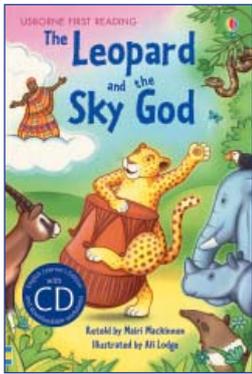


The Leopard and the Sky God • Teacher's notes



Author: traditional, retold by Mairi Mackinnon

Reader level: Lower Intermediate

Word count: 533

Lexile level: 230L

Text type: Fable/folk tale from Africa

About the story

In this tale of long ago, the animals are living in the forest, with the Sky God high up above. One day, the Sky God hears the wonderful sound of drumbeats, and steps down to find the leopard playing a splendid new drum. But Leopard won't let anyone else play his drum, not even the Sky God. The other animals offer to help, and first the python and then the elephant try to persuade Leopard; but he refuses, and carries the drum up into a tree where not even the elephant can shake him out.

Then the tortoise offers to help. Not only is she smaller than all the others, she doesn't even have a hard shell, and nobody believes she'll succeed. Tortoise tells Leopard that the Sky God has an even bigger drum, one that he can climb right inside. Leopard tries to do the same, and Tortoise quickly seals the drum and rolls it along to the Sky God. Now the queasy leopard is only too happy to let the Sky God have the drum, and Tortoise is inspired to ask for a hard shell to protect herself. The Sky God is delighted with his drum, and can still be heard playing it to this day in thunderous weather.

The story comes from the Asante or Ashanti kingdom, in what is now Ghana in West Africa. The Asante were powerful and successful traders of gold and ivory, who resisted English colonial domination until the very end of the nineteenth century. Their chiefs, known as Paramount chiefs, wore robes made of distinctive Kente cloth, with geometric patterns of golden yellow and red, blue and black. The Asante used "talking drums" which imitated the rhythms and tones of speech to communicate over distances of over 200 miles or 300km.

About the author

Mairi Mackinnon has lived in Scotland, France, Italy and Spain, and worked as a teacher, translator, musician, bookseller, nanny, cook and bus driver before settling down in London, where she has written over forty books for children. She has three children of her own, five or six violins, a beautiful old piano and a house full of other people's books.

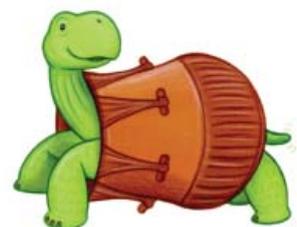
Key words

Your students might not be familiar with some of these words, which are important in the story.

p3 python	p23 scared
p4 forest	p28 shook
p7 leaned	p30 shell
p13 share	p36 climbed
p14 hunting	p37 ground
p19 growled	p39 cooking pot
p21 roared	p40 clapped [meaning "suddenly put"]
p22 slithered	p41 rolled

Key phrases

p12	to shake your head
p15	to keep your eye on [something]
p27	Leave me alone!
p34	Oh yes he does
p38	Right inside



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Before reading

If you can, bring a drum into the class, preferably an African-type drum that you can hold and hit with your hands. (If you can't find an actual drum, you may be able to find video clips online; or you could improvise with a box or container.) Stand or sit with the drum in front of the class, and ask the students to describe how you are playing it. You are particularly looking for the words "loud" and "soft", "high" (lift it off the ground) and "low" (hold it down below your knees), but any adverbs and their opposites are good.

Invite some of the students to play the drum themselves to elicit more descriptive words. Explain that the Asante people in West Africa used drums to beat out messages over long distances. Ask how they might play it to show they were angry? Or sad? That something exciting was happening?

Show the class the cover of the book. Which animal has a drum here? What do the students think a Sky God is, and what could he do? Identify the Sky God, and point out that he is dressed as an African chief.

Reading or listening

You can listen to the story on CD or read it aloud to the students, take turns to read or read together silently. Each double page spread in the book is one track on the CD, so that you can pause between tracks or repeat tracks if your students need it. The first reading is in a British English accent, and it is followed by an American English reading. The words are exactly the same. After the story, there is a short selection of key phrases that can be used for pronunciation practice.

During reading: you might like to ask some of these questions.

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| p4 Which animals can you see in the picture? | p31 What's so funny about the tortoise trying to get the drum? |
| p8 How do you think the leopard feels about his drum? | p32 What's different about the way the tortoise talks to the leopard? [e.g. "Mr. Leopard"] |
| p11 Why does the Sky God want to try the drum? Do you know anyone who says "It's mine" and refuses to share? | p35 How would you describe what the tortoise is doing? [clever, cunning, tricking the leopard] |
| p15 Why does the leopard keep his eye on the drum? | p37 Why does the leopard get inside? |
| p23 Is the leopard dangerous? What does the python think he might do? | p42 How does the leopard feel? Why has he changed his mind? |
| p25 Why do you think the leopard is in a tree? | p46 What makes a drumming sound when the weather is stormy? |

After reading

Ask the class if they liked the story. Did they feel sorry for the leopard? Do they think there really is a Sky God playing a drum? What do you call the kind of story that explains how something began, or why something is the way it is? [A myth.]

Ask them to imagine that the tortoise didn't manage to get the drum, and that the Sky God is now asking the students to get the drum for him. What techniques would they use? You could pretend to be the leopard with the drum, and ask a few volunteers to come up to you and persuade you to hand it over. Then talk about which techniques are more successful [e.g. being polite, bossy, charming or cunning].

Imagine that one of the students was successful. Ask him or her what he would now like in return, just as the tortoise asked for a shell. Invite the rest of the class to think what they might ask from the Sky God, and share their ideas.

