



Richard Krawiec
Adapted from a West African folktale

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*To my two favorite writers,
my sons,
Danny and David.*

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CHILDREN'S INTERACTIVE COMEDY. A narrator attempts to tell the tale of a farmer, a fisherman, and a weaver, but he keeps getting interrupted by an unruly host of characters. It seems that everyone has something to say, but nobody will listen! There's a talking dog, a talking fish—even a talking throne—all of whom feel they've been misused and neglected. Based on a West African folktale, young actors will love this action-packed play, which blends sight gags, wordplay, and slapstick humor. Even the audience can get in on the fun!

Performance Time: Approximately 20-25 minutes.

CHARACTERS

(20 flexible, extras)

NARRATOR: Dressed in formal clothing; a bit stuffy.

DANCING KID: Obnoxious; likes to dance around and chant.

BAT KID: Likes to bonk people on the head with an inflatable bat.

KID 1: Leader of the chorus.

KID 2/FARMER: Lazy.

CHORUS KID A, B, C: Try to answer Narrator's questions, but give wrong answers.

DOG: Farmer's dog; can talk.

YAM: Bodybuilder type; neglected by Farmer.

SIGN KID: Holds cue card; chews bubblegum.

WEED 1, 2: Non-speaking.

FISHERMAN: Jamaican.

FISH: Caught in Fisherman's net; can talk.

WEAVER: Hippie type.

CLOTH: Weaver's cloth; role for 2-3 actors.

CHIEF: Strong and intimidating.

THRONE: Chief's throne; can talk.

CHIEF'S LACKEY: Non-speaking.

EXTRAS: As chorus kids.

Casting Note for Theatre Groups: Several roles may be doubled to accommodate a smaller classroom. Or, if there are more than 20 students in the class, additional classmates can participate as members of the chorus.

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SETTING

Bare stage except for risers and enough chairs for the chorus. Rows of chairs off to one side also will work as seating for the chorus. There is a large prop box at the back of the stage.

PROPS

Inflatable bat

Sign that reads, "Aieee!"

Sign that reads, "Why are you running in the hot, hot sun?"

Farmer costume

Videogame controllers

Large plastic sword

Fish net

Watering can

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(AT RISE: Rear center stage there is a large prop box. The chorus sits stage left on thin wire bleachers or on risers. Chorus is talking, joking loudly. Narrator motions, pleads with the chorus to be quiet.)

NARRATOR: *(To Chorus.)* Okay, be quiet. Settle down, please. Now listen. *(Chorus ignores Narrator's pleas. Narrator turns to face the audience while the chorus continues to be loud and unruly. Narrator continues motioning for the chorus to be silent as he addresses the audience.)* Today we are going to present you with a wonderfully evocative story... *(Chorus is so loud Narrator can't be heard. To Chorus.)* Will you...please...be quiet! *(Chorus stops talking. Silence.)* That's better. *(Narrator faces audience. As he addresses audience, the chorus begins to talk again, incrementally louder.)* Today's story is based on a West African folktale that explores a world in which people don't really pay attention to what is going on around them. It's about people who... *(Gives chorus a sharp look.)* ...talk too much. And it's also about what happens when the powerless learn they do, in fact, have a voice, and that their voice can change the world.

(Dancing Kid stands up from his seat in the chorus.)

DANCING KID: I have a voice!

(Dancing Kid begins to sing in mock operatic fashion. Bat Kid whacks Dancing Kid on the head with a large inflatable baseball bat. Dancing Kid tumbles back into his seat.)

NARRATOR: *(To Bat Kid.)* Thank you.

BAT KID: Thank you! *(Sits down.)*

NARRATOR: *(To audience.)* Now, in order to present this production, I will need everyone's help and cooperation.

For example, in this story, people quite often experience fear. (*Casually strolls over to the chorus, speaking softly.*) And when they feel frightened, they scream... (*He yells.*) ...“Aieee!” (*Throws his arms up. Chorus jumps and screams, “Aieee!” Narrator, turning back to audience, smiles smugly.*) So when you see this sign... (*Narrator opens his arms invitingly to the audience and chorus and then directs their attention stage right. Sign Kid, as if in a game show, chews bubblegum loudly, blows bubbles, pops them, and then struts onstage and holds up a sign that reads, “Aieee!”*) ...I will need everyone to cooperate by screaming. Ready now? Let’s try it.

(*Before Narrator can raise his hands to signal the cue for the audience, chorus mumbles “aieee” with little enthusiasm.*)

CHORUS: (*Mumbles.*) Aieee.

NARRATOR: (*Mimicking chorus.*) Aieee?

CHORUS: (*Liltingly.*) Aieee.

(*Disappointed, Narrator shakes his head and walks over to the audience. Hiding behind the Narrator, Kid 1, who leads the chorus, motions for the chorus to join in shouting “Aieee!” when the Narrator says “two”...*)

NARRATOR: (*To Audience.*) It appears I will need your help.

Are you ready? On the count of three, one, two...

CHORUS: (*Shouts.*) Aieee!

(*Narrator jumps up, clutches chest. Kid 1 laughs and returns to chorus. Narrator attempts to regain his composure. He readjusts his tie and pulls down his jacket.*)

NARRATOR: Good. Now there’s a second request I have to make. There’s a question that keeps coming up in this story. And the question is this... (*Pause. Narrator cues Sign Kid, who flips over a sign/cue card that reads, “Why are you running*

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in the hot, hot sun?" Narrator reads the cue card.) "Why are you running in the hot, hot sun?" Let's try it together, shall we? (Narrator claps his hands in a stilted beat and encourages the audience to join him.) Why are you running in the hot, hot sun? Why are you running...? (etc.)

(Before the Narrator can finish, Dancing Kid stands up in the chorus and chants and dances in an exaggerated, annoying fashion.)

DANCING KID: *(Chanting.) Why are you running in the hot, hot sun? Why are you running in the hot, hot sun? (etc.)*

(Dancing Kid continues chanting and dancing, oblivious to the Narrator. The Narrator approaches Dancing Kid. Narrator stomps his foot.)

NARRATOR: *(To Dancing Kid. Shouts.) Be quiet and pay attention! (Bat Kid stands up and bonks Dancing Kid on the head with an inflatable bat and Dancing Kid is silent. Narrator turns to the audience, and just as he's about to speak, Bat Kid bonks the Narrator on the head from behind. Narrator wheels around, but Bat Kid runs off. Bat Kid keeps running around and manages to hide behind the Narrator's back without him knowing. Narrator is exasperated. To audience.) Okay, forget it. Let's skip the question. Just remember, when you see the sign, scream "Aieeee!"*

CHORUS: *(Loudly.) Aieeee!*

NARRATOR: *(To chorus.) No! Not now, you idiots! (Embarrassed to lose his temper in front of the audience, the Narrator tries to regain his composure. As he tells the following story, he grows increasingly frazzled by the interruptions. To audience.) Let's just push ahead, shall we? Now the story begins with a farmer and a yam. Who knows what a farmer is?*

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(Chorus kids enthusiastically raise their hands and yell, "ooooooooo," and "me, me, me, me," etc. Narrator points to Kid 2.)

KID 2: A farmer is a person who takes care of crops and stuff.

NARRATOR: Correct. You can play the role of the lazy farmer.

(Kid 2 goes to the prop box and pulls out a farmer costume and puts it on.)

NARRATOR: *(To chorus.)* We also need a yam. Now who knows what a yam is?

(Chorus kids enthusiastically raise their hands to answer and yell "ooooooooo" and "me, me, me," as before.)

KID A: You're referring, no doubt, to the expression of existential angst expressed by Popeye: "I yam what I yam, and that's all that I yam. I'm Popeye the sailor yam."

(Kid B jumps up and moves center stage.)

KID B: No, no, no, no, *no!* A yam is meat that's made from a pig.

(Kid C rushes center stage.)

KID C: Are you crazy? That's *ham*. A yam is a hairy animal with horns.

(Kid C makes horns with his fingers and "gores" chorus Kid A and Kid B back to their seats. Yam stands up from his seat in the chorus and moves center stage.)

YAM: That's a *yak*, you dolts. A yam is a big lumpy orange vegetable that looks like this. (*Yam strikes a pose like a bodybuilder.*)

NARRATOR: (*To Yam.*) All right. That'll have to do. Come out here. You're my yam. (*Yam walks to one side of stage and drops to the floor. He lies there immobile.*) And I need a dog. Who knows...? (*Dog leaps from his seat in the chorus and scrambles on all fours to Narrator.*) A dog is a four-legged furry animal that barks... (*Dog barks.*) ...and shakes his tail. (*Dog shakes his tail at the audience. To Dog.*) Sit! (*Dog sits. Narrator approaches audience.*) Anyway, the story begins like this ...one day, a farmer went out to check on his yam patch. Now, this farmer was a lazy man. He didn't take care of his crops. He didn't water them, he didn't weed them, he didn't give them fertilizer. He spent all day at home playing [*insert name of videogame*].

(*Chorus kids grab game controllers hidden under their chairs and pretend they are playing videogames.*)

CHORUS: (*Shouts.*) Yeah! Got him! (*etc.*)

NARRATOR: (*To audience.*) But on this day, their [*insert name of game system*] was broken.

(*Chorus puts videogame controllers back under their chairs.*)

CHORUS: Awwww!

(*Several chorus kids – the more the better – form a line at the rear of the stage. As the Farmer walks back and forth past them, they undulate up and down in sequence to make it look like the Farmer is walking through hills and valleys.*)

NARRATOR: So the farmer walked uphill and downhill until he came to his garden. (*Farmer walks back and forth past the*

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line of chorus kids for a bit and stops.) He started to dig in the yam patch.

(Farmer bends down and pretends to dig up some yams.)

FARMER: This is hard work. Can't I just go to *[insert name of local restaurant or fast food chain]*? It's too hot out here, I'm dying of thirst, and who likes yams anyway?

YAM: *(In Arnold Schwarzenegger or deep bodybuilder voice.)* You're dying?! You're dying?! Let me tell you something, buddy. I've been sitting here baking in this hot sun for four weeks. You haven't given me so much as one drop of water or a spoonful of fertilizer. You haven't even picked the weeds that are choking me to death.

(Seated in the chorus, Weed 1 and Weed 2 come forward and start humorously choking the Yam. Farmer looks around, squints at the Yam, and then glances at the Dog.)

FARMER: Man, this heat is driving me crazy. I could've sworn that vegetable was talking to me.

DOG: Yeah, that's pretty stupid, boss. Everyone knows yams can't talk!

(Sign Kid lifts sign that reads, "Aieee!" Chorus screams, "Aieee!" and continues screaming. Then Sign Kid holds the sign so that the audience can read it and cues the audience to scream. Audience joins in screaming, "Aieee!" Sign Kid puts the sign down and cues the chorus and audience to stop screaming. Chorus kids line up and get ready to move up and down to mimic hills and valleys as Farmer travels.)

NARRATOR: So the farmer ran uphill and downhill and uphill and downhill... *(Farmer runs back and forth in front of the line of chorus kids for a bit, then he stops.)* ...until he came to a fisherman carrying a net full of fish.

(Narrator turns to chorus and motions for Fisherman and Fish to come forward. Farmer comes running with Dog and Yam lagging behind him. They fall back when the Farmer slams into the Fisherman. Both fall down.)

FISHERMAN: Oh, mon, what be your problem? It be 110 degrees outside, mon, and you be running around like you a cockroach in a kitchen.

(Dancing Kid comes forward, dancing.)

DANCING BOY: *(Chants.)* Why are you running in the hot, hot sun. Why are you running in the... *(etc.)*

(Bat Kid runs up, bops Dancing Kid on the head with the inflatable bat. Dancing Kid falls down, and Bat Kid humorously drags him back to the chorus.)

FARMER: You're not going to believe this, but I was just digging in my garden, and all of a sudden, this yam says to me, "Why are you digging me up?" And then my dog says, "Hey, boss, everybody knows that yams can't talk."

FISHERMAN: So you be the boss of your dog, mon?

FARMER: That's not the point.

FISHERMAN: Maybe not to you, mon, but maybe to your dog it be the point, mon. Maybe he be tired of all that cruddy dog food you be putting in his bowl. Maybe he want some good hot wings, mon. Some Jamaican jerk. All that talk, mon, it's probably just in your head. You just be feeling guilty, mon. Everybody knows dogs and yams can't talk.

FISH: Duh! You fools. What? Do you think you're the only ones with brains on this planet? If I could get out of this net, I'd slap you silly with my flippers.

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(Sign Kid lifts the card to cue the audience and chorus to scream "Aieee!" The chorus has once again assembled into a line to form "hills" and "valleys." Farmer and Fisherman, followed by Fish, Dog, and Yam, run back and forth.)

NARRATOR: So the farmer and fisherman went running uphill and downhill until they met a weaver.

(From the chorus, Weaver wanders forward, pulling along other chorus kids, who act as Cloth. Farmer, Fisherman, Yam, Dog, and Fish stop running. They are breathing hard and sweating. They bump into each other in a slapstick fashion.)

WEAVER: Wow, mon, you dudes have got some serious sweat issues. Why don't you chill? Have some chamomile tea?

FARMER: *(To Weaver, gasping.)* You're not going to believe this! First my yam talked to me, then my dog talked!

FISHERMAN: *(To Weaver, gasping.)* But that be nothing, mon. My fish called me a fool and said he would slap me silly with his flippers. That not be right, mon.

(Weaver laughs at them and then makes crazy sign.)

FARMER: No, no, it's true. It really did happen.

(Playing along, Weaver smiles and nods.)

[End of Freeview]