

# ANANSEGRO OF GHANA

## *West African Drums, Songs, Stories and Games*

### Program Summary

Anansegro's program includes an introduction to West African clothing, musical instruments and cultures, then proceeds to include the audience in an interactive call and response experience with games, dance, role-play and rhythmic drum patterns. Program materials are tailored to meet the needs of the audience, including age and special needs.

### About the Artist

**Kofi Dennis** has over 35-year history of working both as an artist and an educator. He received training at Komenda Teaching College, University of Cape Coast, and graduated from the School of Performing Arts at the University of Ghana, with a Diploma in Early Childhood from the University of Cape Coast before coming to the United States in 1993.

He is a Master Teaching artist with the Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts, and an Arts-integration specialist. He facilitates various programs in libraries, senior centers and correctional facilities all over the country.

### Program Objectives

Anansegro shares with audiences the unique culture of the West African people. Their goal is to stimulate and enhance the various creative and developmentally appropriate critical learning skills of the individual through folkloric experiences; including drumming, music, dance, games and role-play. Lastly, Anansegro aims to share the values of sensitivity and respect for one another, regardless of race, color or creed.

### Background

Read about the culture of the West African people living in (English/French-speaking) countries, including geography, history, science and politics, especially the post-independence era.

**Call and Response Songs and Games** are the bedrock of the African culture. Songs and games like Kye-kye kule, Tail-O-Tail, Funga Alafia, Agoh-Ameh, help to establish a sense

of belonging and oneness.

### **Example of West African Echo song/Follow The Leader**

*Kye-kye-Kule! (Chay, chay koolay!) 2X-----I touch my head!*

*Kye-kye-Kofi-sa! (Chay, chay kofi-sa!) 2X-----I touch my shoulders!*

*Kofi-sa lunga! 2X -----I touch my hips!*

*Kata-kyi-lunga! (Kata chi lunga) 2X -----I touch my knees!*

*Kuum! Adende! (Coom aday nday!) 2X -----I touch my toes!*

### **Example of Call and Response Birthday Song: - Months of The Year**

**(Leader sings: - “If you were born in January, do your dance! Do your dance!”**

**Chorus response with a dance: - La-la-la! La-la! La-la! (2X) La-la! La-la!)**

**The adventures of Ananse, the Trickster spider**, is a symbol of —everyman— (a universal character) who features in most African folktales. He is a witty, cunning, crafty and intriguing character who provides exciting moments worth studying. This fictional creature is one of the most remarkable and memorable characters in all literature. Usually a spider, but also a man, he is often a hero but sometimes a scoundrel. At once shrewd and stupid, he is a trickster who often uses his wit to get out of sticky situations, but just as often he is himself tricked, usually because his greed gets the best of him.

The Ananse stories originated among the Ashanti peoples of Ghana, West Africa. Before the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Ashanti migrated from the north into the forest belt of present-day Ghana and established small states in the hilly country along the Gulf of Guinea. Their civilization was distinguished, and they were well known for the quality of their gold work and their **colorful kente cloth**. Among the Ashanti were poets, singers, historians, weavers, metal smiths, wood carvers and drum makers. They developed distinctive music, dancing festivals and of course, stories and storytelling.

Like many African peoples, the Ashanti preserved their history and cumulative wisdom through an oral tradition. Certain individuals, known as *griots* in many West African societies, were charged with the responsibility of learning and passing on centuries of old stories of villages, clans and families. Ashanti stories preserved the legends of their ancestors who had come from the north and recalled the deeds of great heroes. Other tales recorded how the world began and explained how certain customs came to be. Still others taught rules of behavior and contemplated right from wrong, justice from injustice. Some tales simply made the listeners laugh. The best tales did all these things, and many of the best were about Ananse. For the Ashanti, Ananse was a special hero because he taught the people how to weave intricate kente cloth. All stories were believed to belong to Ananse, and the folktales of the Ashanti people were known as *Ananseesem*, or —spider tales.

Today, Ananse stories are told and retold not only in Ghana, but wherever Africans live and memories of Africa are alive. When Africans were captured and transported to the New World as slaves, they took their Ananse stories with them. In adjusting to new environments, they adopted their folklore too, and they preserved the African significance of storytelling. Ananse stories have been found in Jamaica, Haiti and Guyana. His name appears variously as Anansi, Kwaku Ananse, Kweku Ananse, and sometimes just Spider. A further evolution produced Brer Nancy and the Aunt Nancy stories in the southern United States.

## Related Vocabulary

Ago-o-oh	Pay Attention please	Kum Adende	Swings like a Pendulum
Ameh	I'm paying Attention	Ananse	Spider
Gro	Players	Tubóm, Tubóm	Challenge for a duel
Sá, Sá	Dance, dance	Tso-o-oboy	Are you ready?
Sa Pónkó	Dancing Horse	Gáhu	A dance
Kpanlógó	A dance (twisty rope)	Tabon bom	Paddling
Sisiribom	Rocking hips	Kente	A Royal handwoven fabric
Siká	(money)	Sa Kromo	Dancing Crow

## What's Your "Day-Name"?

Day	Names for boys	Names for girls
Sunday	Kwesi	Esi
Monday	Kojo	Adwoa
Tuesday	Kobena	Abena/Araba
Wednesday	Kweku	Akua
Thursday	Yaw	Yaa
Friday	Kofi	Afua
Saturday	Kwame	Ama

Ask students to find out what day they were born on, then tell them what their name would be if they were born in Ghana.

Also ask:

What day do you think Kofi was born?



**Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN), was born and raised in Ghana.** All the nations of the world look to the UN to solve problems. As its leader, Kofi Annan had one of the most difficult and important jobs in the world!

**Question:** On which day of the week do you think Kofi Annan was born?



## “Agoo! Amehh!”

In the Twi language of Ghana in West Africa, **Agoo** (pronounced ah-go) and **Ame** (pronounced ah-may) go together like salt and pepper or peanut butter and jelly. *Everybody* uses this example of call-and-response. Saying, “**Agoo!**” is like saying, “**Hey, everyone! Listen up!**” The proper response is “**Ame!**” It’s like saying, “**Yup! We’re listening!**”

### Here’s how to play the traditional call-and-response game “Agoo! Ameh

#### Step 1:

*Leader: Agoo! Everyone else: Ameh! Leader: Agoo! Everyone else: Ameh! Leader: Agoo! Everyone else: Ameh! Leader: Agoo! Everyone else: Ameh!*

#### Step 2: Clapping (4 counts)

*The leader counts: One! Two! Three! Four!*

As the leader calls out each number, everyone claps once.

#### Step 3: Pat Your shoulders

*The leader counts: One! Two! Three! Four!*

#### Step 4: Blow Out Air (4-counts)

As the leader calls out each number, everyone does the big blowing motion: - hold fists at chest level, elbows out, as if rowing a boat. On each count, put the fists away from the chest and blow out your breath, hard!

#### Step 5: Elbows Stretching/Flying (4-counts)

*The leader counts: One! Two! Three! Four!*

As the leader calls out each number, everyone —flies||: hold elbows out like wings and lean over/stretch to one side. On each count, stretch and tip the elbows to the other side.

#### Step 5: -Two Happy Circles

*The leader demonstrates two big circle motions (One goes upwards, and one goes downwards!*

1) Ahhhhhhh!!! Eeeeeeeeeee!!!!

2) Umoja-a-a-a-a-ahhhhhhhhhh!

The leader guides everyone to make a big circular motion with a happy face/sound!

Make a big circle with your arms in front of you, then bring your arms up above your head.

Next, separate your hands and spread them far apart, then bring them together again below your waist. As you do the entire —circle movement, make your happy sound with your voice. Start with a low, growling —Ahh! || and slowly slide your voice up as your arms move. End with a high squealing —Eeee! Remember to take a deep breath so you have enough air to last through a whole circle!)

## Drums That Talk/Sing (Donno/Dunduns and djembe drums)

**\*\*Related instruments are the Bells and Shakers (agogo bells/gakogui and shekere)**

The sound of **drums**—large and small—is heard in many West African games and festivals. Some are big, thundering drums with deep voices. Some are smaller drums that make lighter, tapping noises. And some of the **drums, very special ones, can actually speak!**

In West African languages, the way you say a word changes its meaning. A word all one note means one thing, but if you say the same word while your voice goes from high to low, it can mean something completely different. Special sets of big drums, called **talking drums, can make sounds on different notes.** A drummer can copy the low and high notes of speech so well that **people can understand** exactly what the drums are saying.

These drums are loud, so they can be heard from a long way off. Even hundreds of years before phones or television, **talking drums could spread news far and wide.** They were so important that they could only be **owned by the chief** of the town. Today, anyone who is ready to learn could play all kinds of rhythmic patterns with the drums just like Kofi does.



### What the Drums Say

- Remember that the drum will say whatever you say.
- It's all about syllables. So, for example, how many syllables does Africa have? (Alternate your hands when you play the drum)
- Can you play that with your drum? Keep repeating just like a pattern
- How about, DJEMBE DRUM FROM AFRICA?
- How about, WEST AFRICA? Or AMERICA?
- How about the song, TWINKLE! TWINKLE! LITTLE STAR?
- Or HICKORY DICKORY DOCK! THE MOUSE WENT UP THE CLOCK! THE CLOCK STRUCK ONE, THE MOUSE CAME DOWN!
- HICKORY DICKORY DOCK!

## Suggested Post-Performance Activities

- 1) Can you use your body as a drum and play some rhythmic patterns? Remember to tap the steady beat first. (Use the tune of the song “Kumba-yah, my Lord! Kumba-yah!” to do the steady beat medley)
  - a) I feel the beat, in my heart! (4X) Heart beat! Heart beat! Heart beat!
  - b) Steady-beat! On my knees/shoulders/head/way up high/all around etc.
- 2) Use your imagination to create your own story about a tricky, but foolish character; an animal, or maybe an inanimate object, like a ball or a broom? What kind of mischief could your character get into? What does he/she learn from the foolishness?  
Using your own music and instruments and dance movements, see what story you can tell about your very own Trickster/Fool. What percussion sound could stand for your character?

## Related Resource Materials

*Anansi the Spider: A Tale from the Ashanti*, Gerald McDermott. Henry Holt & Co. 1987

*Anansi does the Impossible: An Ashanti Tale*, Verna Aardema & Lisa Desimini. Simon & Schuster Children’s 1997

*Anansi and Talking Melon*, Eric Kimmel & Janet Stevens. Holiday House, Inc. 1997

*Tiger Soup: An Anansi Story from Jamaica*, Frances Temple. Orchard Books 1998

*El Hermano Anansi y El Rancho de Ganado*, Rhomer, Von Mason, Zubizarreta & De Souza. Children’s Book Press, 1996

*Kofi and His Magic*, Maya Angelou. Random Library, November 1994

*Talking Drums of Africa*, Christine Price. Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1973

*Ghana*, Etagale Blauer and Jason Lauré. Children’s Press, 1999

*Rhythms of Life, Songs of Wisdom: Akan Music from Ghana*, Smithsonian/Folkways recordings

[www.anansi.org/webwalker/story1/htm](http://www.anansi.org/webwalker/story1/htm) - Anansi’s Website Stories

[www.pbskids.org/africa](http://www.pbskids.org/africa) - Kid’s Africa!

<http://anansi.cjb.net> - Ananse site for kids

[www.worldmusicpress.com](http://www.worldmusicpress.com) - Multicultural music books and recordings

[www.rhythmweb.com](http://www.rhythmweb.com) - Percussion site

<http://www.ghana.gov.gh> - Official website of Ghanaian government



*Portions of this study guide contributed by Discovery Theater, Smithsonian Associates*

# Kente Cloth

Kente Cloth comes from Ghana, West Africa, woven by the Ashanti people in whose family the weaving of Kente goes back many hundreds of years. The patterns or motifs of Kente number in the thousands. The primary colors of Kente Cloth are yellow, red, green, black, blue and white. Generally, each color and some combinations woven into Kente Cloth represent a concept. Red and yellow combinations represent life and its power over illness and disappointment, as light dispels darkness, doubt and confusion. Green and white combinations represent a bountiful harvest, and the fruitfulness of wholesome family and community relations. Blue represents love, tenderness and royalty, as the blue sky pervades over all and brings with the promise of a good day.

