



Anansi Tales

Eight spider tales from Ghana, West Africa

CLASSIC STORY SHELF · THE ACTIVE HOME

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Anansi and the Sky God's Stories



Long ago, all the stories people told belonged to Nyankupon, the Sky God. But Anansi the spider wanted the stories to be his. He climbed to the sky on a thread and said, “Sky God, sell me your stories!”

“They are not for sale for nothing,” laughed the Sky God. “Bring me a jar full of live bees, a python as long as a tree, and a tiger — then the stories are yours.” Anansi bowed. “It shall be done.”

Near the bees' tree, Anansi argued with himself, loudly: “They cannot fill this jar!” “Yes, they can!”

“No, they cannot!” The bees buzzed up. “What is the quarrel?” “The Sky God says you cannot fly into my jar,” said Anansi. “Watch us!” cried the bees — and in they flew, every one. Anansi sealed the jar shut.



Next he carried a long stick to the python's home. “They say you are not as long as this stick,” he said. “Let me measure you.” The proud python stretched out straight, and Anansi tied him to the stick from end to end.

Last came the tiger. “Shut your eyes tight, friend,” said Anansi, “and I will show you wonders such as no tiger has seen.” The tiger shut his eyes — and Anansi led him by a rope, all the way to the Sky God's house.

The Sky God shook his head in wonder. “Little spider, you have done what the strongest could not. From this day, the stories shall be called Anansi stories.” And so they are, to this very day.

Lesson: Cleverness can earn what strength cannot.

Words to know: **tales** — stories that are told again and again · **python** — a very large snake

Anansi and the Pot of Wisdom



Father Anansi had all the wisdom in the world, and people came to him every day for advice. But one day the people made him angry, and he said, "I will hide my wisdom where no one can find it!"

He gathered up every bit of wisdom and packed it into one great clay pot, and sealed the pot tight. Then he carried it deep into the forest to hang it at the top of the tallest tree.

But his little son, Kweku, had followed him quietly through the trees. He watched his father try to climb with the heavy pot hanging in front of him. Up

two steps — slip! Up three steps — bump! The pot always swung into his way.



At last Kweku could not hold his tongue. “Father!” he called. “Why don't you hang the pot on your back? Then you could climb easily!”

Anansi stopped. He stared at the pot. “I thought I had ALL the wisdom in the world in this pot,” he said. “But my own son has more wisdom than me — he saw what I could not!” In his surprise and anger, he threw the pot down.

The pot smashed on a rock, and all the wisdom inside spilled out and scattered on the wind, into every village and every home. That is why, to this

day, no one person has all the wisdom — everyone has a little piece.

Lesson: Wisdom is for sharing — no one can keep it all.

Words to know: wisdom — knowing what is true and what is good · **sealed** — shut tight, so nothing can get in or out

Thunder and Anansi



There was a great famine in the land, and Anansi's family was hungry. From the shore, Anansi saw a tiny island with one tall palm tree. He pushed out in an old, battered boat — and at the seventh try, he reached it.

He climbed the palm and dropped the nuts one by one toward the boat — but every nut missed and splashed into the sea! In despair, Anansi jumped in after them. Down, down he sank — and landed, dry as a bone, in front of a pretty cottage under the sea. It was the home of old Thunder.

Thunder listened to Anansi's tale and gave him a magic cooking pot. "This pot will always give you and your family enough to eat," he said. Anansi thanked him again and again.



In the boat, Anansi whispered, "Pot, pot, do for me what you did for your master!" At once the pot filled with delicious food. Anansi ate until he could eat no more.

But at home, a greedy thought took hold of him. "If I share the pot, its magic might run out!" So he hid it in his room, and night after night he feasted alone, while his poor family grew thinner and thinner.

His family grew suspicious and followed him. When they found the pot, his wife carried it to the village to feed everyone — but the little pot worked so hard, for so many people, that it grew too hot and cracked in two. The magic was gone.

When Anansi came home, he found the empty hiding place and the broken pot. He sat down in the dust. “If only I had shared it,” he said, “there would have been enough for everyone — including me.”

Lesson: Good things are meant to be shared — greed spoils them.

Words to know: **famine** — a time when there is not enough food for everyone · **magic** — having a special, wonderful power

Tit for Tat



In a time of famine, Anansi's son Kweku discovered a hidden place in the forest where the fruit trees bent with fruit. Knowing his father's tricks, he told no one. But every day he came home with his bag full, and his father noticed.

One night, sneaky Anansi cut a tiny hole in Kweku's bag and filled it with ashes. The next morning, as Kweku walked, the ashes sprinkled out behind him in a pale trail. Anansi followed it easily, found the secret place, and drove his own son away!

But Kweku was his father's son. He carved a little wooden image, hung bells around its neck, tied a

string to its head, and hung it from a branch over the path. Then he hid in the bushes, holding the string.



Anansi came along with the first great load of fruit. The image shook its head at him. “May I give you a little?” asked Anansi, frightened. The head shook: no. “Half?” No. “Do you want it ALL?” The image nodded, hard! Anansi dropped the whole load and ran.

Day after day, wherever Anansi went, the nodding image was there first — because Kweku always heard where his father planned to go. Load after load was lost, until Anansi had nothing at all.

When the famine ended, Kweku gave a feast for the whole village and told the story, and everyone laughed — Anansi most of all, in the end. “Tit for tat,” he said. “A trickster can be tricked.”

Lesson: Greedy tricks have a way of coming back.

Words to know: **ashes** — the soft gray powder left after a fire · **image** — a small carved figure

Why Spiders Live in Corners



One year, Anansi, his wife, and his son Kweku worked very hard and grew a wonderful farm — ten times more corn and yams and beans than ever before.

But Anansi was greedy. “You two go and rest in the village for a few weeks,” he told his wife and son, “while I travel on business.” The moment they left, he built a secret hut by the farm and began feasting on the harvest, all by himself.

Soon Kweku came to weed the fields and gasped: half the harvest was gone! “Thieves!” he cried. The villagers helped him make a rubber man — a sticky

figure of dark rubber — and set it in the middle of the field to catch the thief.



That night Anansi came sneaking for more food and saw the figure. “Who are you? Speak!” No answer. Angry, Anansi slapped it — and his hand stuck. He hit it with the other hand — stuck! He kicked it — stuck! He butted it with his head — stuck fast, all over!

There he stayed until morning, when his son and the whole village found him. Poor Anansi was so ashamed to be caught stealing from his own family that he shrank smaller and smaller, turned into a spider, and scuttled up into a dark corner of the ceiling, where no one would see him.

And that is why, to this day, spiders live in the corners of ceilings — in the dark dusty places where nobody looks.

Lesson: Greed and sneaking end in shame — share the feast.

Words to know: **harvest** — the crops gathered in from the fields · **rubber** — a stretchy, sticky material that comes from trees

The Wonderful Grinding-Stone



In a time of famine, Anansi's cousin Kofi found a wonder in the forest: a stone that ground flour all by itself, beside a stream of sweet honey. Kofi ate his fill, and took home just enough for his family — no more.

Every day Kofi returned, and every day he took only what they needed. His family stayed round and healthy while the village grew thin, and Anansi burned to know the secret.

Kofi would not tell — but Anansi poked a hole in his cousin's bag and filled it with ashes, and followed

the pale trail through the forest, just as he had before. “Aha!” he cried. “Now the stone is mine!”



He lifted the great stone onto his head. As he carried it away, the stone sang a little song: “Spider, spider, put me down. The pig came and drank and went away. The antelope came and fed and went away. Spider, spider, put me down.” But Anansi would not listen.

He sold flour in village after village until his bag jingled with money. But when he reached home and tried to set the stone down — it would not move! It stuck fast to his head, heavier and heavier, until Anansi sank to his knees in the dust.

“Help me, cousin!” he cried. Kofi came, and the whole village too. “Only when you promise to share the flour with everyone,” said Kofi. “I promise! I promise!” cried Anansi. At his promise, the stone let go. And Anansi — for once — kept his word, and no one in the village went hungry.

Lesson: Take only what you need, and share the rest.

Words to know: **grind** — to crush something into powder
· **flour** — the soft powder used to make bread

Adzanumee and Her Mother



There once lived a woman who longed more than anything for a daughter. One day, digging in her yam field, she pulled up a yam so straight and fine that she sighed, “Oh, if only this yam were a daughter, how happy I would be!”

To her astonishment, the yam answered: “I will become your daughter — if you promise never to reproach me for having been a yam.” “I promise!” cried the woman. At once the yam became a beautiful girl, and she named her Adzanumee.

Adzanumee was a wonderful daughter. She made the bread, gathered the yams, and sold them at the

market, singing as she went. The woman was happier than she had ever been.



But one day Adzanumee was late coming home. Her mother waited and waited, and at last, impatient and angry, she cried, “Where can that girl be? She does not deserve her beautiful name. She is only a yam!”

A little bird in the tree heard the words, and flew to Adzanumee and sang them to her. Adzanumee walked home weeping. “Oh, Mother,” she sang softly, “you have reproached me with being a yam. You said I do not deserve my name.”

Her mother ran after her, crying, “Do not believe it! You are my daughter, my dear daughter!” But it was too late. In the middle of the yam field, Adzanumee became a yam once more — and no words could ever bring her back.

Lesson: Keep your promises — unkind words can break them.

Words to know: **yam** — a sweet root vegetable that grows in warm lands · **reproach** — to blame someone with unkind words

Morning Sunrise



In a village lived a girl so beautiful that everyone called her Morning Sunrise. Three young men wished to marry her: one was called Wise Man, one was called Wit, and one was called Thinker.

Her father could not decide between them, so he made a plan. He sent each young man the same sad message: “Morning Sunrise has died. Come and help us with her funeral.” (She was not dead at all — she was hiding in the house, listening!)

The messenger came first to Wise Man. “What?” he said. “She was not my wife. I will not pay for her funeral.” The messenger came next to Wit. “Oh dear,

no,” said Wit. “Her father did not even tell me she was ill. I shall not go.”



But when the message came to Thinker, he got ready at once. “Of course I must go and mourn for Morning Sunrise,” he said. “Had she lived, she would surely have been my wife.” And he took money with him to help her family.

When Thinker arrived, the father called out, “Morning Sunrise! Come here — this is your true husband!” For he had seen that Wise Man and Wit thought only of themselves, but Thinker's kind heart showed itself in what he did.

Morning Sunrise came out smiling, and that very day they were promised to each other. They were married soon after, and lived happily together all their lives.

Lesson: A kind heart shows itself in what it does.

Words to know: **suitor** — a man who hopes to marry someone · **mourn** — to show sadness when someone has died

About this book

Kwaku Anansi the spider is the most famous trickster in West African storytelling. These eight tales come from Ghana and were retold in English by W. H. Barker and Cecelia Sinclair in 1917; they are in the public domain. These retellings, and the illustrations, are original to The Active Home.

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