Eleanor A. Dasi, "Entry on: Jamari's Drum by Eboni Bynum, Baba Wagué Diakité, Roland Jackson", peer-reviewed by Divine Che Neba, Daniel A. Nkemleke and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2022). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1443. Entry version as of November 06, 2026.

Eboni Bynum , Baba Wagué Diakité , Roland Jackson

Jamari's Drum

Canada (2001)

TAGS: African Storytelling African Traditions



We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Jamari's Drum
Country of the First Edition	Canada
Country/countries of popularity	Malawi, Canada
Original Language	English and Suahili
First Edition Date	2001
First Edition Details	Eboni Bynum and Roland Jackson, *Jamari's Drum*. Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 2001, [32 (29) pp.] unpaged.
ISBN	0888995318
Genre	Fiction, Illustrated works
Target Audience	Children (5–8 years)
Author of the Entry	Eleanor A. Dasi, University of Yaoundé I, wandasi5@yahoo.com
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Creators



Eboni Bynum (Author)

We could not get any biographical information on this author.



Baba Wagué Diakité , b. 1961
(Author, Illustrator)

Baba Wagué Diakité was born in 1961, in Bamako, Mali in West Africa. His mother named him "Wagué," or "Man of Trust," after his maternal grandfather. He spent his early childhood with his grandmother in the village of Kassaro where his earliest education started. He later joined his mother in Bamako, where he began his formal education in a French school. "He maintains that his best education came from stories that were told to him by his grandmother and mother about animals and the First People"*.

"Though Diakité was always artistically inclined, he did not begin the work for which he is known until after he moved to Portland, Oregon in the United States in 1985"** where he met artist Ronna Neuenschwander, whom he married; the couple have two daughters. His first children's book *The Hunterman and the Crocodile* was published by Scholastic Press in 1997 and received a Coretta Scott King Honor Book Award. "He has illustrated numerous children's books including *The Pot of Wisdom* and *Jamari's Drum* for Groundwood Books of Canada"***.

"He is the founder and director of the Ko-Falen Cultural Centre in Bamako, Mali, which enables artists and travellers from other countries to live, meet, study, and collaborate with artists of Mali"****. Together with his wife and their two daughters, they divide their time between two homes: Portland, Oregon, and Bamako, Mali.

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* “About Wagué”, Baba Wagué Diakité website, babawague.wordpress.com(accessed: July 30, 2021).

** "Baba Wague Diakite”, Art in Embassies. U.S. Department of State website, art.state.gov (accessed: July 30, 2021).

*** “About Wagué”, Baba Wagué Diakité website, babawague.wordpress.com(accessed: July 30, 2021).

**** “Radiozine on 02/22/13”, KBOO fm website, kboo.fm (accessed: July 30, 2021).

Sources:

Official website (accessed: July 30, 2021).

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kboo.fm (accessed: July 30, 2021).

Bio prepared by Eleanor A. Dasi, University of Yaounde I, wandasi5@yahoo.com



Roland Jackson (Author)

Roland Jackson learned drumming from a Senegalese master drummer, Abdoulaye Diakité. He co-founded Friends of de Drums and teaches young African Americans to drum as a way of preserving their ethnic and cultural identity. Apparently, Jamari’s Drum is his lone children’s book. He lives in St Helena Island, South Carolina.

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Source:

books.google (accessed: May 9, 2022).

Bio prepared by Eleanor A. Dasi, University of Yaoundé I, wandasi5@yahoo.com

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Additional information

Adaptations

Jamari's Drum read by Amy Dinaldo, available at Summersville Community Television YouTube channel (accessed: May 9, 2022).

Summary

There once lived an old man in the village of Okpa called Baba Mdogo. He usually sat under a shade near the market square to play the *djembe**. He was very much admired by Jamari, a young boy. Sometimes, Jamari would spend whole days with Baba Mdogo, watching him play. Then one day, Jamari asked Baba Mdogo why he played the drum everyday. Baba told him that the drum is the peace keeper of the village and if he did not play it, “the sky would turn black and the ground would grow hot and begin to melt beneath our feet” (3). Jamari did not understand what Baba meant and tried asking from other elders but nobody seemed to know and so Jamari forgot about it.

Some time passed and Jamari had now become a strong young man. Many of the elders had died and Baba Mdogo was almost the only one left. Despite his age, he still beat the drum as vigorously as ever. One day, Jamari was going to the market and stopped to greet Baba. Baba told him he would soon join his ancestors so he wanted to hand over the drum to Jamari since he showed interest in it. Jamari was hesitant as he thought the village was just fine in its usual harmony. But Baba gave him the drum and asked him to play it every day because the village depended on it. He continued to say that there was danger over the mountains and that only the drum could ensure peace. Before Jamari could turn round, Baba had gone. Jamari started playing the drum every day but the pressure of family responsibilities soon weighed on him and he stopped. Then one day, calamity struck. It was as if the world was coming to an end; the sky was turning black, the rivers were bubbling, birds were falling to the ground. Then Baba Mdogo’s words came to Jamari’s mind. He rushed for the djembe and started beating it to the village square, amid shouts and wails. He got to the position where Baba Mdogo used to sit, sat down, and continued beating the drum with vigour, while silently praying for the ancestors to give him strength. Then suddenly, the sky began to clear at *Chafua***. Jamari felt triumphant as the villagers stopped running, gathered around him and danced a *ngoma****. Peace returned in Okpa and Jamari never forgot to beat the djembe again. Even to this day,

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the djembe is still beaten in Okpa.

* A carved wooden drum with a goatskin head.

** The Swahili word for destruction.

*** A drum dance among the people of northern Malawi, which started as a war dance but was later performed in other social events. In Eastern Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Uganda, the ngoma is called the drum of the dead because it is a dance that is performed in honour of the ancestor spirits.

Analysis

Drums and drumming are very significant elements in African traditions. They do not only announce and accompany socio-political and cultural events in a community by way of producing music, but also serve as a means of communication between the living, and between the living and the dead. The sound of the drum sends important messages to both the living and the dead and maintains the connection between both realms.

The story of Jamari's drum is a metaphorical representation of the calamity that befalls when the drumming tradition of a people is abandoned. Many African societies believe in the continuity of customs, which are handed down from generation to generation. Baba Mdogo in the story hands down the djembe to Jamari, with a warning to always play it, but Jamari, for his part, soon ignores it giving way to chaos and destruction. However, to prove the power of this tradition on the lives of the people, calm is restored when Jamari resumes playing the drum. Symbolically, therefore, the drum is an instrument of communication with the gods and spirits of the land and the music it produces guarantees the preservation of that connection. Added to this, the people dance the ngoma in acknowledgement of the power of the ancestors in miraculously averting the calamity that was impending.

The tale thus emphasises on the need to honour an ancestral call when it comes to maintain peace and social cohesion both at the level of the community and in the spirit realm.

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Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Storytelling African Traditions
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Boys Child, children Music* Tradition
Further Reading	Strumpf, Mitchel, "Some Music Traditions of Malawi", *African Music* 7.4 (1999): 110–121 (accessed: May 9, 2022). "The Importance of African Drums inTraditional Life" (accessed: May 9, 2022). Ugobude, Franklin, "The Importance of Drums in African Tradition" (accessed: May 9, 2022). Yenika-Agbaw, Vivian, *Representing Africa in Children's Literature: Old and New Ways of Seeing*, Routledge, 2008.

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