

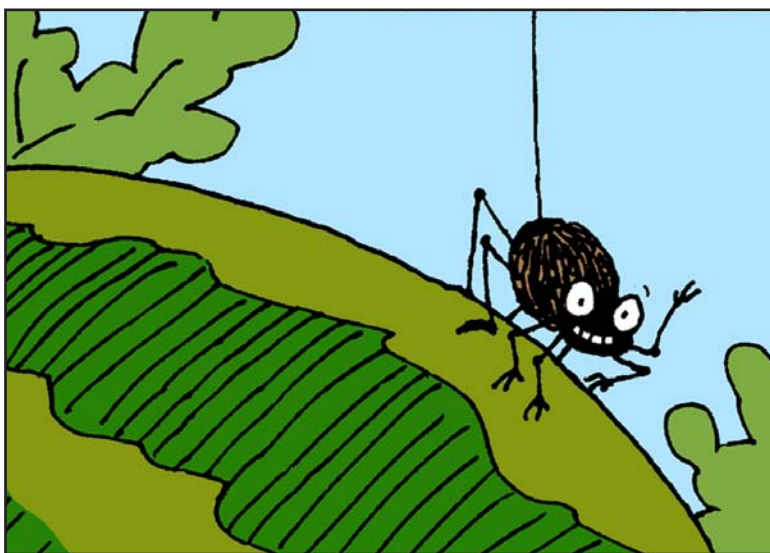
LEVELED BOOK • 0

Anansi and the Talking Watermelon



Retold by Kitty Higgins
Illustrated by Patrick Girouard

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Early one morning, Anansi the spider awoke to the sound of Possum hoeing his watermelon patch. Anansi peered down from the peach tree where he lived to watch Possum's slow progress. Anansi salivated at the thought of a meal of watermelon, his favorite juicy, red fruit.

When Possum set his hoe aside at midday to take a nap, Anansi snuck down his tree for a snack.



While Possum snored, Anansi shimmied down his fine, silk web to the ripest watermelon in the garden. He picked up a small, sharp stone to chip away the melon's rind. He made a hole that he could just squeeze into. He gorged himself as the juices slid down his eight spider legs.

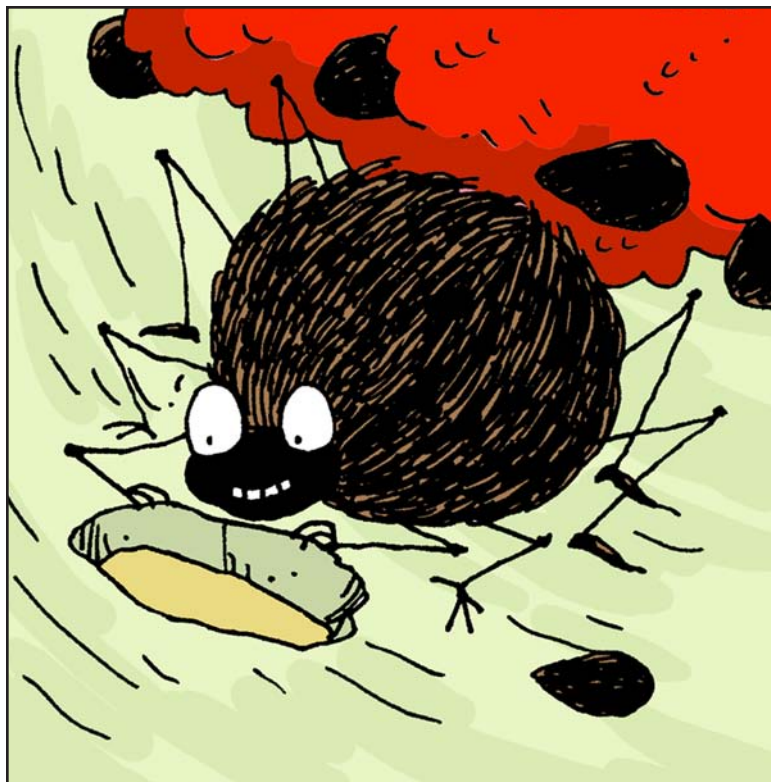
Just when Anansi about had his fill,
he heard Possum stir.

“Possum will punish me if I am
discovered,” Anansi said to himself.

He waddled to the hole in the rind and
one leg at a time he tried to pull himself
out. He was so slippery he couldn’t
keep his footing. He braced himself
against the edge of the hole, but he
was so full of fruit that he no longer fit!

“Oh no! I am stuck!” he cried. “Now
I have to wait until I shrink back to
normal size.”





Anansi laid his head upon a watermelon seed in an attempt to sleep. He tossed and turned restlessly. "This is so boring. What should I do while I wait?"

As he pondered his next plot, he heard Possum at the far end of the row.

"I know! I will trick Possum into thinking that his melon talks!"

Possum came scratching with his hoe,
and as he neared Anansi's melon he
heard a sound, quiet as a mouse.

"Who is that?" he asked.

"It is I, the watermelon!" Anansi now
yelled.

"How absurd, watermelons can't talk!"
Possum said as he cradled the melon
to his ear.

"Possum, you have never been a good
listener. Watermelons have been
talking since before you were born!"



Possum could not believe his ears and cried, "Eureka! I must show King Bear the discovery I have made."

Off he went, carrying the watermelon with Anansi bouncing to and fro inside. He met Raccoon rolling in the dust beside the road.



"What's the hurry, Possum?" Raccoon asked.

"I am bringing King Bear a talking watermelon!" Possum answered, very proud of himself.



“Now I have heard everything!” Raccoon laughed.

“You haven’t heard me talk!” Anansi replied from inside the melon to Raccoon’s smart remark.

“Huh? What? Who said that?” asked Raccoon.

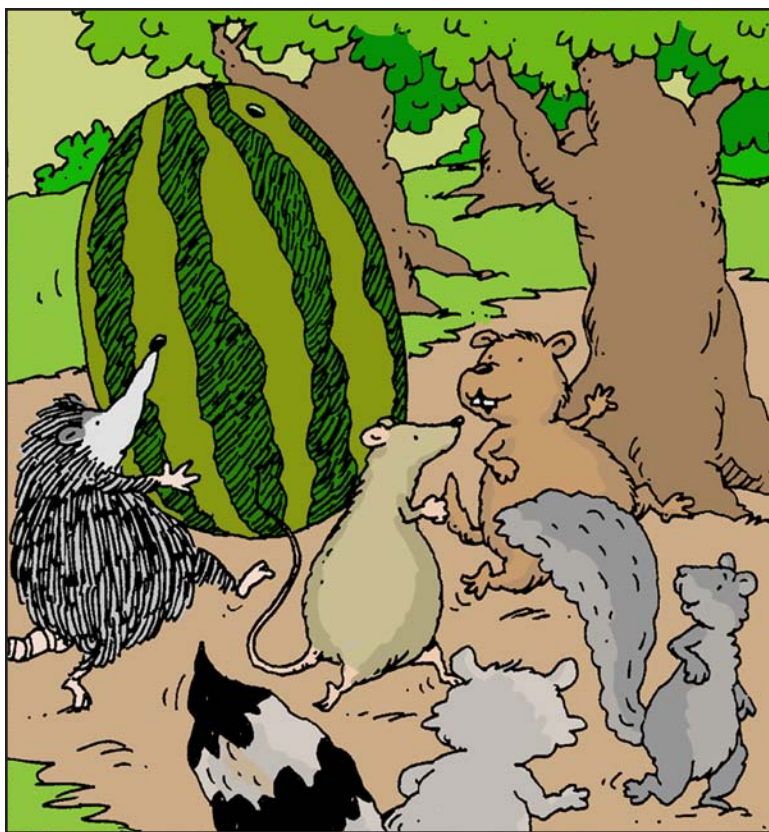


"I did!" said Anansi, really enjoying his trick. "You are silly, Raccoon, for not realizing more than animals have speech. Watermelons are more intelligent than you."

"Do you believe me now?" asked Possum.

"Yes, I do," Raccoon said. "This smart-aleck watermelon is something the king would want to see."

Along the path to King Bear's grand den, Possum and Raccoon came upon Gopher, Rat, and Squirrel. They each, in turn, laughed and pointed fingers—until they heard the melon's strange little voice themselves. Before long they all wanted to hear what the king would say about the oddity, so off they went.





When they arrived, the king, a very grizzly-looking bear, had just woken from his afternoon slumber and was a bit grumpy.

“What is it?” he growled as the animals bowed before him.

Possum placed the watermelon on a tree stump before King Bear.

“What am I to do with this?” the king asked, continuing before anyone had a chance to answer. “I do not need any watermelons; I have acres of my own.”

“This one talks!” they chimed in unison.

King Bear refused to believe he had subjects from a garden patch. He demanded that the melon pay respects to him if the animals spoke the truth.

The watermelon just sat there, mum for the first time all day.

“What kind of joke is this?” the king grumbled.

The melon remained silent.



"I would be a fool to waste more time waiting to see your treacherous trickery," he snarled at the frightened animals.

"You would be a fool not to wait," piped up Anansi from inside the melon. "Only a fool thinks watermelons can't talk!"

"Fool? Fool!" King Bear roared. "How dare you call the king foul names!"

And with that, King Bear picked up the melon in his paws and chucked it as hard and as far as he could.





The melon flew through the air and landed with a crack and a thud, splitting wide open. Anansi was free! He skittered as fast as he could back to the peach tree where his morning started.

“What a great day!” Anansi rejoiced. “All of this fun has made me hungry again.”

He began nibbling at a large, ripe peach above Possum’s patch.

Possum returned later that day with a sour look on his face. He picked up his hoe and started digging furiously.

"Melons!" he cried. "Next year I will grow something else in this patch; you watermelons are nothing but trouble."

"Perhaps you should grow more peaches!" Anansi said with a mouth full of fuzzy fruit. "The king is sure to listen to a peach!"



Anansi "the Spider" stories are based on the oral tradition of West Africa. They feature a clever spider who outwits bigger animals to get out of trouble or just to have fun. Folktales once told around campfires in countries such as Ghana now teach children worldwide about life.

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