

ANANSI



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Anansi

Story Summary

Long ago, in the jungles of West Africa, lived Anansi, the trickster. Originally an ordinary human, Anansi had once played a joke on the wrong person and was transformed into a spider! Now, he and his wife, Aso, spend their time playing tricks on whomever they come across—and telling stories of all their adventures. But, stories were not always free to tell! Once, all the stories belonged to Nyame, the sky god, and he rarely had the time to share them with anyone. He kept them locked in a big box where no one could use them, see them, or hear them. How, then, is this story being told to you? Well, that is because of Anansi. Read on and find out how he did it!

Tips for **Performing** Reader's Theater

Adapted from Aaron Shepard

- Don't let your script hide your face. If you can't see the audience, your script is too high.
- Look up often when you speak. Don't just look at your script.
- Talk slowly so the audience knows what you are saying.
- Talk loudly so everyone can hear you.
- Talk with feelings. If the character is sad, let your voice be sad. If the character is surprised, let your voice be surprised.
- Stand up straight. Keep your hands and feet still.
- Remember that even when you are not talking, you are still your character.
- Narrator, be sure to give the characters enough time for their lines.
- If the audience laughs, wait for them to stop before you speak again.
- If someone in the audience talks, don't pay attention.
- If someone walks into the room, don't pay attention.
- If you make a mistake, pretend it was right.
- If you drop something, try to leave it where it is until the audience is looking somewhere else.
- If a reader forgets to read his or her part, see if you can read the part instead, make something up, or just skip over it. Don't whisper to the reader!
- If a reader falls down during the performance, pretend it didn't happen.



Anansi

Characters

Anansi (ah-NON-see)

Mmoatia (em-mo-AH-tee-uh)

Nyame (nie-AH-mee)

Osebo (o-SAY-bo)

Aso (AH-so)

Onini (o-NEE-nee)

Setting

This reader's theater takes place in the jungles of West Africa. It is hot and wet, and there is life in every direction. Bird and monkey calls can be heard from high in the canopy. There is the constant sound of water dripping from the leaves onto the jungle floor. This is just the sort of place where spiders and leopards and snakes might live ... and maybe even fairies.

Act 1

Song: Funga Alafia

- Aso:** Gather around, everyone! That's right. Sit around me in a circle. Today I will tell you the best story you have ever heard!
- Mmoatia:** If it is the best story, it must have magic in it!
- Onini:** If it is the best story, it must have secret plans and a satisfying ending!
- Osebo:** If it is the best story, it must have me in it!
- Aso:** Well, of course it has all those things. But, I think it is the best story because, without it, no other stories could ever be told. This is the story of my husband, Anansi, and the Box of Stories.
- Nyame:** Oh, I like this one! I will stay and listen as well.
- Mmoatia:** I don't recall the ending. Now, tell me what happens!
- Onini:** It all turns out all right in the end. Peace, Mmoatia, we want to listen. Here, may I sit up front, please? Pythons tend to be a little nearsighted.
- Osebo:** I am not sure I want to hear this story. It makes me look foolish.
- Nyame:** You all helped Anansi and Aso earn the right to tell my stories! You should be proud of your contribution. Now, let's settle down so that we can listen.
- Mmoatia:** I will try, but the suspense is driving me crazy!
- Aso:** In the beginning, all stories belonged to Nyame the Sky God. He kept them in a secure box. But, because he was such an important god, he did not always have the time to share them.
- Nyame:** That is absolutely true. You get right to the heart of the matter, Aso!
- Aso:** Anansi went to see Nyame and asked the great sky god for the Box of Stories. Nyame, wisest of the wise, knew that anything worth having is worth working for. So, he gave Anansi three difficult tasks to perform in order to earn the stories.

Nyame: I told Anansi that if he wanted my stories, he must first bring me Onini the Python with his powerful coils. Next, Anansi would face Osebo the Leopard with his sharp teeth and claws. Finally, I told Anansi that he must bring me Mmoatia the Fairy, who is both magical and invisible when she wants to be!

Mmoatia: I can really turn invisible? Hey, that's cool! I love stories about me because I learn some interesting things!

Onini: Mmoatia, if you listen patiently, you will find out everything you want to know. Now, be quiet so that everyone else can listen, too!

Aso: Poor Anansi. How could he hope to succeed with such difficult tasks?

Act 2

Anansi: Ah, the tasks were difficult, but I am no fool. I did not try to face them alone! The first thing I did was to return home and ask the advice of Aso, my wise and clever wife.

Aso: Don't be discouraged, Anansi. Onini the Python is strong in the body. But he is weak in the mind.

Onini: Hey, I resent that! Actually, given how things turn out, I guess I can't really quibble. Please continue.

Aso: Anansi harvested a palm frond. Then he went to a place where the snake was likely to be found. He paced back and forth and began shouting as if he were arguing with someone.

Anansi: I still say that this palm frond couldn't possibly be bigger than such a great python!

Onini: Who is that? Anansi, is that you? It is always hard to see a creature so small. What is the matter? Why are you shouting, and why are you holding that broom?

Anansi: It is not a broom, Onini. It is a palm frond. Aso and I had an argument about how long you are. She says that because you are always curled up, you are not really that long at all. But, I stuck up for you and said that the great Onini is longer than the longest palm frond! That woman can be so stubborn, though!

Onini: Pah, I am longer than that little stick! Here, let me prove it to you. If you just lay the frond on the ground, I will lie alongside it and we can compare our measurements.

Anansi: Hmm, it is actually a little longer, but I think that is because we can't straighten out your body. Maybe if I tied you to it, we could stretch you to fit.

Onini: I am not certain that I like the sound of that. Being tied to a palm frond would leave me a little vulnerable.

Anansi: Well, if you have a better idea, of course we will go with that. But, you don't want Aso to be right, do you? Don't you trust me, Onini?

Onini: Hmm, well, I suppose a little spider like you can't do any harm, and I certainly don't want Aso to be right! Fine, use your silk to help straighten me out. There, see, I am longer than the ... hey!

Aso: So, Anansi tied Onini to the palm frond and took the now harmless but furious snake to Nyame.

Nyame: Don't look so smug, Anansi. You have completed the first task, but the others will not prove so easy! Next, you must capture Osebo the Leopard, with his razor-sharp teeth and scythe-like claws.

Osebo: An accurate description as far as it goes, but you forgot to mention my graceful speed and dashing good looks.

Poem: How to Know the Wild Animals

Act 3

Anansi: Feeling daunted, I returned home to consult Aso.

Aso: Anansi, you must remember, Osebo is dangerous if he gets close to you. But, if you keep him at a distance, his teeth and claws will be of no use to him! You must start by digging a hole ...

Mmoatia: You non-fairy creatures talk so slowly and describe everything so carefully. Just tell me what happened next!

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