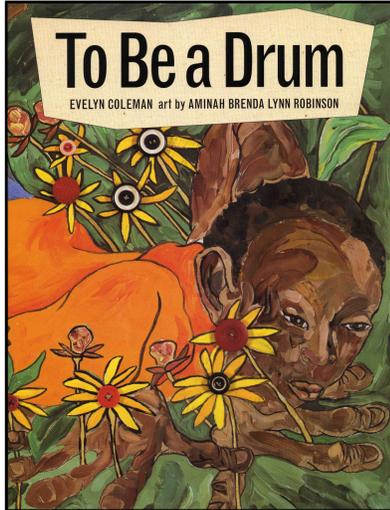


STORYLINE ONLINE PRESENTS:

# "TO BE A DRUM"

By *Evelyn Coleman*, Illustrated by *Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson*

Watch online video of actor *James Earl Jones* reading this story at <http://www.storylineonline.net>



"Long before time, before hours and minutes and seconds, on the continent of Africa, the rhythm of the earth beat for the first people..."

And with the rhythm begins a story. It is what Daddy Wes whispers to his two young listeners one morning, the story of the 'drum,' the pulse that has moved through the African people and through time and place. *To Be A Drum* tells of a history sustained by the spirit of a people; Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson's mixed-media rag paintings are filled with the wonder of that spirit. *To Be A Drum* sends an invitation to all people to join the present and past, to listen...to become a drum.

---

## RELATED ACTIVITIES

- Retell this story in your own words.
- Discuss and then tell or write about what you enjoyed most about this book.
- Read *To Be a Drum* aloud to someone.
- Daddy Wes instructs Martha and Mat to put their ear to the bare earth to listen for the earth's heartbeat. See if you can do the same and hear the heartbeat of the earth.
- What is the significance of the earth's heartbeat? How does it bind all people together?
- Research the subject of slavery. What does it mean to be a slave? What was the life of a slave like? Discuss what you learned about slavery with an adult.
- The illustrations in *To Be a Drum* are very unique. How do they make you feel? Why do you think Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson chose this type of artwork for this particular book?
- Remember a story your father told you, any story. Retell the story or write it down.
- Research jazz music. Find or ask an adult to play you some jazz. Pick a jazz artist, find out as much as you can on that person and write a report.
- Oral tradition and oral history are messages or testimony spread verbally from one generation to another. What ways can these messages get passed on? What are some ways discussed in the book?

## MORE ACTIVITIES

- What are some of the things the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. did to help make life better for all peoples?
- In November 2008 Barack Obama was elected President of the United States of America. On January 20, 2009 he was inaugurated as President of the United States of America. Why was this event historic?
- Research the Harlem Renaissance and make a list of important people who contributed to this movement in the areas of music, dance, literature, and art. Choose one of these people to research further and write a report about their life and contributions. Make a poster about this person to go with your report.
- Research “drums”. Find out as much as you can from using resource books, interviewing people, using the internet. Write a report about “drums”.
- Have someone beat a drum or table top in a steady heartbeat rhythm as you read the book aloud.
- Research the use of drums throughout history. Make a chart of what you learned.
- Read at least two other books by Evelyn Coleman. Describe how her books are the same and different.

---

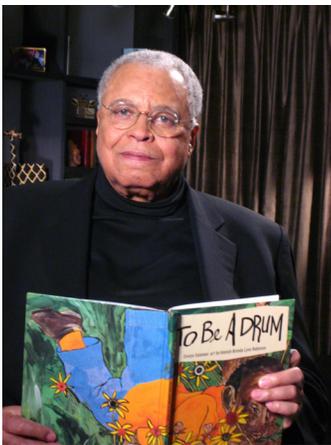
## INTERNET ACTIVITIES

After you have visited these websites, write a report or make a poster to share the information you learned. Give an oral presentation of the facts you learned to your class or family.

- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_slavery\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_slavery_in_the_United_States)
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harlem\\_Renaissance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harlem_Renaissance)
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin\\_Luther\\_King,\\_Jr.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Luther_King,_Jr.)
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_States\\_Senate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Senate)
- [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drum](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drum)
- [www.drumstretchers.com/History.htm](http://www.drumstretchers.com/History.htm)

---

## ABOUT THE READER



James Earl Jones was born in Arkabutla, Mississippi, USA. For years he refused to speak more than a few words at a time, even to his family. In school he pretended to be mute, and communicated only in writing. He began to express himself by writing poetry. Jones entered the University of Michigan planning to study medicine, but found himself drawn to the theater. In 1968 Jones earned widespread acclaim for his performance in *The Great White Hope* playing a character based on Jack Johnson, the first African-American heavyweight champion. His performance in the play on Broadway won him his first Tony Award; he received an Oscar nomination for his performance in the 1970 film version. He has, also, appeared on television regularly since the early 1960s. He is famous for his deep and authoritative voice, used most famously for impressive roles like Darth Vader in the *Star Wars Trilogy* and Mufasa in *The Lion King*. Forty years after his breakthrough performance in *The Great White Hope*, James Earl Jones remains active on both stage and screen.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Evelyn Coleman* is a children's book and thriller author living in Atlanta, Georgia with her husband. She has two adult daughters and a granddaughter named Taylor, who have all listened to the earth's heartbeat and now beat out their own rhythms. She is originally from Burlington, North Carolina.

### *Some Other Books by Evelyn Coleman:*

- "Circle of Fire"
- "White Socks Only"
- "Mystery of the Dark Tower"
- "The Foot Warmer and the Crow"
- "The Glass Bottle Tree"
- "Shadows on Society Hill: An Addy Mystery (American Girl Mysteries)"

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

*Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson* is an accomplished artist who has exhibited her work widely in her native Ohio and other parts of the United States. Her works are considered to be "folk art." Robinson's paintings often burst into the third dimension with the addition of objects such as buttons, beads, yarn, seashells, and twigs; some of these collages have reached twenty feet or more in length. In addition to mixed-media pieces, Robinson has created sculptures, quilts, puppets, music boxes, and other forms of art, and for many years she taught children how to express themselves creatively through the Columbus, Ohio Parks and Recreation Department. In 2004 she was awarded the prestigious MacArthur Fellowship.

---

### *Other books you might enjoy if you liked "To Be a Drum":*

- "Great African American Children's Books" by Donna Rand and Toni Trent Parker
- "Light the Candle! Bang the Drum: A Book of Holidays from Around the World" by Ann Morris and Peter Linenthal
- "The Lion's Drum-a retelling of an African Folk Tale" by Steven Gregory and Claudia Obata
- "Drum, Chavi, Drum!" by Mayra L. Dole and Tonel
- "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands" by Kadir Nelson
- "A is for Africa" by Ifeoma Onyefulu
- "Drumbeat in Our Feet" by Patricia A. Keeler
- "The Leopard's Drum" by Jessica Souham
- "I See the Rhythm" by Toyomi Igus

---

"To Be a Drum" published by Albert Whitman, 1998

Content developed by JAN POWELL, BookPALS National Program Director, Screen Actors Guild Foundation

Storyline Online is brought to you by the Screen Actors Guild Foundation.

Learn more about the Storyline Online program at <http://www.storylineonline.net>