

### Fiction Excerpt 3: All Stories Are Anansi's (A Tale from West Africa)

**Note to Teacher:** Anansi (/ah\*nahn\*see/) the Spider is a popular figure in the folklore of parts of West Africa. Anansi is a “trickster” figure—clever, cunning, sometimes mischievous—who uses his wits to make up for what he lacks in size and strength. This story tells how Anansi became the “owner” of all stories.

Long ago, there were no stories on Earth. In those days all stories belonged to the sky god, Nyame, who kept them in a box beneath his throne.

Because they had no stories to share, the people of Earth did not have much to do. They just sat around their campfires and whistled. Anansi the spider could see that the people were restless and bored. He decided he would bring them something that would help them pass the time.

Anansi stretched his eight legs and wove a wonderful web that reached all the way to the sky. He climbed up the web until he arrived at the throne of the sky god, Nyame, the keeper of all stories.

“Nyame,” Anansi said, “great, wise god of the sky—I would like to take the stories to the people who live on Earth. Will you let me have the great box where you keep the stories?”

“I will give you the stories,” said Nyame, in a booming voice. “But the price is high. You must bring me three things: Onini (/oh\*nee\*nee/), the great python who can swallow a goat; Osebo (/oh\*say\*boe/), the mighty leopard whose teeth are as sharp as spears; and Mmoboro (/mmoh\*boh\*roh/), the hornet whose sting burns like a needle of fire.”

“I will pay the price,” said Anansi.

Anansi made his way back down the web to Earth. He went to speak with his wife, Aso. Together, they came up with a plan to capture Onini, the great python who could swallow a goat.

The next morning Anansi walked into the forest, waving a big branch. As he walked, he spoke to himself. “She’s wrong,” he said, pretending to be very upset. “I know she is. He is much, much longer than this branch.”

As Anansi drew near the watering hole, a large snake rose up. It was Onini, the great python who could swallow a goat.

“What are you muttering about, Anansi?” asked Onini. “You are disturbing my nap.”

“I have been quarreling with my wife,” said Anansi. “She says that you are shorter than this branch. But I say you are longer. She will not listen to me, and I do not see how I can prove to her that I am right.”

“That is easy,” said Onini. “Lay your branch on the ground and I will lie next to it. Then you shall see that I am longer.”

The great snake slithered over and lay next to Anansi’s branch.

“It looks like you may be longer,” said Anansi. “But I can’t tell for sure because you are not quite straightened out. Could I straighten you out a bit?”

“Certainly,” said Onini.

"Let me fasten your tail at this end," said Anansi as he worked. "That way I can really straighten you out. And let me fasten you here, by your head, as well."

Before the python realized what Anansi was up to, Anansi had spun a web around Onini and tied him to the branch.

"Now you are caught!" said Anansi.

With that, Anansi carried Onini the python to Nyame.

"That is one thing," said Nyame. "Two things remain."

Anansi went back to Earth and began to think about how he might catch Osebo, the mighty leopard with teeth as sharp as spears. Anansi dug a pit on the path Osebo used to get to the watering hole. He lay branches across the pit and covered the branches with sticks, leaves, and dirt. When Anansi was satisfied that the hole was well hidden, he scurried home and went to sleep.

When Osebo came out to hunt during the night, he fell right into Anansi's trap. Anansi found him down in the pit the next morning.

"Osebo," said Anansi, "what are you doing down in that pit?"

"You fool!" said Osebo. "Can't you see that I have fallen into a trap? You must help me get out."

"I will see what I can do," said Anansi.

Anansi found a large willow tree and bent the top of the tree over the pit. He spun two silky cords and used them to hold the tree down. Then he spun another silky cord. He attached one end of this third cord to the top of the tree and let the other end dangle down into the pit.

"Tie this cord to your tail," said Anansi. "Then I will lift you up."

Osebo tied the cord to his tail.

Then Anansi cut the two cords that were holding the tree down. The tree sprang back to its original position, carrying Osebo with it. Osebo dangled from the tree.

"Now you are caught!" said Anansi.

Anansi wove a web around Osebo the leopard and carried him to Nyame.

The sky god was impressed. "That is two things," he said. "Only one thing remains."

Anansi went back to Earth to catch Mmoboro, the hornet whose sting burned like a needle of fire. He cut a gourd from a vine and hollowed out the inside. Then he filled the gourd with water and went to the nest where Mmoboro the hornet made his home.

Anansi poured some of the water in the gourd over his own head. Then he dumped the rest of the water on the hornet's nest. Mmoboro the hornet came out, buzzing angrily. He saw Anansi standing nearby, holding a leaf over his head.

"Oh, my!" said Anansi. "The rainy season seems to have come early this year, and it looks like you have no shelter from the rain. Would you like to take shelter in my gourd until the rain goes away?"

"Thank, you, Anansi," said Mmoboro the hornet, as he flew into the gourd.

"You're welcome!" said Anansi, as he closed up the opening in the gourd with a leaf and wove a web to hold the leaf in place.

"Now you are caught!" said Anansi.

Anansi carried Mmoboro the hornet to Nyame.

Nyame was very impressed. "That is the last thing!" he proclaimed. "You have succeeded, Anansi, where many before you have failed. You have paid the price."

Then Nyame called out, in a voice like thunder: "Listen to me! Anansi has paid the price for the stories of the sky god, and I do hereby give the stories to him. From this day forward, all of the stories belong to Anansi. Whenever someone tells one of these stories, he or she must acknowledge that it is Anansi's tale."

Anansi took the box of stories back to Earth and shared them with the people. The people were grateful for the stories and told them to their children and to their children's children, who told them to their children, and so on. Even to this day, these stories are known as spider stories.