



Tricky Ol' Buh Rabbit

Gullah Tales and Tunes

A "MEET THE MUSEUM" program with Tiffany Jana

scripted by Christopher W. Wilson

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National Museum of American History*

A REPRODUCIBLE LEARNING GUIDE. This guide is designed to help children and adults prepare for, enjoy, and discuss *Tricky Ol' Buh Rabbit!* It contains background information and vocabulary. Appropriate for ages 3–8 / grades pre-K–3.

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A fascinating and inspiring part of the culture that enslaved Africans and African Americans created more than one-hundred years ago are the stories and songs from the Lowcountry and from the people we call the Gullahs. This learning guide will help you to answer some of the questions that may come up in the minds of young people as they experience Gullah tales. We encourage you to explore this history and culture as we have. Learning about this part of our shared past is important because it shows that different cultures and communities all played a role in making the United States the diverse nation it is today.

Where is the Lowcountry?

The Lowcountry is a name for a narrow strip of land that stretches across four states near the Atlantic Ocean. It includes parts of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and northern Florida. In the 1700s and 1800s, people discovered rice could be grown in the Lowcountry. At that time, it was easiest to grow rice in places that were near enough to the ocean that the water in the rivers rose and fell with the tides, but not so near that the water was too salty. The area along the Atlantic coast was perfect for growing rice, but it took a lot of work to turn the swamps there into rice fields. People in Africa had been growing rice for hundreds of years. Many of those people were forced to come to America and grow rice in the same way in the Lowcountry.



The Lowcountry was a narrow strip of land that stretched along the Atlantic coast and was a great place for growing rice. It was also home to thousands of enslaved Africans who were forced to work to make their owners rich, but who also found a way to survive and create a culture all their own.

What are Gullah Tales?

When people were brought to the United States as enslaved workers, they came from many different parts of Africa, and did not all speak the same language. They had to borrow from many different languages in order to communicate. They turned these many languages into one new one. The new language they developed was called Gullah. It combined words and grammar from English with a number of West African languages. We call it a creole language. That means it is a combination of several languages with its own rules – making it a completely new language.

The Gullah people made up lots of tales, sort of like fairy tales, and told them in their new language. Trickster tales, especially animal tales, were the most common on the plantations in the Lowcountry. Some of the trickster tales were adapted from traditional African stories and changed to reflect life as a slave in the United States. Storytelling was very important to the Gullah people. The stories were entertaining, but they were also a way to teach slave children about the nature of the social world. Trickster tales taught slaves that if they were tricky and learned the ways of the powerful, they could outsmart them and survive.

Most of the Gullah trickster tales that we know today were preserved by the work of Charles Colcock Jones, Jr. and Joel Chandler Harris. Harris' first book of tales, *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings—The Folklore of the Old Plantation*, was published in 1880. It was so popular that within four months of its printing it had sold more than 10,000 copies and had to be reprinted. Many writers such as Rudyard Kipling, Zora Neale Hurston, William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, Ralph Ellison, and Toni Morrison were inspired by the Gullah tales collected by Harris and Jones and used similar themes in their work. Some people, including author Alice Walker, were concerned that Harris used the more than 145 tales he re-wrote to profit from the culture of others. The stories that Jones collected never became as popular as those of Harris, but they are very useful today in studying Gullah culture.



This is how Tricky Ol' Buh Rabbit appeared in a magazine more than 100 years ago (Punch, Or The London Charivari, Volume 102, March 19, 1892).

About the Performer

Tiffany Jana is an adept storyteller—and much more! Over the past five years, she has appeared in children's theatre productions such as *Insect Cub: The Musical* and the one-woman show *The Penny Executive: The Maggie L. Walker Story*, as well as in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Birth*, and *The Merchant of Venice*. She has hosted her own internet TV show, *Richmond's Renaissance*, on blacktvonline.com, and in 2005 she produced her first play (John Patrick Shanley's *Where's My Money?*) to rave reviews in the local media. A recent MBA graduate, Tiffany began her arts marketing company, Catalyst Communications LLC, in 2002, and was key in the successful launch of the *Soul of Virginia* Magazine and the inaugural Acts of Faith Theatre Festival. Besides starring in the recent Discovery Theater production of *Let My Motto be Resistance*, she has assistant-directed DT's popular touring show *How Old is a Hero?*, and is looking forward to directing it in the upcoming season.

About the Writer

As the director of the Program in African American Culture at the National Museum of American History, **Christopher W. Wilson** wants to enrich the experience of every visitor by offering them glimpse into the rich history and culture of black Americans and an understanding that the American experience springs from many diverse stories. Chris is an historian and specialist in museum theatre. He has written and directed numerous dramatic pieces that explore historical themes. Chris wrote the scripts for the *American History Alive!* program, dramatic presentations in the American History Museum's transportation exhibit, which took place during the summer of 2006. In 2005 he created "We Shall Overcome: The 40th Anniversary of the Voting Rights March," a living history and musical tribute to the civil rights activists who put their bodies on the line to bring about the Voting Rights Act. More than 17,000 Museum visitors participated in "We Shall Overcome" and the program was a featured part of the United States Justice Department's commemoration of the Voting Rights Act.

Before coming to the Smithsonian, Chris worked for 18 years at Henry Ford Museum, in Dearborn, Michigan. His many educational shows educated and entertained hundreds of thousands of museum visitors as they explored varied topics ranging from the science of making plastic out of soybeans to the history of baseball.

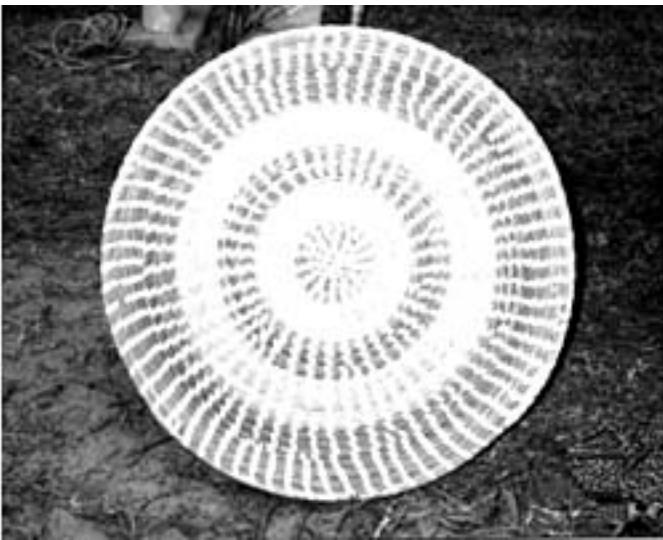


A nineteenth century drawing of the trickster Buh Rabbit.

What is Carolina Gold?

The swampy, coastal lands of South Carolina and Georgia, which we call the Lowcountry, were perfect for the cultivation of rice. Before the Civil War, most of the country's rice was grown in the Lowcountry, and it made great profit for the owners of rice plantations. Because people could make so much money by forcing others to grow rice for them, it was known by the name Carolina Gold.

Many of the slaves who worked on the plantations were from West Africa, and they brought skills with them that they had used in everyday life. One of these skills was weaving baskets. The Gullah people blended African tradition with the resources they found in the Lowcountry, and made seagrass baskets that they used for carrying and to fan rice.



In order to take rice from the field and make it good to eat, enslaved African Americans on Lowcountry plantations had to go through several steps. First, they used a mortar and pestle to pound the rice to separate the grain from its hull, which is the tough outside covering of the rice kernel. Next they used a fanner basket like the one pictured above to throw the rice into the air, letting the hull float away in the breeze and the rice fall back in the basket.

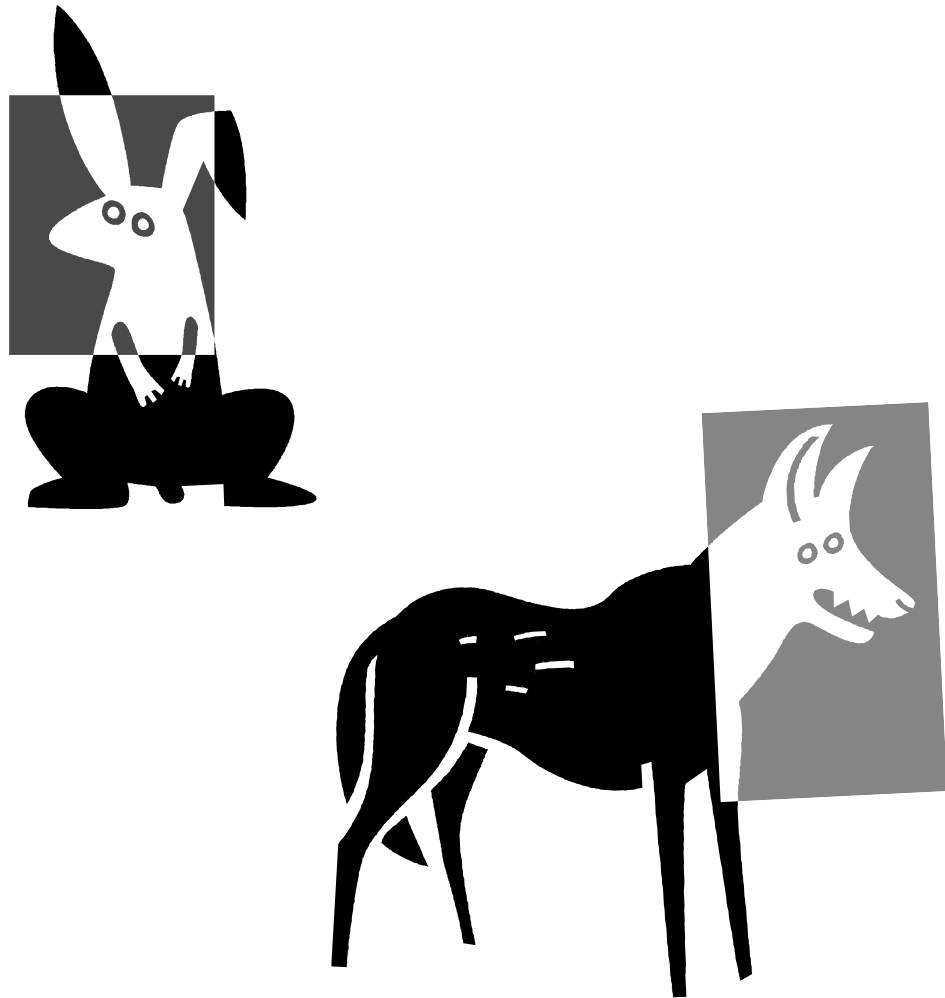
Who was Charles Colcock Jones?

Charles Colcock Jones Jr. was born in Savannah, Georgia in 1831 to a family who owned three plantations in coastal Georgia. More than 100 slaves cultivated rice and cotton on the land owned by Charles' family, allowing him to grow up in wealth and leisure. His father, both a Presbyterian minister and a planter, traveled the country preaching. He believed in slavery because he felt it was condoned by the Bible. Like his father, Charles championed what he thought of as "compassionate slavery" and the ideals of the Old South throughout his life.

On the other hand, Jones was an intelligent and learned man who attended Princeton University, Harvard Law School, and became the first president of the American Anthropological Association. In spite of his racist, pro-slavery beliefs, Jones had an academic interest in preserving African-American folklore, and spent five years collecting and then compiling 57 tales along the coast of Georgia. His anthology of the stories he heard told by the slaves on his family's plantations appeared in his book, *Negro Myths of the Georgia Coast* in 1888. This book contains dozens of stories of Gullah characters like Buh Cootah (turtle), Buh Rabbit, the Rice Bird, and a slave named John, all of whom were tricksters who used their wits to get the best of more powerful characters like Buh Wolf and Buh Fox.

This is Charles Colcock Jones, Jr.'s version of one of the stories we are presenting. See if you can translate the Gullah into English, and then look at the end of this page to see how you did.

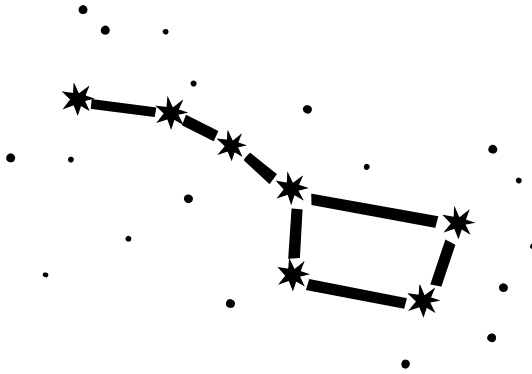
Er Buckra man bin hab er gang er sheep. Ebry now an den eh miss one. Eh sarche eh fiel, an eh see Buh Wolf track day, an eh mek up eh mine say him bin er de one wuh duh tief eh sheep. Eh fix heaper plan fuh ketch um, but eh fail. At lenk eh call een Buh Rabbit, case eh hab summuch sense, fuh help um. Buh Rabbit, him gree fuh do so ef de Buckra man would len um one horse, an would prommus no fuh tell Buh Wolf nuttne bout de ting.



Translation: A white man had a whole bunch of sheep. Every now and then one of them would go missing. He searched his field and saw Buh Wolf's footprints on the ground. The man decided that the wolf was the one who stole his sheep. The man tried many plans to catch him, but all of them failed. At length, he called on Buh Rabbit, because he was so smart, to help him. Buh Rabbit agreed to do so if the man would lend him a horse, and would promise not to tell Buh Wolf anything about the plan.

What is a Drinking Gourd?

Gourds have been used all over the world for thousands of years. They have so many uses that people have called them “the plastic of the pre-modern world.” The people of Africa used gourds with different shapes for different purposes. A long gourd with a handle could be used to dip water to drink. Gourds with a bottle shape could be used to hold water and carry it around, just as we do today with plastic bottles. Gourds were also used as musical instruments and in art, such as masks. When Africans were transported to America during the slave trade, they used gourds in the same ways in America.



Drinking gourds were gourds that were hollowed out, dried, and used as dippers for water. The “drinking gourd” was also a name given to the constellation of stars that we know as the Big Dipper, which points to the North Star. At night, runaways used the North Star as a guide to freedom. The song “Follow the Drinking Gourd” gave instructions to slaves who were planning to escape.

Follow the Drinking Gourd

When the sun comes back
And the first quail calls,
Follow the drinking gourd
For the old man is a-waiting to carry you to freedom

Follow the drinking gourd
Follow the drinking gourd
For the old man is a-waiting to carry you to freedom
Follow the drinking gourd

Well, the river bank makes a mighty good road
Dead trees mark the way
Left foot, peg foot traveling on
Follow the drinking gourd

Follow the drinking gourd
Follow the drinking gourd
For the old man is a-waiting to carry you to freedom
Follow the drinking gourd

Gullah Glossary

There are lots of English words in Gullah, but they don't always sound like English because the Gullahs pronounce them differently. For example, if they say "there," they pronounce it "day" – as in "Buh Rabbit saw Buh Wolf track day on de ground." There are some words, however, that are in Gullah but not in English at all. Here are a few of them:

Yeddy.....Hear

Buckra.....White person

Cootah.....Turtle

Dayclean.....Morning

Glossary

Hull - The tough, inedible outside covering on a grain of rice. The hull was removed by pounding the rice with a mortar and pestle.

Fanner basket - A flat basket made to throw grain, such as rice, up in the air to allow the breeze to blow away the light hull that people didn't eat. If the person using the basket had a lot of skill, the clean grain fell back into the basket

Mortar and Pestle – A mortar is a sturdy wooden, metal, or stone bowl that is used to grind or pound grain, spices, or other foods that need to be crushed. The pestle is the club-shaped device that presses onto the food that is in the mortar.

Creole – A creole language is a new language made up from other languages. A creole language, like the Gullah language, has its own rules, but maintains some of the characteristics of the languages from which it came.

Find out more about Gullah People on these Websites:

Ron and Natalie Daise preserve and present the story of the Gullah people through books, performances, and their television show *Gullah Gullah Island*. Visit them at their website: www.gullahgullah.com

At Knowitall.org you can hear Gullah Tales in both English and Gullah www.knowitall.org/gullahtales

At Henry Ford Museum's website, you can learn about The Hermitage, a Lowcountry plantation near Savannah, Georgia, and the people who lived there. <http://www.thehenryford.org/education/smartfun/hermitage/open.html>

For more information on Charles Colcock Jones, Jr. and his writings, see the New Georgia Encyclopedia online at:

<http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-678>

And if you want to learn more about Carolina Gold rice – and even get some to try – go to Anson Mills’ website. At Anson Mills in South Carolina, they started growing the same kind of rice that was grown there two hundred years ago. It’s a way to get a real “taste of history.”

<http://www.ansonmills.com/page21/page13/page13.html>

Also take a look at these books:

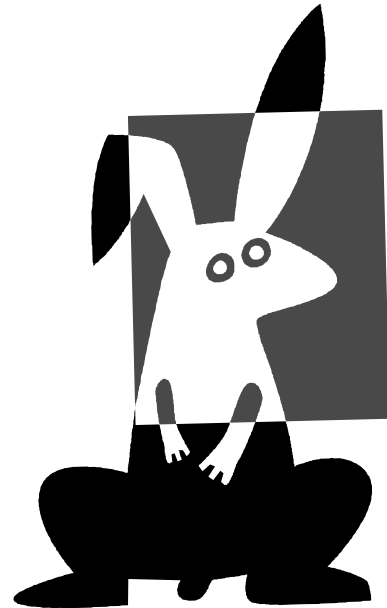
Coakley, Joyce V. *Sweetgrass Baskets and the Gullah Tradition*.

Joyner, Charles. *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community*.

Joyner, Charles. *Remember Me: Slave Life in Coastal Georgia*.

Jones, Charles Colcock. Jr. *Gullah Folktales of the Georgia Coast*.

Pollitzer, William S. and David Moltke-Hansen. *The Gullah People and their African Heritage*.



About the Partners

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY (americanhistory.si.edu). This Smithsonian Museum takes care of more than three million objects that preserve the memories and experiences of the American people. Constantly enriching the collections with new acquisitions and research, NMAH provides the public with a strong sense of the American identity through exhibitions and programs that look at the major themes of our national experience. At the National Museum of American History everyone can explore uniquely American ideals, freedom, democracy, opportunity, and the belief in progress—something we call the American Dream—that have shaped our nation.

Currently closed for renovation, NMAH is scheduled to reopen by summer 2008. Meanwhile, almost a dozen exhibitions are currently traveling the country. In addition, there are currently two small exhibitions at other Smithsonian museums: a selection from our numismatic collections, *Legendary Coins and Currency*, is on display in the Smithsonian Castle, and more than 150 objects from the collections of the Museum are on view at the National Air and Space Museum in the exhibition *Treasures of American History*.

THE SMITHSONIAN WOMEN’S COMMITTEE was founded in 1966 by Mary Ripley, wife of Smithsonian Secretary S. Dillon Ripley, to advance the interests of the Smithsonian Institution through fundraising activities and special projects. Since 1983, the committee's

most important fundraiser, the Smithsonian Craft Show, has established its reputation as the nation's premier juried exhibition and sale promoting excellence in American crafts. Since its founding, the Smithsonian Women's Committee has raised over \$6 million for the benefit of educational, outreach, and research programs within the Smithsonian Institution.

DISCOVERY THEATER (www.DiscoveryTheater.org),

the Smithsonian Institution's theater for children, is dedicated to offering the best in live educational performing arts for young people. Each year, more than 50,000 children and their adults visit Discovery Theater on the National Mall to explore American history and cultures, folk tales from around the world, and exciting, accessible science and math programs. Discovery Theater

performances unite ideologies, enact themes that reflect the diversity of its audiences, open avenues of self-reflection, and offer an enjoyable means for parents and teachers to demonstrate life's lessons. *Tricky Ol' Buh Rabbit* is just one of several recent collaborations between Discovery Theater and distinguished partners such as the Library of Congress, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Lemelson Center for Study of Invention and Innovation, and America's Jazz Heritage, A Partnership of the Lila Wallace–Reader's Digest Fund and the Smithsonian Institution.

Discovery Theater's new specially-designed performance space is located next to the Smithsonian Castle, in the S. Dillon Ripley Center—the Smithsonian's underground learning center with classrooms, lecture halls, artists' studios and more. Favorite DT programs also tour schools and museums, while our partnership with Round House Theater in Silver Spring, MD means that DT's special brand of educational entertainment for kids is more widely available than ever before. For details, call 202-633-8700 or see www.DiscoveryTheater.org.

