.htm](http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/steptoe.htm)>

## Themes and Motifs

- cultural diversity
- folktales
- African history and culture
- caring
- character

## Meaning Study

### Skills and Strategies

- Using context clues to develop vocabulary
- Making comparisons
- Recognizing story structure

### Initiating the Reading Experience

1. Collect items that represent Africa and place them in a suitcase. (These might include pictures of wild animals, landscapes and people, foods, a map, travel brochures, a safari hat, etc.) Show the suitcase to the students and ask them if they can tell what country you would be visiting based on the contents. Initiate a discussion about Africa. Record the students' comments about this country.
2. Have the students locate Africa on a map or globe. Discuss its location in relationship to our continent.
3. Display a collection of folktale books. Give the students an opportunity to explore these. Explain to the students that folktales are stories that have been handed down from generation to generation. These began as oral stories told to others.  
•Folktales often include talking to animals and a

moral that can be drawn from the tale. You may choose to share a well-known folktale with the students to introduce this genre. (Refer to the Related Reading Section for possible selections.)

### Introducing the book

1. Present the book to the students. Open the book to display the front and back cover. Have the students identify the title and author/illustrator. Call attention to the Caldecott Honor Award, explaining what it represents.
2. Generate responses concerning the characters, setting and story based on the illustrated cover. Record the responses so that the students can confirm their predictions after hearing the story.
3. Read the introductory page to the students. Discuss Steptoe's selection of settings for this story. This page also explains the meanings of the names of the characters. Give the students an opportunity to discuss the origin and meaning of their names and/or why they were given a specific name. You may wish to provide them with name directories so they can look up the meaning of their names.

### Reading the Book

Prereading: Setting the purpose for reading.

1. Have the children read to confirm their predictions and gain the meaning of the story.  
During Reading:
2. Read the book to or with the children. Model the enthusiasm you have for the story. Allow the children to view the illustrations on each page as the text is read. You may wish to have the students predict "what will happen next" at several appropriate places in the book.

Post Reading: Confirming, analyzing, synthesizing or evaluating the reading.

1. Encourage the children to share their feelings about the story.
2. Allow the students to confirm any predictions they might have made prior to reading the story.
3. Initiate small group or whole class discussion of the story. Some of the following questions may help to start and/or guide this process:
  - After reading this story, would you like to visit Africa? Why?
  - How were Nyasha and Manyara different?
  - Why didn't Mufaro realize that his two daughters were

different?

- Would you rather have Nyasha or Manyara for a friend? Why?
- Why did the king choose Nyasha to be his wife?
- What kind of a servant do you think Manyara will be?
- What do you think the wedding celebration was like?
- What part of the story did you like best? Why?
- Could this story really have happened? Why?
- What other stories do you know that are similar to this/story?

4. Have the students revisit the book as often as needed to reread the story and examine the illustrations.

## Student Involvement Activities

1. Use context clues to develop vocabulary:

Locate and read each sentence containing an unfamiliar word, such as: bountiful, proclaimed, grieve, silhouetted, foretold, destination, trans-fixed, descended, hysterically, or any others needing further exploration. Write each sentence containing an unfamiliar word on the board. Focus on the unfamiliar word by framing it. Example:  
“... and some said it was her singing that made her crops more bountiful than anyone else’s.”  
Ask the students what they think “bountiful” means. List those responses. Example:  
“... and some said it was her singing that made her crops more bountiful than anyone else’s.”  
Explore additional words in the same manner. This activity can be extended by having each child choose several of the new words to define and use in original sentences.

2. Making comparisons:

There are several types of comparisons that can be made using this text:

- Two characters: Nyasha and Manyara
- This folktale to another folktale
- Life in Africa then and now
- This book to another book by this author

Discuss how making comparisons can be done by determining the likenesses and differences of two or more things. This can be modeled by selecting two students and having the students note how they are like and how they are different. List and compare characteristics using the handout “Making Comparisons.”

3. Recognizing story structure:

Discuss the five major story elements with the students: setting, characters, problem, action, and resolution/outcome. Provide copies of the hand-out “Story Structure” for students to complete.

## Across the Curriculum

### Writing

1. Bring in copies of various advice columns from the newspaper and/or magazines. Give the students an opportunity to explore these. Divide the students into pairs. Have one student write for advice from one of the characters in this story and the other student reply. These can be compiled in a book format for all to share. This activity could be extended by letting the students continue to write advice columns based on their personal experiences.
2. Discuss the marriage proposal made by the king. Let the students share any other information they have that relates to marriage proposals. Have each of the students write a different marriage proposal from the king to Nyasha and her acceptance/rejection of it.
3. Have the students work in pairs or small groups to create a different ending to this story. These can be shared with the class.
4. Discuss the characters in the story. Have each student select one of these to be his/her friend. Provide the students with the materials necessary to write about and illustrate something they could do with this character. Encourage them to include details of the event.

### Math

1. Share James Haskins’ book, *Count Your Way Through Africa*, with the students. The children can learn to count to ten in Swahili through the use of this text. Have the students use index cards to write mathematical equations in English on one side and in Swahili on the other side. The students can illustrate these, if desired.
2. Provide the students with a photocopy of a map of Africa. Have them use a mileage scale and a ruler to determine length and width of the continent at various strategic points and record them. Following this activity, have the students create a mileage scale that will allow them to make a rough outline map of Africa, either in their class-

room using masking tape or on a hard top surface on the playground. Supply them with the necessary measuring instruments and other materials necessary to complete this activity.

## Social Studies

1. Share the book, *Ashanti to Zulu: African Traditions*, by Margaret Musgrove. Initiate a discussion of the likenesses and differences of the customs of different African tribes presented in this book.
2. Have the students research ways various cultures celebrate holidays around the world. Students can share these reports with the class. They may wish to dress in costumes that represent that culture or share foods that are traditionally part of that celebration.
3. Reread the last page of the text to initiate a discussion about wedding customs. The students can share various marriage customs and traditions that are familiar to them. You may wish to share the book, *Jafta and the Wedding*, by Hugh Lewin to help the students begin their exploration of African wedding traditions as well as those of other countries and cultures.
4. Invite a travel agent or someone who has visited Africa to tell the class more about the country. This can be extended by having the students create travel posters or brochures to depict various aspects of Africa.
5. Discuss the values this book teaches. Explain that folktales often teach the values and customs of a country. Provide the students with other folktales from Africa. Have them identify the values and/or customs presented in each. These findings can be recorded on a class chart.
6. Use a globe or world map to have the students locate Africa, the United States and the state in which they live. Have them locate land masses, bodies of water, forest areas, the coasts of each country and the equator. Have the class plot a trip from their location to a selected location in Africa. Assist them in determining the mileage, forms of transportation needed, sites to see, events to attend, cost and time needed to complete the trip.

## Science/Health

1. Refer back to the text to review what Nyasha was growing in her garden as the beginning of a discussion about foods grown in Africa. Have the students use reference materials on Africa to determine other food products from that country. These include yams, sunflower seeds, mangoes, honey, dates, peanuts, grapes, olives and coffee. You may wish to have a "tasting party" using some of these foods.
2. Talk about various plants that can be grown in a garden. Bring in seeds for the students to plant in plastic glasses or empty margarine tubs. Have the students fill the containers with potting soil and plant seeds in each. Discuss what seeds need to grow. Have each of the students take the responsibility of caring for his/her plant. The growth of the plants can be recorded in a learning log or graphed on a class chart.
3. Provide the students with books and other reference materials on Africa. Divide the class into small groups to research the flora (plants) and fauna (animals) found in the various regions of Africa. The handout, "Plants and Animals in Africa," can be used by the groups to record and share their findings.

## Art

1. Provide each of the groups selected for Science Activity 3 with a six foot piece of butcher paper, paints, brushes, markers, crayons, paper scraps and any other art media necessary for the creation of a mural to depict the flora/fauna of their region. These can be labeled and displayed with the information gathered.
2. Have the students create stick puppets of the characters in this story using cardboard squares glued or pasted to popsicle sticks; the children can draw, color, or paint the characters on the squares. Backgrounds for the puppet show can be created for each scene in this book and used during a puppet show of this story. (Drama Activity 1)
3. Bring in various forms of African art and books containing pictures of African art (you may wish to use the book, *African Art*, by Frank Willett) to develop an appreciation of African art. If possible, plan a field trip to a museum that exhibits this type of

art.

4. Divide the students into small groups to design a mobile to represent this story, African customs, dress, flora/fauna, foods or any other aspect of African study they choose. Have them create and cut out representations to attach to coat hangers in a balanced manner by using various lengths of yarn. These can be hung from the ceiling for display purposes.
5. Refer back to the text to have students view the various forms of dress shown. Note how bracelets are worn either on the wrists or upper arms. The students can make bracelets by using empty masking tape rolls. Provide them with different lengths and colors of yarn. Have the students begin wrapping the roll with the yarn by attaching each piece with a drop of glue and wrapping it tightly around the empty roll. When the roll is completely wrapped, it will be a colorful bracelet that can be worn on the wrist or upper arm.

## Music/Creative Movement

1. Initiate a discussion of the importance of drums as a part of communication and music in Africa. Assist the students in making a drum. Supplies needed:
  - large plastic, metal or cardboard can or cylinder (such as a coffee can or a large butter tub)
  - sheets of sturdy construction paper or butcher paper
  - glue and scissors
  - large rubber bands
  - string, beads (optional)
  - paint, markers and/or crayons
2. Teach students traditional African folksongs, and/or listen to recordings. Discuss the rhythms and instruments used in these recordings. You may wish to provide various rhythm instruments for the students to use as these recordings are played.
4. Use rhythm instruments to play natural rhythms. Have the students move and dance to these. You may use the recordings of folksongs to allow for more creative movement activities.

## Drama

1. Have the students use present a puppet

- show of this story for other students or classes.
2. Assist the students in writing a play based on this book. Provide them with old bed sheets and pieces of fabric from which to create costumes. Props may be used to enhance the dramatization of this story. Give the students an opportunity to perform this play during the culminating activity.

## Culminating Activity

Have an *African Celebration Day*. Give the students an opportunity to share their writings, artwork and projects about Africa. One portion of this celebration can be a sharing of African folktales (refer to the Related Reading section). The dramatization of this story can be presented. Folksongs and creative dances can be enjoyed. Sunflower seeds and mango juice can be served. Close the celebration by viewing videos, filmstrips, or slides on Africa.

## Related Reading

Aardema, Verna, *Anansi Finds A Fool, Bimwili & The Zimwi, Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain, Rabbit Makes A Monkey Of Lion: A Swahili Tale, Who's in Rabbit's House?*  
 Abrahams, Roger D., ed., *African Folktales*  
 Arnott, Kathleen, *African Myths and Legends*  
 Bryan, Ashley, *Ox of the Wonderful Horns and Other African Tales*  
 Feelings, Muriel, *Jambo Means Hello: Swahili Alphabet Book, Moja Means One: Swahili Counting Book*  
 Gray, Nigel, *Country Far Away*  
 Greenfield, Eloise, *Africa Dream*  
 Grifalconi, Ann, *Village of Round and Square Houses*  
 Hadithi, Mwenye, *Baby Baboon, Hungry Hyena*  
 Haskins, James, *Count Your Way Through Africa*  
 Kimmel, Eric A., *Anansi Goes Fishing*  
 Knutson, Barbara, *Why The Crab Has No Head: An African Folktale*  
 Lester, Julius, *How Many Spots Does a Leopard Have?*  
 Lewin, Hugh, *Jaffa and the Wedding*  
 Madden, Eric, *Fire Children*  
 McDermott, Gerald, *Anansi The Spider: A Tale From The Ashanti*  
 Mallei, Tololwa, *King and the Tortoise*  
 Musgrove, Margaret, *Ashanti to Zulu: African Traditions*  
 Purcell, John W., *African Animals*  
 Rosen, Michael, *How the Giraffe Got Such A Long Neck...And Why the Rhino Is So Grumpy*

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Ryden, Hope, *Wild Animals Of Africa ABC*

Sabin, Francene, *Africa*

Sierra, Judy, *Elephant's Wrestling Match*

Warren Mattox, Cheryl, ed., *Shake It to the One You Love  
the Best*

Willett, Frank, *African Art*

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Story Structure**

<b>Setting:</b>
<b>Characters:</b>
<b>Problem:</b>
<b>Action:</b>
<b>Resolution/Outcome:</b>



Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Plants and Animals in Africa**

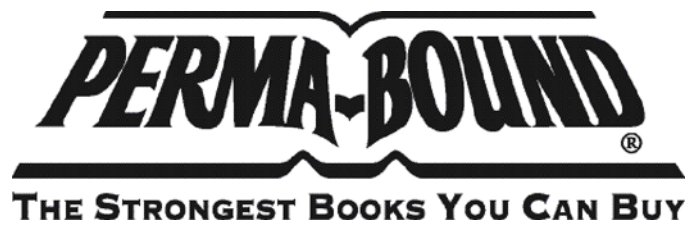
<i>Region</i>	<i>Plants</i>	<i>Animals</i>



Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Making Comparisons**

<i>1st thing to be compared</i>	<i>2nd thing to be compared</i>	<i>How they are alike</i>



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