

NARRATED BY THE AUTHOR!

Ages 4-8



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# MABELA THE CLEVER

An African Folktale

Retold By Margaret Read MacDonald  
Illustrated By Tim Coffey

In this folktale a sly cat plans to catch all the mice in the village by inviting them to join her "secret Cat Society." The cat almost succeeds, but one clever mouse saves the day. When Mabela remembers her father's words of wisdom, she pays attention to her surroundings, moves fast, traps the cat and rescues all the mice! This cautionary tale, adapted from the oral story-telling tradition of the Limba people of Sierra Leone, demonstrates basic safety rules for little mice – and others – who go out into the world. **Delightfully narrated by the author!**

### In Praise of the Picture Book ...

"MacDonald's spry retelling of an African folktale ... is alight with humor.... Coffey plays up the comedy in his subtly exaggerated illustrations." **Publishers Weekly**

"MacDonald's retelling of this Limba tale is engineered for storytime success." **School Library Journal**

**Parents' Choice Picture Book Silver Honor**

**Children's Literature Choice List**

**Charlotte Zolotow Award**

**Pick of the Lists ABA**

**New York Public Library's 100 Best Books – 2001**

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**A Picture Book  
On DVD  
Study Guide Included**

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Themes: African Folklore, Cat and Mouse Tale, Safety & Life Survival Skills

Ages: 4 to 8

Running Time: 9 Minutes

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*Aesop Accolade, American Folklore Society*

## Summary:

In this folktale a sly cat plans to catch all the mice in the village by inviting them to join her "secret Cat Society."

The cat almost succeeds, but one clever mouse saves the day.

When Mabela remembers her father's words of wisdom, she pays attention to her surroundings, moves fast, traps the cat and rescues all the mice! This cautionary tale, adapted from the oral story-telling tradition of the Limba people of Sierra Leone, demonstrates basic safety rules for little mice – and others – who go out into the world. **Delightfully narrated by the author!**

## Objectives:

- Children identify with the main character who outwits a larger and more powerful opponent.
- Children are encouraged to follow basic rules of safety and make wise choices instead of foolish ones.
- Children are introduced to a folktale from the story-telling tradition of the Limba people of Sierra Leone.
- Children discover the wisdom, culture and customs of a society different from their own.

## Before Viewing:

1. What stories do your parents or grandparents tell you that are not in books? What are they about? What do you like/dislike about these stories?
2. The story we are about to see is an African folktale that the Limba people have told for generations. What do we know about folktales? (*Heroic deeds, clever tricks, talking animals, magic, fantastic events*) As we watch this story, see if you can discover why it is a folktale.
3. How would you describe someone who is clever? Someone who is foolish? Discuss the meaning of each and ask the children to describe clever and foolish choices.
4. Have you ever read or heard a story with a moral? What is a moral? Discuss morals and lessons from other stories. Ask the children to listen for the moral of this story.
5. Point out Africa on a world map. Ask the children to look for clues in the story that tell them more about Mabela's African village.

## Words To Know:

**Society** – A club or organization based on a common interest

**Ceremony** – A ritual, a solemn observance like a wedding ceremony

**Initiated** – Began, welcomed as a new member of a club or other group

**Thorns** – Sharp spikes or barbs that grow on the stems of some plants

## After Viewing:

1. Does this story remind you of something that happened to you or someone you know? Something in a book or movie?
2. *Mabela the Clever* is based on a folktale of the Limba people of Sierra Leone. How is this story like other folktales you know?
3. Why are the mice so excited to join the Cat Society and go to the secret ceremony? Do you think the cat is clever? Explain.
4. Who is more clever, Mabela or the cat? Explain. Mabela has been taught to be clever by her father. Who has taught you to be clever? How do you try to be clever?

5. What is the moral of this story? Discuss the importance of being aware of your surroundings.
6. What do we learn about Mabela's African village from the pictures in the story? (Thatched huts, warm climate, lush foliage, warm and sunny environment, wood-burning fires, no electricity, berries gathered in baskets, non-mechanized rural culture.)

Encourage creative play by asking the children to act out the story, or follow the author's suggestion for a Mabela game, having the players who are "mice" march in a line singing the "Fo Feng" song while the "cat" snatches each in turn. All "caught" mice line up behind the cat and keep singing until only Mabela is left.

Develop language arts skills by asking the children to write or tell about a time when they had to listen carefully or keep their eyes open or pay attention to what they were saying or move fast! Encourage the children to illustrate their true stories.

Encourage critical thinking skills by discussing the safety rules the children have learned from their parents and teachers. Compare them with Mabela's. Develop a list of safety rules based on the children's responses. Ask the children to describe a time when they had to pay attention to their surroundings.

Encourage research skills by asking the children to make their own book about Africa with pictures of the people, geographical regions and animals found there.

Extend language skills by reading other African folktales such as *Anansi the Spider: A Tale from the Ashanti*, *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears: A West African Tale*, *Anansi and the Magic Stick* and other Anansi tales. Compare and contrast these stories with *Mabela the Clever*.

The original picture book published by Albert Whitman & Company is available wherever books are sold. For more information, visit [www.albertwhitman.com](http://www.albertwhitman.com).



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