

Tjenga and the eland man

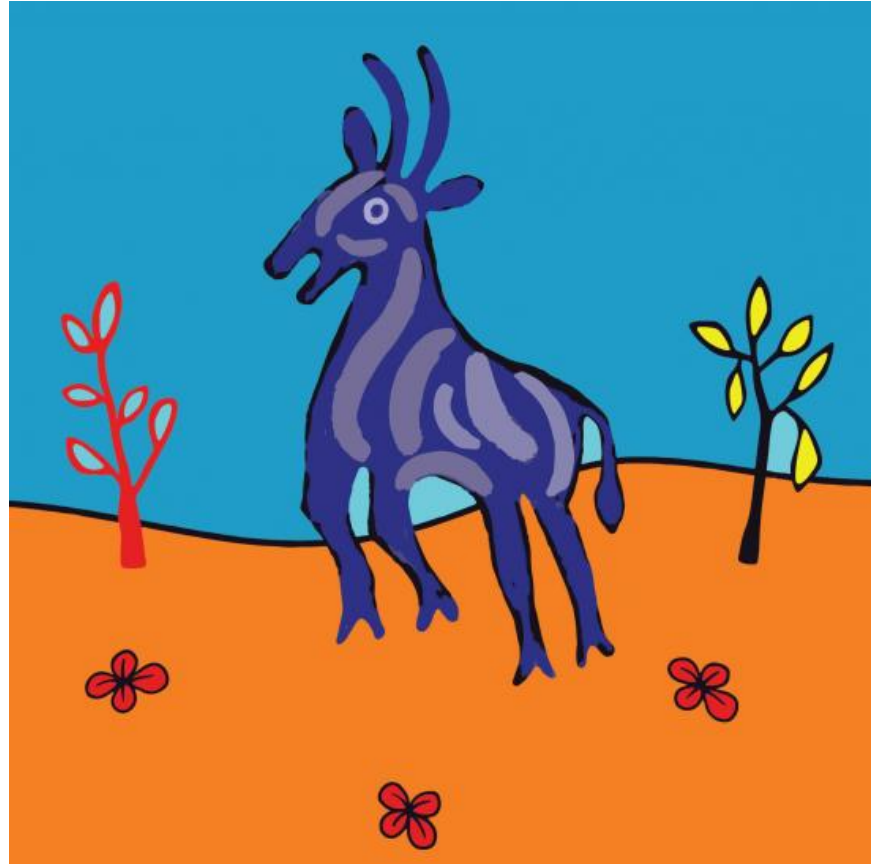
Traditional San story
English





This story is about two friends, Tjenga and Ngu. They understood each other, played together, hunted together and shared their food. Tjenga left his family and went to stay with Ngu's family.

Early one morning Tjenga left to hunt in the bush. After searching for some time, the young hunter found the footprint of an antelope on the ground. It belonged to an eland, the most beautiful of all antelopes.



Quietly, he followed the eland's footprints. Careful not to step on any dry, noisy grass, he walked, crawled and crept all day long until he finally found the eland. It was grazing on a hill.



Quietly, Tjenga set his arrow in the bow and pulled until the string was tight and ready. He aimed at the eland's heart.

Tjenga released the poison arrow and it flew through the air. The arrow hit the eland's heart.

Tjenga was afraid because he had shot the beautiful eland. He lay down silently in the bush, resting and waiting for the poison arrow to do its work. The sky and the air around Tjenga shivered from the midday heat while the hunter waited for the eland to die.

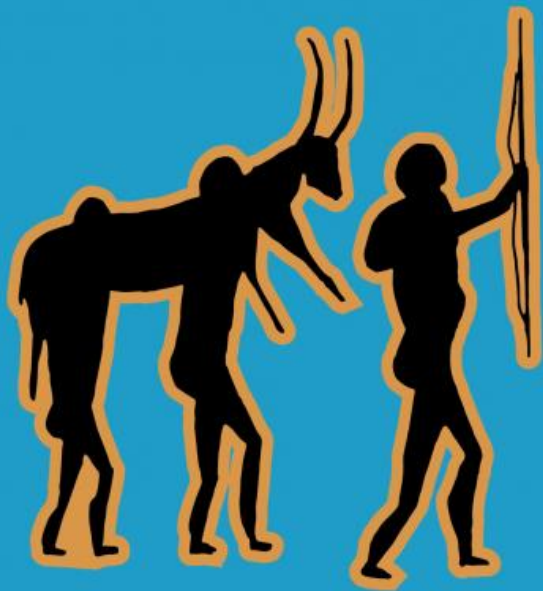


Suddenly, the eland turned into a person. Tjenga's heart was even more afraid, for he did not mean to kill a person. What would the people say if they found that he had killed a person?

Tjenga walked to his friend Ngu, to tell him what had happened. When he found his friend and told him the news, he said, "I am in big trouble. I hunted an eland and after I shot it, it became a person. Please, you must help me now so that I can bury it before the people see what I have done."

Ngu said, "Oh no! You are not my own family. I cannot make your problem my problem!"

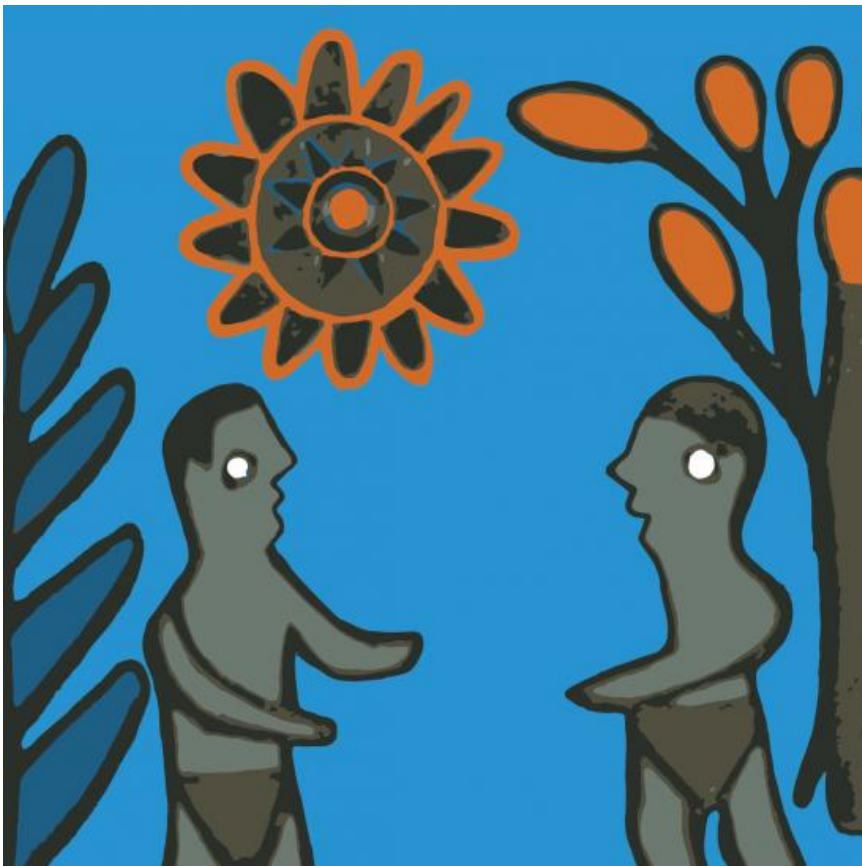
With a sore heart, the young hunter returned to his own people. Tjenga told them his story. Without saying much, his father said, "Come, let us go and have a look."



When the family got to the hunting ground where Tjenga had shot the eland, they did not find a dead person there. The father said, "Did you lie to me?"

"No," said the boy, "I told you about my hunt and the eland man just as I saw it."

His mother said, "You did not kill a person. This is meat, it is an animal and we must eat it because we are hungry. We need its skin to make clothes. That is why you shot the eland. From now on you must understand that people are people and animals are animals."



Tjenga's family made more fire. They danced all night and celebrated the food that the hunter had brought home.

Tjenga's father said to him, "Now you have learnt a great lesson. You cannot leave your own people and adopt another. When you are in serious trouble, it is your own people who will help you and not your friends."

Story notes

In 1998 !Xun storyteller Manuel Maseka (1954–2006) told this traditional oral story to Kapilolo Mahongo, who retold it in Afrikaans to Marlene Winberg, who retold it in English. Manuel Maseka explained that it was a tale about a young hunter, Tjenga's remorse at killing the eland. Tjenga's elders explain to the young hunter that the beautiful antelope is not a human being, that animals and people are different. As with many San stories, this one hints at the primeval time before humans and animals were separated from each other. It also teaches about the difference between family and friends.

The illustrations in this story are from story boards by Marlene Winberg, interpreted digitally by Satsiri Winberg through manipulations of the Manyeka Art Collection of paintings made by San artists /Thaalu Rumao, /Tuoi Samcuia and Joao Wenne Dikuango, who have all passed away since.

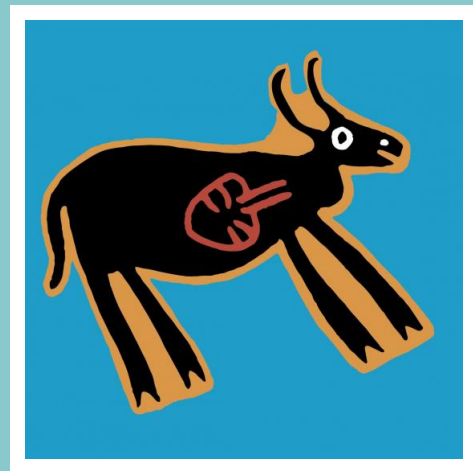
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Writer: Traditional San story

Illustration: Manyeka Arts Trust

Manuel Maseka, Kapilolo Mahongo and Marlene Winberg

Language: English



The Manyeka Arts Trust celebrates the traditions of southern African San storytellers.
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