

Faraway Home

• Reader's Theater •

Grades
3-5

by | Toni Buzzeo

Read the book aloud to children first, so that they can enjoy the illustrations and become familiar with the story. Then, hand out a set of photocopied scripts to nine or thirteen students. (**Note:** Because Mother and Christopher each have a single-line part, you may want to assign them to one of the two choruses as well.) Note that the America Chorus will include a chime player and the Africa Chorus will include a drummer. Your music teacher may be able to lend instruments for the reading. Ask the remaining children to be the audience. Have performers face the audience and simply read their parts on the first run-through. Once all readers are comfortable with their parts, have a second reading with the opportunity to use props, if desired, and to act out the story while reading.



Faraway Home by Jane Kurtz, Harcourt, 2000.

Roles

Mother

Desta

Daddy

Christopher

Narrator One

Narrator Two

Narrator Three

America Chorus
(three readers,
one with a chime)

Africa Chorus
(three readers,
one with a drum)

Pronunciation Guide

These words are in Amharic. There are no stress syllables.

- *Injera* in-jeh-rah
- *Gahbi* gah-bee
- *Emayay* em-eye-yay

After Reading

Visit www.librarysparks.com for an interview with Jane Kurtz about *Faraway Home*. Also visit Jane's Web site at www.janekurtz.com.

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Faraway Home

Narrator One: When Desta dances into her house after school, the first thing she sees is the green envelope.

Narrator Two: She traces the bright stamp with her finger.

Mother: Your grandmother back home in Ethiopia is ill. Your father needs to go home to be with her.

Desta: Daddy is going to leave us? No!

Narrator Three: Desta runs to her father's favorite chair and curls up in it.

America Chorus: (*With chime.*) America, America, my right here home.

Narrator One: When evening comes, soft as a curtain closing, Desta's father takes her in his arms.

Daddy: Desta, my Desta, whose name means "joy," listen to my song.

Africa Chorus: (*With drum.*) Africa, Africa, my faraway home.

Narrator Two: Daddy sings a haunting song full of words Desta doesn't know.

Desta: Ethiopia is so far away. I don't want you to go.

Daddy: For me, Ethiopia is never far away. Close your eyes and try to see green-gray mountains. Think about a thick cloud of fog crawling up the valley and the lonely sound of cowbells in the hills.

Africa Chorus: (*With drum.*) Africa, Africa, my faraway home.

Narrator Three: Desta closes her eyes and hears the wind chime hanging from the front porch.

Desta: Do cowbells sound like that?

America Chorus: (*With chime.*) America, America, my right here home.

Daddy: When I was your age, I carried grain on my head to the mill by the waterfall, where the grain was ground into flour. Then my mother made *injera* and cooked it over the fire that lived in a scooped-out place in the middle of the floor.

Africa Chorus: (*With drum.*) Africa, Africa, my faraway home.

Narrator One: Desta shakes her head.

Narrator Two: In her home the fire stays in a fireplace.

Narrator Three: Her own mother cooks *injera* on the stove.

America Chorus: (*With chime.*) America, America, my right here home.

Desta: My friend Christopher says Africa is hot.

Narrator One: Daddy clicks his tongue.

Daddy: Not where I lived. Sometimes at night the wind whooshed cold as old bones through the silver blue leaves of the eucalyptus trees outside my home. I slept on the floor wrapped in my *gahbi* to keep warm.

Africa Chorus: (*With drum.*) Africa, Africa, my faraway home.

Narrator Two: Desta tries to imagine sleeping on the floor and listening to silver blue eucalyptus.

Narrator Three: The tree *she* hears at night drops white blossoms on her bedroom windowsill, blossoms that look like snow.

America Chorus: (*With chime.*) America, America, my right here home.

Daddy: In Ethiopia, hippos yawn from muddy pools and crocodiles arch their backs above the river water. Shepherds pipe songs of longing in the hills, and thousands of flamingos flap in a pink cloud over the Great Rift Valley lakes. I wish you could see the pink cloud.

Africa Chorus: (*With drum.*) Africa, Africa, my faraway home.

Desta: Did you walk to school like I do?

Daddy: Yes. And I carried a stick of purple sugarcane over my shoulder. Sometimes I couldn't wait for lunch but chewed out the sweet juices as I walked to school with mud squeezing up between my toes.

Africa Chorus: (*With drum.*) Africa, Africa, my faraway home.

Desta: Wait. Why did you take your shoes off?

Daddy: (*Laugh.*) I didn't wear shoes to school.

Desta: Didn't wear shoes?

Narrator Two: Desta thinks of the shoes in her closet—the black pair, the wonderful red pair, the new pair that she can hardly wait to wear.

Desta: No shoes. That's strange.

America Chorus: (*With chime.*) America, America, my right here home.

Narrator Three: Daddy gives Desta a mule ride to bed.

Narrator One: He switches on her night-light and takes her hand in his.

Daddy: Desta, my stomach is always hungry to go home. Now my *emayay* is very sick. It is time for me to go home and be with her for a while.

Africa Chorus: (*With drum.*) Africa, Africa, my faraway home.

Narrator Two: Desta thinks of hippos and crocodiles and a cold whooshing wind.

Desta: Daddy, would you like to take my night-light with you?

Daddy: Thank you, but my mother's home has no electricity. When I was a boy, sometimes the darkness pressed against me, and I heard the hyenas' strange coughing cry close by. But my *emayay* sang to me. She showed me that sunsets

were bright borders on the cloth of the evening sky. The moon and stars burned holes in the cloth to light the night.

Africa Chorus: (*With drum.*) Africa, Africa, my faraway home.

Narrator Three: Desta looks out the window at the stars beyond the snow blossom tree.

Narrator One: She shivers to think of the hyenas' cry.

Desta: Don't leave us to go there. Your home is too wild.

Narrator Two: A sad look flies over Daddy's face, and before Desta goes to sleep, she hears him singing the haunting song with words she doesn't understand.

Desta: (*Whisper.*) Don't go. Don't go. Don't go.

America Chorus: (*With chime.*) America, America, my right here home.

Narrator Three: The next morning Desta walks to school, scuffing the toes of her shoes on the sidewalk.

Narrator One: The wind chime rings its rhymes all the way down her block.

Narrator Two: Desta wonders why Daddy has to remember things like cowbells and silver blue eucalyptus.

Desta: What if he goes away and never comes back?

America Chorus: (*With chime.*) America, America, my right here home.

Narrator One: Desta dreams all morning by the window. At lunch time, she sits with Christopher.

Desta: Did you ever hear of anyone not wearing shoes to school?

Christopher: No. That would be weird.

Narrator Two: Desta frowns. When Christopher leaves, she opens her locket and looks at the face

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of the grandmother she has never met but whose picture she wears close to her heart.

Narrator Three: Grandmother's eyes look back at her, proud and strong. But is there sadness glimmering in those eyes?

Narrator One: In the afternoon Desta looks up flamingos in the teacher's big book.

Narrator Two: As she studies their upside-down smiles, she thinks she almost hears the sound of a haunting lullaby somewhere at the edge of the classroom.

Africa Chorus: *(With drum.)* Africa, Africa, faraway home.

Narrator Three: After school Desta walks home barefoot, swinging her shoes, feeling the sun under her feet where it has soaked into the ground.

Africa Chorus: *(With drum.)* Africa, Africa, faraway home.

Narrator One: When evening comes, soft as a curtain closing, Desta climbs into her father's lap.

Desta: I think you miss your home a lot.

Daddy: Yes, I do.

Desta: *(Sigh.)* And your *emayay* misses you a lot.

Daddy: Yes. The same way I will miss you while I am gone.

Desta: Will you tell me about your home every night until you leave?

Narrator Two: Daddy holds Desta close.

Daddy: Oh yes. And when I come back—and I will come back—I will have new stories to tell.

Desta: Know what? Shoes aren't so great.

Narrator Three: Desta catches her father's smile and then closes her eyes.

Narrator One: Daddy will come back.

Narrator Two: Until he does, Desta can hold his stories in her heart.

Narrator Three: As Daddy sings to her, Desta sees a pink cloud of flamingos rippling up from a dark blue lake, wrinkling the pale cloth of the evening sky.

Africa Chorus: *(With drum.)* Africa, Africa, faraway home.

America Chorus: *(With chime.)* America, America, right here home.

Africa and America Choruses: *(With drum and chime.)* Africa, America, home.

