

1 Talking Drums

Read the given story and do the activities given below.

Isn't it interesting to know that the Lokele tribe of Central Africa communicates through a drum language? Read on to find out Sete's experience of learning the art of playing talking drums.

Sete had just found a good piece of dried bamboo stem in the forest. He needed the bamboo to make a practice drum. Later that day Sete would begin learning 'drum talk'. Drums had been used by Sete's people to send messages from one village to another for hundreds of years.

Many of Sete's friends were not interested in learning about the drums. They thought other ways of communicating were better. Sete was different, though.

Many of his people still used the drums, and Sete wanted to know what these messages said. He also wanted to learn to make the drums speak. Sete's Uncle Baelo would show Sete how to use the 'talking drums'. Sete felt lucky to have his uncle for a teacher as Uncle Baelo was the finest drummer in the village.

First, Sete would learn on a small drum, and then he would graduate to a much larger one. The large drums were made

graduate

move forward or improve

from the logs of **padouk trees**. They made sounds that could be heard far away.

When his uncle arrived, Sete watched carefully as he made the bamboo stem into a drum. Once his uncle was done, Sete could make a deep, low sound by **thumping** one side of the bamboo with a stick. By hitting the other side, Sete could make a high sound. Later, he would learn to use these sounds to make words.

When the drum was finished, Sete received his first lesson. His uncle taught him *ki-ke—ki-ke*, which made 'high-low, high-low' sounds. When people heard these sounds, they knew a drummer was about to send a message.

Uncle Baelo told Sete to practise the sounds again and again. "When you have learned these sounds well, I'll teach you how to drum some words." Sete drummed *ki-ke—ki-ke* until bedtime.

"You know the sounds well," Uncle Baelo praised Sete the next day. Then he told Sete to listen carefully to one of his favourite messages. Sete could hear the difference.

Ke-ki-ki-ki—ke-ke-ki—ke—ke-ki-ke.

"What does that mean?" Sete asked.

"It means, 'Don't worry,'" his uncle answered.

padouk trees

type of trees found in Africa with a very unique reddish orange colouration

thumping

hitting something and causing a noise

Sete practised the drum sounds every day for many months and learnt their meanings. One day Sete saw his uncle coming towards him carrying a large drum.

"Are you letting me borrow this large drum?" Sete asked excitedly.

"No," Uncle Baelo answered. Sete stopped smiling. "Do not be sad, Sete," Uncle Baelo said, "I made this drum for you as a gift. I'm sorry for teasing you."

Sete did not answer. As his uncle turned to walk away, Sete ran his hand over his smooth new drum and smiled. He waited until the next day to use his gift for the first time. Uncle Baelo was fishing on the river, but he would hear the message.



"Do not worry, Uncle," Sete thought as he pounded out the sounds. "I love my new drum with all my heart and soul and will take good care of it. And some day, I will show my own nephews how to make the drums talk."

teasing

laughing at someone or saying unkind things about them



Think and Answer

1. Why was Sete different?
2. Why was Uncle Baelo a perfect instructor for Sete?

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3. What was the small drum made of?
4. What was the large drum made of?
5. Why are the drums in the story called **talking drums**?



Using Words

A. Find a word in the story that means the same as each of the meanings given below.

1. a group of people living together and sharing the same language, culture and history
2. a person who plays a drum
3. a tall tropical grass with hard, hollow stems
4. the job of catching fish
5. a thick piece of tree trunk or branch

B. These words are from the story. Illustrate the meanings of the words by using them in sentences of your own.

1. art
2. communicate
3. soul
4. language
5. borrow



Appreciation

The story sketches a picture of a community which is close to nature. The story also outlines how traditions are passed down through generations.

The story uses words related to sounds to highlight those sounds.

Sete could make a deep, low sound by **thumping** one side of the bamboo with a stick.

Can you not hear the sound as you read the word thump?

Try to find some more sound words in the story.



Writing

You are Uncle Baleo and have left the village soon after teaching Sete the skill to play the drum.

Write an informal letter to Sete asking him about things back home, and most importantly about his 'talking drums' practice.

Begin this way.

<i>Okshua Territory</i>	<i>Date:</i>
<i>Dearest Sete,</i>	
<i>It's been a while since I heard from you...</i>	
<i>With love,</i>	

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Discussion

Think of a family ritual or tradition that has been handed down from your grandparents. What is its significance? Do you think these traditions are worth preserving? Discuss in small groups. Support your answer with a few more examples.

