

Script to a play : *Sundiata, Lion King of Mali*

by Nick Bartel for production or for Readers' Theater

Scene One: The Griot Speaks [*Introduction - Curtain is closed.*]

Griot/Narrator [*May be shared between Griot 1 and 2; griot/griots is pronounced "gree-oh" (French word)*]

We are griots, masters of the art of eloquence, master storytellers – but our stories are true.

We teach kings about their ancestors so the lives of the ancients may guide them. And we shall teach you your history so you may be guided, too.

We shall teach you of our time of greatness. The past is only the seed of the future.

Listen to the story of Sundiata, the Lion King of Mali. Sundiata, the greatest in a long line of kings.

Return now to the time before Sundiata was born, before the great Lion King united the small tribal territories of Mali into a mighty empire. Return to the land along the river before Sundiata's mother and father had met.

Scene Two: Outside King Maghan's Palace

Staging hint: Lights dim and the actors enter in front of the curtain – the scene is acted in the skirt of the stage. The king is seated on his royal stool, stage right. King Maghan has a cowtail switch, robes, may have an African style crown. King sits under a baobab tree [an important prop – it has to be moved later in the play – a potted plant?].

King Maghan -

Prince Dankaran (very young, crawling) – servant with fan (non-speaking part) -

Queen Sassouma -

Soothsayer/hunter (needs cowrie shells, hunter's bag, bow)

Griot:

King Maghan sat under the mighty baobab tree for shade outside his palace walls. He was joined by his beautiful wife, Queen Sassouma who was pregnant with their second child. Their son, Prince Dankaran, was only a child then.

A hunter from far away approached. His garments were covered with cowrie shells which showed him to be a master in the art of hunting. These hunters were known as great soothsayers, or fortune tellers, as well.

Soothsayer/hunter [*enters stage left, walks up to the king and bows*]:

I salute you, king.

King Maghan:

Welcome, stranger. You have traveled far. Rest here and enjoy some refreshments. And please share with us some stories of our neighboring lands.

Soothsayer/hunter:

I am not a teller of tales. I do not make up stories, nor trick my listeners with a golden tongue. But I can tell the future among the best fortune-tellers.

King Maghan (*laughing*): Then tell us the future.

Queen Sassouma : Yes! Tell us how great my husband will become, and how our son will rule after him.

[The hunter takes cowry shells out of his hunter's bag, raises them to his mouth and murmurs an incantation. Then he throws the shells before him on the mat. He looks at them studying the way they fell and the patterns they make.]

Soothsayer/hunter:

Oh, great ruler, our world is full of mystery. Great things come from small. This baobab tree springs from a tiny seed. Kingdoms are like trees; some will become like this great tree, and others will remain like dwarf palms. *[hand drops subtly from the great baobab tree to Dankaran]* And who can recognize in the little child the great king to come? Know this, King Maghan. Your land is about to emerge from the night.

King Maghan *[arising, going closer to the cowrie shells]:*

Hunter, your words are strange and exciting. Make them clear to us.

Soothsayer/hunter:

Oh, King. Listen to my message. Your successor is not yet born. *[Queen looks shocked, angry.]* I see two hunters coming to your city. They have come from afar. A woman comes with them. Oh, that woman! She is ugly. On her back is a hump giving her the appearance of a buffalo. Her eyes are misshapen, too. But this is the woman you must marry, for she will be the mother of the one who will make the name of your family immortal. This son will be mightier than all who have preceded him.

Queen Sassouma *[interrupts, threatens]:*

That's ridiculous! And you said you were no teller of tales! My husband married to a "buffalo woman"? *[to the soothsayer/hunter]* You are a foolish and dangerous man. Go back to where you came from while you still can!

Soothsayer/hunter *[picks up his cowrie shells and returns them to his bag]* : I am only passing through, and now I must leave.

King Maghan *[laughing nervously]:*

Don't you have any other stories for a king?

Soothsayer/hunter:

I have spoken not to entertain, sire. Farewell, great king.

[Hunter exits left, king and others exit right. Only the queen remains.]

Queen Sassouma *[outward to audience, self; a soliloquy]* :

What is this terrible news? NO! My son will be the king, not a son of a buffalo woman! I will be the queen and mother of kings! *[exits right]*

Scene Three : The Hunters

Oulamba - hunter (younger brother)

Hunter one (with an injured leg)

Oulani - hunter (older brother)

Hunter two (assisting hunter one to walk)

Old woman

Buffalo (two people in a costume: head with horns, made of paper mâché)

Griot :

After the harvest season in the Land of Daw, two brothers, Oulamba and Oulani, were eager for traveling and hunting. The youths were strong and anxious to prove their skills to the people of their village. Two days' journey beyond their village, they met two other hunters, one of whom was brutally wounded.

Hunters enter in front of curtain, dressed in hunters' narrow trousers and the wide, long reddish-brown over-garment; barefoot. Oulani and Oulamba enter stage left and see injured hunter and helper enter from stage right. Oulani and Oulamba have bows, and a quiver of arrows.]

Oulamba : Fellow hunters! What happened to you?

Hunter one : My leg has been torn apart by the sharp horns of a wild buffalo in the countryside of Daw.

Hunter two : Every day it claims some victims. We are lucky to be alive! No one dares leave the village after sunset.

Hunter one : And none of the fields are safe from the destruction of that marauding animal.

Hunter two : The King of Daw has promised a fine reward to the hunter who kills the buffalo and rids the village of this curse. But we have failed. Farewell.
[Hunters one and two continue across the stage and exit.]

Oulani : Let's try our luck! If we kill the buffalo, we will be famous in our village.

Oulamba : And we'll get a reward! Let's go!
[They follow the "trail" across the stage, as if stalking an animal.]

Griot :

So in search of adventure and reward, the two brothers advanced deep into the land where the buffalo had caused its destruction. Cautiously they pursued the buffalo and by chance, they came upon an old woman by the side of a river. *[The old woman hobbles in using a wooden staff.]*

Old woman:

Please, young hunters. I beseech you for something to eat.

Oulani : Forget it! Let's go on and find the buffalo!

Oulamba : No, we must help her. Look how old and thin she is. *[He approaches her and gives her some dried meat from his hunter's bag.]* Here, old woman. Eat this.

Old woman [smiling, showing her few remaining teeth] :

Thank you, my son. May God return to you the charity that you have shown me.

Oulamba : Farewell, old woman. *[The hunters get ready to leave.]*

Old woman : Wait, boys! I know that you are going to try your luck against the Buffalo of Daw. But you should know that many others before you have met their death. Arrows are quite useless against the buffalo because of its thick hide. One hundred and seven hunters have been killed.

Oulani : We are good hunters and we are not afraid to try.

Old woman : Your hearts are generous and it is you who will kill the buffalo. Here, take this staff and go to the plain over there. You must take aim three times with this staff. Then the buffalo shall be vulnerable. As proof of your victory, you must take the buffalo and bring it to the King of Daw.

Oulani : This is great luck!

Oulamba : Thank you, old woman!

[Crazy with joys, the two brothers seize the staff, but the old woman stops them with a gesture – all three hold the staff, and move up the staff like a baseball bat, they move their hands up until the woman's hand is on the top, then she gestures and the brothers fall back by her magic.]

Old woman : There is ... one condition.

Oulani [impatiently, suspiciously] : What is it?

Old woman : The king promises the hand in marriage of the most beautiful maiden of Daw to the victor. When all the people of Daw are gathered and you are told to choose among the beautiful maidens of the village ...

Oulani [excitedly] : All right!

Old woman : But you must search in the crowd until you find a very ugly maiden, uglier than you can imagine, sitting on the observation platform. You must choose her. She will be an extraordinary woman for the man who is able to possess her. Swear to me that you will choose her, hunters!

Oulani : You've gotta be kidding! Why risk our lives to claim an ugly woman as our reward?

Oulamba : Yes, we promise. *[elbows his brother, talks directly to him]* We will be famous hunters, and it's time you had a wife.

Oulani *[to his brother]* : She's only leading us to our death! This is no magic staff!

Oulamba : Then I will die like a brave hunter, not a coward. Let's go! Yes, we promise, old woman.

Griot : And the two brothers continued on to the plain of Daw. *[The brothers continue across the sage as if hunting. The old woman leaves. Drums beat to build suspense...]*

Out on the plains of Daw, the two young hunters saw a buffalo with black hide and silver horns. Oulamba advanced cautiously stooping to hide himself in the tall grass. Then the buffalo raised its head and saw the young hunter. It bellowed, lowered its mighty head, and charged.

The hunters shot at it, but the arrows seemed only to inflame the buffalo. It charged again! Oulani ran and hid behind a tree. Oulamba lowered the staff three times. He took the staff and charged at the buffalo and this time he killed it.

His older brother came from behind the tree and congratulated him. They dragged the buffalo and headed for the village of Daw.

Scene Four : The King of Daw

Oulamba - hunter (younger brother)
Oulani - hunter (older brother)
Sogolon -
King of Daw -
Villagers (no speaking parts)

Maidens who are also dancers (4 or 6)
Girl #1 :
Girl #2 :
Girl #3 :

Griot : Drums spread the joyful news throughout the Land of Daw that the buffalo had been slain, and soon fathers accompanied by daughters of marriageable age came to the village to celebrate and hopefully get a husband.

[Curtains open to scene of Daw's main square – a group of beautiful girls and fathers; on a riser in the back of the stage sits Sogolon, head covered. In the center of the stage dancers and drummers celebrate and dance around the buffalo carcass.]

[Dance number with four - six women of Daw - African music for celebration.]

Everyone gathered in the main square. The hunters' names, Oulamba and Oulani, were sung by the crowd in praise of their great deed.

When the king appeared, a deep silence settled on the crowd. Next to him were the two hunters. The beauty of the two young hunters set every woman daydreaming that she might be the one chosen.

King of Daw : The buffalo is dead, and here in the hunter, Oulamba, who killed it. I promised the hand of a woman in marriage as a reward. Great hunter, look upon the beautiful daughters of Daw and take your pick.

[The crowd cheered its approval. Women (dancers) move forward.]

Girl One : Oh, I hope he chooses me! Hey, hunter, check me out!

Girl Two : *[to Oulani]* He looks fine! I'll take him!

Oulamba: These women are all so beautiful. How can I decide among such great loveliness?

Griot: But overhead a hawk appeared and after circling three times, plummeted over the platform. Then the hunter remembered the words of the old woman and tore his eyes from the smiling beauties.

[Crowd in unison looks to the sky, some point and follow three wide circles and then downward to platform – then crowd parts leaving a V to open up where Sogolon sits on the platform.]

On the raised platform, he spotted Sogolon, with a humped back and bulging eyes partially hidden by a veil pulled across her face. The hunter elbowed his way through the crowd, took her by the hand and pulled her into the center of the great circle. *[The crowd gasps in disbelief.]*

Girl Three: He must be joking.

Girl Two: That's one of the king's daughters, the girl everyone calls the Buffalo Woman.

Girl One: Can't he see her misshapen body with its huge hump? Hey, hunter... look at me!

Oulamba: *[bringing Sogolon to the King of Daw]*

This is the one I have chosen.

King of Daw : *[He cannot control his own laughter... and laughter spreads throughout the crowd]*

You ... want Sogolon?

Oulani : Yes. Let's leave this place immediately! They have no respect!

Oulamba : Yes! Let's kick the dust from our feet and vow never to return to this rude village again!

Griot: The brothers left that very day pursued by the mockery of the people of Daw. They escorted Sogolon, the Buffalo Woman, away from Daw and started on their return to their own village.

[curtains close - the brothers and Sogolon go in front of the curtain to continue journey]

Scene Five : Journey *[in front of the curtain]*

Oulamba - hunter (younger brother)

Sogolon -

Oulani - hunter (older brother)

Griot: On their path home, the young hunters slowed their pace to ease the journey for Sogolon, the Buffalo Woman. She was weeping, for she was leaving the only home she had ever known. But she was the daughter of a king. Was she to become the wife of a mere hunter from a poor village?

Oulani : There is a village up ahead. We can stay there tonight. Hey! are you going to sleep with your wife tonight? You were the one who was victorious over the buffalo.

Oulamba: But you are the eldest. You know that it is not right for me to take a wife before you.

Griot : But that night, the brothers could do nothing. Sogolon was a very powerful sorceress and the spirit animals in her body took over. She roared like a panther and the hunters were frozen if they came near her.

Sogolon *[as hunters approach, gestures that forces them back ... this is a rap with a drum beat]*

Stop! *(drum beat)* Stay where you are!

You think that I'm ugly, but I'm really a star.

Try to take advantage of poor little me?

Stop what you're doin' or I'll make you both freeze.

I said "Stop!" *(drum beat)*

Don't mess with me. Do no such thing.

Marry a hunter? I'll marry a king.

I said Stop! *(drum beat)* Now, good night hunters...

[hunters collapse into sleep at her gesture]

Griot : The next morning, the brothers realized they would never have Sogolon for a wife.

Oulani [*waking up, stretching*] : Oulamba, wake up. Her spells are more powerful than any we know. We have failed to make her our wife.

Oulamba : Yes, Sogolon is not for us.

Oulani : Let's continue on our journey. [*To himself, audience...*] What a waste! First, we have to choose her for a wife, and now this!

Scene Six : King Maghan's Palace

King Maghan -

Prince Dankaran (as a child) -

Queen Sassouma (with baby in arms) -

Servant

Oulani (hunter) -

Oulamba (hunter) -

Sogolon (Buffalo woman) -

Griot

[King Maghan again is seated under the tree. Sassouma holds a baby daughter.]

Griot : And so the two young hunters and the young maid continued on their journey until they came upon King Maghan's palace. When the strangers were a few steps from the king, they bowed.

Oulani : Great king, we are hunters from far away. This young girl is from Daw and we present her to you, for we think she is worthy to be a king's wife. She has amazing magical powers.

[Sogolon shyly kneeling in front of the king with a veil hiding her face. Sassouma becomes uncomfortable, shakes her head and stands facing the audience..]

Sassouma : Oh, no! Not her. I hope my husband has forgotten about the horrible prophecy made months ago!

Griot : The king was embarrassed and stared a long time. [*He checks out Sogolon and shakes his head - this is not what he expected.*]

The hunters sat down to tell their story. [*Hunters pantomime talking with the king...*]

They told of the old woman at the river, the killing of the buffalo, and the choice of the Buffalo Woman of all the beautiful maidens of Daw.

The king knew this extraordinary woman was the one prophesied. She must become the king's wife and mother of his son!

[King pantomimes actions: getting up and going to Sogolon; ordering gifts and dismissing the hunters who bow and leave.]

So the king ordered a gift of kola nuts for bringing her to the king.

King Maghan : Let the wedding be set!

Griot : And throughout the twelve villages of the kingdom, the drums announced the marriage.

[Drums beat, music begins, people come to the stage and welcome the new girl... They prepare for the wedding... King Meghan puts on his wedding cloak. Sogolon is brought to the front of the stage.]

Sassouma *[while servants prepare her for the wedding Sassouma goes to Sogolon]* :

Watch out, buffalo girl. If you think you can come into this palace and take over, you're wrong. I'm the first wife and my son will be the next king. My daughter Nina will be next in line. So get any other ideas out of your head.

Sogolon : I have no choice in this, Queen Sassouma. I've been snatched away from my family and brought here. I have no plans... I don't want this marriage any more than you! And now it's my wedding day - to be married to a complete stranger.

Sassouma : We'll see about that!

[Sogolon is presented to King Maghan. Music plays. A cloth is put around both of their shoulders to unite them. They are married. Then the music stops and lights dim. All actors leave except Maghan and Sogolon who are alone in front of the curtain.]

Griot : And so King Maghan and Sogolon the Buffalo Woman were married. And later that night ... the king went to his new wife's bedroom.

[Maghan helps seat Sogolon and then sits beside her.]

King Maghan : Come here, my wife. *[He leans forward coming on to her...]*

Sogolon : I have a headache! Can't you come back next month?

King Maghan : Now don't be afraid.

Sogolon : I said, 'Stop!' *[drum-beat]* My spirit animals, protect me! Help me, buffalo and panther!

King Maghan : I have a spirit animal of my own - the lion! Think of how great our children will be - children of the buffalo, panther, and lion. I know you don't love me yet, but let's take our time.

[Wedding music ends. Lights out. Actors go behind the curtain.]

Scene Seven : Sundiata's Birth

King Maghan -

Queen Sassouma -

Midwife -

Griot -

Sogolon -

townspeople to celebrate the birth
lightning and thunder effects; drums

[The first part of this scene is in front of the curtain with King Maghan and Sassouma]

Sassouma *(angrily)* : Even though the Qur'an allows you take many wives, how could you marry her? Do you prefer that ugly buffalo to me?

King Maghan : Woman, woman! Don't worry. I love you still. I am only trying to make an alliance with the people of Daw *[aside and quieter to the audience]* and she is an incredible woman ... To make up for it, I give you ten cows from my herd. They are yours. But I beg you, no, I order you, don't disrupt my marriage with her. She is pregnant now and will give birth to my child and heir.

Sassouma *[to herself and the audience]* :

And now Sogolon is pregnant! But I can handle that Buffalo Woman! I'll poison her and her child. Just wait... *[exits behind curtain]*

Griot : Near the moment of the baby's delivery, the sky grew dark with clouds. Thunder and lightning crackled. Rain started falling and blanketed the earth. And then the rain stopped suddenly and the sun appeared. *[Light and sound effects.]*

It was at that very moment the midwife came out of Sogolon's hut to announce to Maghan that he was the father of a boy.

Midwife : Sire, you have another son! *[She hands the bundled baby to him.]*

King Maghan *[proudly raising the baby to the sky and to the audience]* : I name you Sundiata, and some day you will become the Lion King of our bright land.

Griot : Drums announced the birth of a boy throughout the village and in celebration, singers and balafons carried the praises of the king and his new son. *[Music is joyous ... then gets softer, sadder for the next scene]*

Scene Eight : Sundiata's Early Childhood

King Maghan -

Queen Sassouma -

Woman one -

Dankaran -

Soothsayer (may be same as hunter, scene two) -

Infant Sundiata -

Woman two -

Griot : But God has mysteries which no one can understand. Some people will be lucky and live an easy life untouched by sorrow. Others will be marked for suffering. You can do nothing about it. Such is the will of God.

The infant Sundiata had a slow and difficult childhood. At the age of five, he still crawled, dragging himself along the ground like a crocodile on a sandbank. He was a strange child, too. Malicious tongues began to wag.

[Women in front of curtain, looking at Sundiata crawling]

Woman One : Look at the king's son! What's wrong with him? What five-year-old has not yet learned to walk?

Woman Two : Something is wrong with him.

Woman One : Is this the great future king, or was the prophecy a cruel joke?

Woman Two : Or is there witchcraft involved?

Dankaran : Come here, mother. Look at my brother. He still won't get up.

Sassouma : Yes, my son. Look at that good-for-nothing, poor excuse for a prince! Look at my son, Sogolon! I prefer a son who walks on his two legs to a lion that crawls on the ground! *[laughter from the women; women and queen walk away]*

Sogolon *[to her son]* : Sundiata, my boy. What's wrong with you? I have tried all my magic, but still you can't walk. Your father is so worried about you... Here he comes now. *[She bows and leaves as King Maghan enters.]*

King Maghan *[enters with soothsayer and looks at Sundiata crawling]* :

Look at my son, soothsayer. Can Sundiata possibly be the one with a glorious future?

Soothsayer : Oh, King. Great trees grow slowly, but they plunge their roots deep into the ground. Your son has three guardian spirits in one body: the lion, buffalo, and panther. He is not yet able to assimilate them, or bring them together. Be patient. *[exit soothsayer]*

King Maghan : And now he is five years old and crawls around like a crocodile! Everyone's laughing at me! He'll be a great king! Ha! The prophecy. What happened? I am old now and have yet to see his greatness. My life ends in sorrow and pain. *[Exits completely defeated.]*

Griot : Maghan died never seeing his son Sundiata walk. And with the death of King Maghan, Dankaran, the eldest, the son of Sassouma, was named as king. And Sassouma became powerful in her new position, as well.

[Queen, Dankaran, and village people enter through curtain as griot speaks. Queen Sassouma is proud of her son, puts the crown on her son herself. Sogolon continues to mourn the king.]

Scene Nine : Sundiata's Childhood

Queen Sassouma -

Sogolon -

Dankaran -

Young Sundiata -

Young Nina -

Some villagers (including Woman 1 & 2) -

Props: leaves (in a basket) ; baobab tree (potted plant that can be moved across stage)

[Nina is playing with Sundiata when the Queen enters; in front of the curtain]

Nina : Come on, Sundiata. Catch this one. *[playing catch, seated]*

Sassouma : Get away, Nina! *[to Sogolon]* Sogolon, you and Sundiata must move to the poorest section of the palace. *[to a servant...]* Don't waste food on them. They can eat our leftovers.

Dankaran : But mother, father wouldn't want that... they're ...

Sassouma : Quiet! You're not old enough to be king yet. So listen to me, and learn how to rule.

Sogolon *[rising, talking to Sassouma, carrying an empty bowl]* :

Oh, Queen Sassouma, may I please have some baobab leaves to season our food? We never get any meat, just leftovers, but can we please have some leaves?

Sassouma : My son can walk and run. He brings me baobab leaves every day! Whereas yours, supposed to be superhuman, drags himself around and can't even gather leaves for you! Here, take these. Go and feed your good-for-nothing son. Make him a big fat lizard!
[laughing, throws the leaves at Sogolon; Dankaran and the women go to the left side of the stage, but not off stage, with their backs to the scene]

Sogolon [to herself and the audience] : I'd rather my child and I starve to death than take these baobab leaves. I won't accept her insults or her charity! *[She covers her face to hide her tears and hurries back to her hut at the side of the stage.]*

Sundiata *[playing on the floor next to their house seeing his mother come in]* : What's the matter, mother? *[Sees her crying.]* Did the queen insult you again? *[Sobbing, Sogolon nods]* Then today, I am going to walk!

Griot : Rejoice! Today is a day of destiny!

[Sundiata crawled on all fours to a wooden pole. A small crowd starts gathering. He picks up the pole and stood it vertically. Then he pulls himself slowly upward... Drumbeats build...]
Arise, young lion! Roar! And let the bush know that from now on, it has a new master!

Sassouma *[with a haughty smile is in the crowd]* - Fall on your face, buffalo boy!

Nina : Come on, Sundiata! You can do it!

Sassouma : Shut your mouth, Nina!

Griot : Sundiata lowered his head and stared at the pole. The next moment, his muscles swelled, and embracing the rod, he hauled himself up. His legs pulled under him and they started trembling, like rice stalks whipped by the wind. In a supreme effort, he managed to stretch himself completely upright on his own two legs.

Soon the silence turned to joy. There was chanting and clapping. And with every step the crowd praised him more!

Not far from the palace was the baobab tree. Sundiata slowly stumbled to the tree leading the crowd. Once there, he turned to his mother.

Sundiata : Mother, did you ask your son for some leaves?

Griot: Then, with a might tug, he up-rooted the tree, put it over his shoulder, and carried it back in front of his mother's hut.

Sundiata : From this day on, it is from your hut that the women of our town, including Sassouma, shall come to get their leaves!

Griot : The lion had awakened. *[Some villagers start applause – get audience to join in.]*

Scene Ten : The Witches

Witch One -

Sogolon -

Witch Two -

Sundiata -

Witch Three -

Props : plastic or real vegetables for garden

Griot : Sundiata was now ten. He was a boy full of strength. His arms had the strength of a man and grown men were afraid of him. His mother taught him the secrets of the animals and plants, and of magic. So he grew in strength and wisdom.

And every day Sassouma's hatred of Sogolon and Sundiata increased. She became more and more worried about her own son's throne. Even now, at the age of eighteen, her son Dankaran was weak. Sassouma really ruled in his name. And she wanted to kill Sundiata. One night Sassouma met with three great witches.

Sassouma: You who rule supreme at night and have nocturnal powers, oh you who can put an end to someone's life, will you help me? I want to kill Sundiata. His destiny runs counter to my son's.

Witch One: Mother of the king... Sundiata has done us no wrong. Why should we bring about his death?

Sassouma: You are wrong. He and his mother are evil and have no respect for you. Tomorrow go to his mother's vegetable patch where Sundiata stands guard. You will see how vicious he is.

Witch Two: That's a clever idea. We will test him.

Witch Three: And will you give us a reward? *[greedily they accept a reward]*

[Lights very dim; Sundiata is sleeping outside of a hut near a vegetable patch. Sogolon is inside the hut.] [Witches enter the vegetable patch while Sundiata is sleeping... lights grow brighter. Witches gather vegetables from the garden... They pretend to run away like thieves who have been caught. Sundiata wakes up (after one witch has to wake him).]

Witch One: We've been caught stealing.

Witch Two: Let's run.

Sundiata : Stop, stop, you poor old women. Don't run. This garden belongs to all. Each time you need food, come back and take what you need without fear. *[He picks food and gives it to them.]*

Witch One : We came to test you, Sundiata. We have no need of your vegetables.

Witch Two : We can do nothing against a heart full of kindness. Forgive us.

Witch Three : Beware of the queen mother. She wishes you harm. *[They exit.]*

Sundiata [returning home, to the hut] : Mother, the witches said the Queen wishes to harm us. I just met them in the vegetable patch.. They were picking vegetables and ...

Sassouma : Please, great king. Please leave Mali in peace. We can join you without war and killing. No need to add to your collection... *[looking at the heads and skeletons on the wall, feels his throat]*

King Sumangaru *[rises and looks at Nina, goes closer to look at her]* :
And is this another one of your gifts?

Dankaran : Yes, if you wish!

Sassouma *[to Dankaran]* : No, not Nina! How can you do that to your own sister?

Dankaran : Be quiet, mother. There is no other way. Let's get out of here!
[pulls his mother out as she tries to hold on to Nina]

Villager / Guard of Sassouma : *[who was with Dankaran and Sassouma, talks to audience]* :
This is disgusting! Our own king gives away his country and his own sister to this monster. I must search for Sundiata, if he is still alive. He is the only hope for Mali now. *[Curtain closes.]*

Scene Twelve : Finding Sundiata

Sogolon -

Guard / Soldier #1 -

Sundiata -

Sundiata's soldiers 3 or 4 (non-speaking parts)

Sumangaru -

Sumangaru's soldiers (3 or 4 non-speaking parts)

Props : swords, lances, shields for battle Slide projector (slides of Sumangaru)

Griot : And so the guard went in search of Sundiata across the savanna.
And following every rumor of a great warrior and a woman who looked like a buffalo, he eventually came to the Land of Mena.

Guard from Mali : *[In front of curtain]* Thanks to Allah, I have found Sogolon and her son. My journey is not in vain. *[to Sundiata]* Alas! I bring you sad news. Sumangaru, the powerful King of Ghana, has brought death and destruction to Mali. Your half-brother, Dankaran, has fled with his mother, and Mali is without a leader. We are waiting for a true king... Mali can be saved because we have found you, Sundiata. The throne of your father awaits you.

Sundiata : I cannot leave my mother now. She is very sick. And where were the people of Mali when we needed help?

Sogolon : My son, don't be bitter. All that has come to pass has been to prepare you for greatness. My destiny is finished. Yours is about to begin... Go back to Mali at the head of an army. *[coughing, dying...]*

Be brave... *[Sogolon is escorted off the stage, slow drum, then silence, a wail from off stage.]*

Griot : Sundiata had a great burial to honor his mother Sogolon. Then the king of Mena gave half of his own army to Sundiata. They set out to confront Sumangaru's forces. The people of Mena cheered them as they left and wished them well.

[war drums beat; Sundiata's soldiers see Sumangaru's army across the stage – or marching in from the aisle]

Soldier One : My general, how can we fight such a great army? We are so few!

Sundiata : Numbers mean nothing. It is worth that counts. I shall clear myself a path to Mali!

Griot : After a while they came across Sumangaru perched high on a hill. Sundiata left his soldiers behind and alone he charged toward his enemy.

Sundiata : My arrow will kill you, Sumangaru!

Griot: He shot an arrow at the evil king, but the king grabbed it mid-air. Sumangaru raised the arrow, waved it, and laughed.

Sundiata : Then taste the metal of my spear!

Griot : Sundiata threw his metal spear, but that only bounced off Sumangaru's chest.

Sumangaru: Ha, Sundiata! I am invincible. But live a while longer. We will meet in a few days on the Plains of Karina. Prepare to die!

[laughs, exits leaving Sundiata alone on the stage]

Griot : Then Sumangaru disappeared. A moment later he was across the valley on another hill! Sundiata could hear his mocking laughter echoing down the valley.

[Slide Projector shows slides of Sumangaru on the auditorium walls on opposite sides; prerecorded laughter reverberates.]

Sundiata : *[looking at Sumangaru's images on different sides of the auditorium walls]*
How can I defeat a man who can disappear and reappear where and when he likes? How can I conquer a man invulnerable to my spear and to my arrows? Clearly other weapons are necessary.

Scene Thirteen : Sumangaru's Palace

Sumangaru -

Nina -

Props : glasses for wine (non-breakable) 2 chairs

Griot : When her own brother Dankaran brought her to be the wife of Sumangaru, at first she was angry. But when she saw the suffering of her people, she decided that she may be in a position to find the secret of the king's vulnerability.

Sumangaru had three hundred wives, but because of her beauty, Nina became his favorite. One evening she dressed herself in a most seductive way and went to his tower room. She offered him wine and her legendary beauty inspired the liveliest of passions.

Nina : Drink, my love. There is plenty of honey in it, my sweet king.

Sumangaru : Oh, come here, my beauty. Tomorrow I will conquer Mali. What a great general I am.

Nina : A great general, and so strong and handsome, too.

Sumangaru *[drinking wine]* : Come here, Nina.

Nina : Oooh, don't look into my eyes, for no woman can bear the brilliance of your gaze.

Sumangaru *[laughing, as if proud of himself, and a little drunk]* : Yeah!

Nina : Do you find me as good and as sweet as the wine?

Sumangaru : As sweet as a ripe papaya, with juice that quenches thirst and flesh that satisfies hunger. *[He pulls her to him.]*

Nina : *[coily pulling back]* Oh, your arms, my lord. Tell me, are you a man, or a supernatural being? Your arms have the strength of ten. Tell what guardian spirit protects you and makes you so powerfully strong.

Sumangaru : I don't have one guardian spirit. I have sixty-three ancestral totems! I can take the form of sixty-three different animals!
[Nina turns away, but not so much as to let her tears go unnoticed.]

Why are you crying?

Nina : I'm crying because I am afraid you will abandon me one day. I love you so and I can't live without you! Will you ever send me away?

Sumangaru : No, my pet. *[drinking more wine]* Not for a while...

Nina : You are such a great man that I cannot resist you. Tell me, is there anything that might diminish your magnificent powers?

Griot : Nina had cast her web and waited for what it would bring.

Sumangaru : Don't worry. I can only be hurt by the spur from the foot of a white rooster.

Nina : I am so lucky to have you near me. And I will take good care of all that you have told me.
[She puts her head on his shoulder, smiles knowingly... lights go out.]

Scene Fourteen : The Battle of Karina

Sundiata - Sundiata's army (3 - 4 other soldiers)

Sumangaru - Sumangaru's army

Nina - (who rides in on a horse - need prop)

Choreographed fight scene - swords or staffs, capoeira ?)

Griot : As Sundiata and his army advanced to the plains of Kirina, sons of Mali joined Sundiata's side. He gave the people hope that at last the sorcerer king could be defeated. And then they would be free.

[Battle begins with drumming - soldiers are paired in combat with staffs, swords, but no one wins. Then they take a break...]

But Sundiata's soldiers were no match for the magic of Sumangaru.

In a break in the battle, a mysterious visitor came riding up to Sundiata. In a disguise was Nina, his half-sister.

Nina *[riding on a horse or walking]*: My brother!

Sundiata : Is this Nina? You've grown so. But what are you doing here where it's so dangerous?

Nina : My brother, I must warn you. The evil king cannot be defeated by your arrows or your spears. But know what I have learned... His luck can only be destroyed by the spur of a white rooster. Here ...

[She hands him an arrow that she had prepared. Note: It is attached to two black strings: one is a guideline, the other can pull the arrow across the stage so it appears to fly. The arrow will have two eye-hooks to keep it level as it is pulled across the guideline. The guideline should be held by the stage crew (behind the curtain) over the shoulder of Sumangaru for the shot. Another crew member will pull on the string attached to the arrow.]

This will bring you victory.

[The drums sound and the battle begins again.]

Griot: Sundiata saw Sumangaru at the crest of a hill. Raising his bow, he shot the arrow fixed with the spur of a white rooster.

[Stage crew pulls the arrow fixed with eyelets and suspended on a black string pulled by another string across the stage and over the shoulder of Sumangaru. All in slow motion...]

The arrow flew straight, but only grazed his shoulder. Immediately Sumangaru felt his powers leave him. Trembling, he let out a great cry, turned and took flight.

The forces of Sumangaru saw their king leave, and they fled in turn. It was a complete victory for Sundiata.

Sundiata's troops rejoiced in their spectacular victory, and he was proclaimed King of all Mali. *[curtains close, griots (drummers?) move to front of curtain]*

This is the story of the Lion King, Sundiata, my children. Don't doubt our words. We teach you of our time of greatness. The past is only the seed of the future.

[Curtain opens, entire cast takes bows - music cue]

Cast list :

Griot(s) -	Sogolon	Nina
King Maghan -	Sundiata	Sumangaro
Queen Sassouma -	Witch #1	Guard of Sumangaro
Prince Dankaran -	Witch #2	Soldiers of Sumangaro
Soothsayer/hunter -	Witch #3	Guard of Sassouma & Dankaran / Soldier
servant of King -	Midwife of Sogolon	Soldiers of Sundiata
Oulamba (younger hunter)	Soothsayer	Drummer
Oulani (older brother)		Music and sound effects
Old buffalo woman	Hunter one (with injured leg)	Lighting, props
King of Daw	Hunter two	Stage crew and special effects
Dancers of Daw	Villagers - Woman 1, 2	Buffalo of Daw

Note to teachers :

The was prepared by 7th grade teacher Nick Bartel for middle school students in San Francisco and produced a couple of times. You have permission to adapt this for classroom use. For questions (especially about costuming and staging designs), you may contact Nick Bartel at nickbartel@yahoo.com.