CHILDREN'S TALES FROM AROUND THE WORLD
Dear Reader

It is my pleasure to be able to welcome you to our pages. I hope that you find them full of interesting characters and exciting adventures. That you laugh and learn valuable lessons. That your imagination takes you to countries and continents near and far.

This book is for you, our precious Little Explorers, and is inspired by your endless creativity and curiosity.

Thank you. Travel well.

Reem
CHILDREN'S TALES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Stories brighten our world. They teach us about our planet and those who inhabit it. Through the sharing of stories, we can discover some of the world's greatest treasures and pleasures. The tales in this book, and their illustrators, come from all over the globe, just like our readers!
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Let us tell you about the magical powers of the Sosso Bala, how the mouse got his year, why fairies turned a man into a mountain, and how Singapore became known as the Lion City.

And while we’re at it, shall we tell you about the rise of the robots? Or airplanes and hot air balloons? Let’s go!

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Once upon a time, a young milkman named Santaka was returning home to his charming village of Creve Coeur, on the beautiful island of Mauritius. Spotting a forest far away, he decided to take the short way home through the lush greenery. On his trek, he felt one, two, three raindrops, which suddenly turned into heavy rain. Utterly drenched by the cold, pelting rain, he desperately sought shelter, and eventually found refuge under a canopy of trees. Tired from his journey and the rain, he decided to rest his eyes for a while.
His dreams were filled with heavenly sounds of music, and magical voices from what only could have come from angels. His eyes fluttered open and he was pleasantly surprised that the angelic sounds weren’t the things of his dreams. Enchanted, he followed the lovely voices into a clearing in the forest where he saw a group of magical fairies singing and dancing. One particular fairy took notice of the curious onlooker.
“And who might you be?” she asked.

Under the inquisitive gazes of the fairies, Santaka nervously introduced himself.

“I didn’t mean to intrude. I was hiding from the rain, and your music was just as clear and beautiful as the skies after the heavy rainfall.”

“Dear Santaka, it takes a special person of pure heart to be able to see and hear us in the far clearings of this vast forest.”

Santaka couldn’t believe what he was seeing and hearing with his own eyes and ears.

“Santaka, as the Fairy Queen, I must warn you that if you tell any other human being about your rare sighting and our existence, a curse will befall on you and turn you into stone for eternity.”

He promised he wouldn’t tell a single soul — but this promise wasn’t one he kept for long.
Overwhelmed by his encounter with these enchanting creatures and their melodies, he ran back to his village as fast as his legs could carry him, telling every friend and loved one about the mystical creatures in the forest.
The next day, he came back to that very clearing with the hopes of seeing the dancing and singing fairies again. However, having discovered that Santaka broke their trust and revealed their treasured secret, the fairies were angry.

Upon his return to the clearing, the fairies kept their end of their promise. They had placed an irreversible curse on him, turning his body into stone.
Made of basalt stone, Santaka’s figure now graces the summit of the iconic Pieter Both mountain, and is a reminder to the people of Mauritius that we must always keep our promises.
Did you know?

This story originated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, created by Indian immigrants and their descendants who lived close to Pieter Both, to explain the human-like rock formation on the summit of the mountain.

Pieter Both is 820 metres tall and is the second highest mountain in Mauritius. It is situated in the centre of the island on the Moka mountain range.

The mountain was named after Pieter Both, the first Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies, who was shipwrecked in Mauritius.

Another important part of Mauritian culture and folklore is Sega, a vibrant music that is almost always sung in Creole. Since its origin as the song and dance of slaves, Sega has grown to reflect the nation’s joyful way of life.
The History of Inventions — The Airplane

(A Tale of the Yellow Woodpecker Ranch)

Based on the works of Monteiro Lobato

Illustrated by Darah Eduarda de Paula, Gael Givisiez Ribeiro, Agatha
Emanuели Nascimento Silva, Fernanda Lana Padilla Costa, Vinicius
Medeiros dos Santos and Roberta Oliveira Garcia Queiroz

In a tiny white cottage at the Yellow Woodpecker Ranch lives an elderly woman called Grandma Benta. Those who pass by the road and see her sitting on her porch might think, “My, it must be sad to live alone in this place...”

But make no mistake, Grandma Benta is the happiest of grandmas, for she lives in the company of the loveliest of granddaughters, Lucia, the girl with the upturned nose, or simply Narizinho, as everyone calls her.
Lucia and her grandmother share their roof with Aunt Nastacia, who is the best cook this and other worlds have ever seen and who had nursed Lucia as a baby. Emilia, a clumsy rag doll hand sewn by aunt Nastacia herself, is also part of the family. Narizinho neither eats nor sleeps without having Emilia by her side.
Every afternoon, Narizinho takes Emilia for a stroll along the creek running through the back of the orchard. They sit idly by the water on the roots of an old Ingá tree and feed breadcrumbs to the fish.

But this creek is no ordinary creek. It is the gateway to the Clear Water Kingdom, home to Fish Charming and his royal court of talking underwater creatures: Major Frog, Doctor Snail, Seamstress Spider and other fantastical beings.

It was in this underwater kingdom that Emilia the rag doll was bestowed the gift of speech by taking one of Doctor Snail’s magical ‘talking pills’. One day back at the cottage, Emilia astonished Grandma Benta and Aunt Nastacia when she started talking non-stop about her adventures. However, it wasn’t long before her nonsensical and whimsical remarks warmed their hearts.
Peter lives in the big city and spends every holiday at the Yellow Woodpecker Ranch, where he joins his cousin Narizinho and Emilia on great adventures in the Clear Water Kingdom, in Grammarland and in the Land of Mathematics.

At the Yellow Woodpecker Ranch kids must only worry about two things: **brincar e aprender**, (playing and learning in Portuguese).

Blessed with an endless library with hundreds of books, Grandma Benta would often get the newest releases from a bookseller in the big city.

At seven o’clock on the dot, we find Grandma Benta telling Narizinho, Peter and Emilia a story based on a new book by Hendrik Van Loon.

“This is not a book for children,” she says, “but I will read it in a way that will make you understand. Never feel afraid to ask me any questions anytime, if something isn’t clear to you.”
“Mr. Van Loon describes how creatures called human beings, who were once very hairy and walked on all fours, came to develop their brains to measure how far the stars were from each other, and how big atoms were.”

“And how did they do that?” asks Peter.

“Inventions,” explains Grandma Benta. “Human beings are great inventors of things, and the history of humanity on Earth is charted by these inventions, and the impact they have had on human lives. Let’s look at Chapter One.”

“Only when we have popcorn, Grandma,” cries Narizinho while sniffing the air.

From the kitchen comes the delicious smell of popping kernels. Nighttime popcorn is always plentiful at Grandma Benta’s ranch.
After the snacking feast, Grandma Benta resumes. “All other animals invent for two reasons: alimentação e morada (food and shelter). When they have both, their inventive spirit falls asleep. Not humans. Their inventions make them hungrier for more inventions. They will never stop. Humans move at an unimaginable speed, it is impossible to tell what we will become in a few thousand years.”

“Well... even talking dolls have been invented,” mumbles Narizinho while gazing down at Emilia.

“Human inventions will always seek to make the limbs more powerful, as well as our sight, hearing, taste, and resistance of our skin,” explains Grandma Benta.
“The feet have always carried the greatest burden... travel, migration to remote lands. The feet that toiled were rescued by the hairy four-legged creature’s brain. The brain brought horses, the sled and the wheel to let the feet finally rest.

“The wheel started rough, raw, heavy — ugly, really — but it started nonetheless,” continues Grandma Benta. “What starts, doesn’t stop. It continues to perfect itself. The wheel multiplied the power of the feet. Without it, we wouldn’t have cars, trains or airplanes.”
“What has the plane got to do with the wheel?” asks Peter.

“Everything. With each invention comes countless smaller ones, like branches from a tree,” Grandma Benta explains. A single train has countless tiny inventions, in the car it pulls and the tracks it runs on. The same goes for ships. As rulers of land and sea, human beings hadn’t yet taken to the skies. So they had to conquer the air too.
The skies once seemed unreachable, except to eagles. ‘If eagles can fly, why shouldn’t we fly as well, as we are smarter than eagles?’ they thought. With that, they made a hot air balloon. With it, they concluded that warm air was lighter than cold air.

“What about a device that was heavier than air? Birds are heavier than air and they can fly. This ‘crazy’ idea was infectious among the people.

“The ‘official wise men’ laughed and doubted the idea. Governments really paid attention to the opinions of such ‘wisemen’, and those with the ‘crazy’ ideas about human flight never had the slightest support. No longer were they considered ‘crazy’. They were simply ‘lunatics’.

“Yet those lunatics believed in their ideas. They insisted, experimented and persisted. They would not give in to the ‘wisemen’.
“Then came a Brazilian man named Alberto Santos Dumont. He took a balloon, filled it with a gas that was lighter than air, placed a gasoline engine propeller on one end, and took flight. He actually flew. He flew around the Eiffel Tower in Paris, and landed back safely. It was stunning. And not happy with that Santos Dumont later flew in his heavier-than-air planes named ‘Demoiselle’ and ‘14-Bis’.

“Human beings are amazing, my children. They can measure the distance between the stars and weigh them. They can discover millions and millions of Milky Ways. They can make what is invisible visible. They can speak from one continent to another. They can fly at amazing speeds and create wonder after wonder.”
"Well," said Emilia. "I will invent something much better than a wheel or a plane... A-ha! An invention-making machine! You put the idea inside, turn on the switch and that's it – you have any invention you want."
Grandma Benta, Narizinho and Peter giggled, each realising that their laughter could make them one of the ‘wisemen’. They vowed that they would never underestimate their own ideas, let alone those of others. Who knows where they may lead...
Did you know?

This story is an adaptation of several children's stories written by Jose Bento Monteiro Lobato, a famous Brazilian author who lived from 1882 to 1948.


The stories at the Yellow Woodpecker Ranch (Sitio do Picapau Amarelo) have entertained generations of children, their parents and grandparents and are the most well-known of Monteiro Lobato’s children’s books.

National Children’s Book Day is celebrated in Brazil on Monteiro Lobato's birthday, 18 April.

This English language adaptation has been specially produced by the Brazil Pavilion’s team for this project.

Illustrated by Fernanda Lana Padilha Costa
A long time ago, there was an inventor named Rossum who truly believed in the wonders and magic of science and engineering. He never doubted, not for a single second, that technology could heal human beings of all suffering.

Night after night, his dreams would feature a machine, its eyes a pair of bright blinking yellow lights, its aluminum body like a knight’s armour.

Rossum would wake every morning, with the previous night’s dream as vivid and clear as the light of day.
He desperately wanted to create an autonomous machine, with those very bright, blinking yellow lights that would stare at him in his night visions.

Every night in his laboratory, Rossum furiously sketched model after model, welded precious metals, tirelessly rearranged nuts and bolts, and tried gears of all shapes and sizes to make his dream a reality.

Early one morning, as the first rays of sunshine broke through the clouds, Rossum found his machine’s eyes blinking right back at him. Success.

This machine surpassed all human capabilities, and was able to fulfill any human command that was given to it. Filled with glee and awe, Rossum called his machine robota, which, in Czech, means ‘labour’. From that, the word ‘robot’ came to be.

Robota was the first of hundreds of robots that Rossum built over the years. Rossum was clever, however, to ensure that the robots did not know how to repair themselves — only humans could do that.
Over the years, Rossum grew old and weary, and knew that he needed to find someone to continue his work. He found his successor in a spirited, ambitious young man named Jakub. Rossum’s beloved daughter Helena had stumbled upon Jakub as he was ferociously tinkering with his latest machine.

When Jakub laid eyes on Helena, he knew they would spend the rest of their lives together. They were wed in front of their families of humans and robots, not too long before Rossum passed away. Together, Helena and Jakub continued Rossum’s legacy.

One day, years later, as Helena and Jakub were fixing one of their robots, Helena asked her husband if he believed that robots had souls.

“Why Helena, why would you ask such a thing?”
“Well, if robots can do what humans can do, couldn’t they feel what humans feel too?”
“That’s impossible, my dear wife. These robots are simply automated machines, and nothing more.”

As Helena tried to convince her husband that robots were capable of human emotions, thoughts and feelings, their robots multiplied by themselves at the speed of light and took over the work of human beings. As humans were replaced by robots, they grew increasingly lazy.

Their lack of motivation to work made them overly smug and arrogant towards their fellow human beings. Increased arrogance and tension between humans soon led to wars, which robots were sent to fight.

The robots soon realised that there was no use in fighting each other at the request of humans, and instead turned against the humans and declared war on humanity itself.

Jakub and Helena watched in horror as the robots claimed victory over humans and began to take over the world.

“I knew these robots were smart, but I didn’t think they were smart enough to think on their own,” Jakub said in astonishment.

“That may be, but there’s one thing they haven’t figured out yet.”

“What?”

“How to fix themselves, when broken.”
“That’s it, Helena! We need to find the manufacturing secrets to take these robots apart, piece by piece!”

“But Jakub, I burned them long ago, for fear that they may come into the robots’ hands.”

Helena and Jakub decided to reach out to an elder scientist named Alquin, who agreed to discover the manufacturing secrets by disassembling the robots.

The couple pretended to work in their lab to distract the robots, as they knew they were the only ones the robots wouldn’t turn against. In the meantime, Alquin slowly and quietly began to dismantle the machines.
They saw a pair of robots approaching and Helena swore that she could see fear in their blinking eyes.

“My name is Radius, and this is Helena,” an automated voice sounded.

“I beg you not to kill us. I can’t imagine a world without Helena,” Radius continued.

Alquist, to his huge surprise, realised that the two robots were in love with each other.

Helena asked Alquist not to dismantle Radius and her namesake. Their feelings of love and empathy towards humans and each other gave them souls and made them considerably more human.

From that moment on, Helena and Jakub never once underestimated the emotional intelligence and human capability of their inventions. They also made sure that they never lost their own humanity in the midst of their scientific ambitions and achievements.
Did you know?

The word ‘robot’ was first introduced to the world in 1921 by a Czech writer named Karel Čapek. This story is based on his play, titled Rossum’s Universal Robots (R.U.R.). The robots described in Čapek’s play are not robots in the traditional sense of automation. They are not represented as mechanical devices, but rather as artificial biological organisms that may be confused for humans.

The Unimate was the world’s first commercial, digital and programmable robot. It was patented in 1954 by American inventor George Devol and built in 1961.

Other inventions from the Czech Republic include the arc lamp and soft contact lenses. The automatic electric arc lamp debuted in 1881 at the International Exposition of Electricity in Paris, while soft hydrogel contact lenses were introduced in 1959.

The images for this story were painted by student Klára Vodenková, who hopes to pursue art in university.
800 years ago, in a land located today in Upper Guinea, there once was a sorcerer named Soumaoro Kanté, who ruled as absolute King over the Sosso, a group of the Mandé people.

Soumaoro Kanté made a deal with Jinna Maghan, the King of the Jinns, who are supernatural spirits. Jinna Maghan fulfilled his end of the deal and gave Soumaoro the jinns’ most sacred treasure: the Sosso Bala.
This wooden instrument, a xylophone, wielded supernatural powers beyond imagination.

One of these powers included the ability to see the future.
The sorcerer would use his new knowledge from the magical instrument to his advantage in battle to win wars. Each victory brought greater arrogance to the King, and each moment with the magical xylophone made him crueler and more selfish, as the King refused to share the magical instrument’s powers with another being.

One day a jeli, a traditional singer, musician and oral historian, by the name of Balafaseke Kouyaté came to King Soumaoro’s palace. Balafaseke was in the service of Sundiata Keita, a King from another group of the Mandé people.

Balafaseke sneaked into Soumaoro’s palace and found himself immediately drawn to the Sosso Bala and started to play the beautiful instrument.
King Soumaoro, sensing that his Sosso Bala had been touched, ran to check. “Who goes there?” he barked, as he entered his chambers and saw Balafaseke playing with the precious instrument.

Thinking quickly, Balafaseke quickly started singing the King’s praises. With each verse, the King’s angry eyes grew warmer and softer.

Pleased by Balafaseke’s praise, the King spared his life and kept him in his service. From then on, Balafaseke was the only person allowed to enjoy the powers of the sacred Sosso Bala, in exchange for continuing to sing the praises of the King's accomplishments.
What Soumaoro Kanté didn’t know was that since Balafaseke started using the Sosso Bala he too was granted supernatural powers by the xylophone.

The jeli used his new powers to help his true master, Sundiata Keita, defeat King Soumaoro Kanté with his own army.

He then created the great Mali Empire and unified all the Mandé groups of people.

Sundiata Keita claimed the Sosso Bala as a war trophy and Balafaseke Kouyaté continued to serve him as his personal jeli. From then on, he appointed the Kouyaté family as the sole guardians of the Sosso Bala for the rest of time.
And so, the Sosso Bala transformed from being a tool of tyrannical rule to one of cultural healing in the hands of Sundiata Keita and his singer, forever representing the unity and freedom of the united Mandé people.
Did you know?

The Sosso Bala is a national treasure in Guinea. The original instrument is preserved in the village of Nyagassola (Northern Guinea) under the care of the Dökala family, the Kouyaté jelis (or griots) of Nyagassola.

As an instrument that spanned different eras, countries and cultures in West Africa, the Sosso Bala is inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The original name of the percussion instrument is Bala, while the term "Balafon" actually means "playing the bala instrument". The balafon is a widely used musical instrument in Mandé music.

Children from the age of seven years and older can be taught how to play the instrument by the Balatigui, the patriarch of the Dökala family and guardian of the Sosso Bala.

The word “jeli” derives from the Mandinka language, and refers to the oral historians, musicians and performers who keep alive and celebrate the history of the Mandé people all over West Africa.
One summer morning, Jia-Xin and Wen-Xin were enjoying a hearty traditional Singaporean breakfast of soft-boiled eggs and kaya toast with their grandmother. Kaya is a tasty egg jam made with coconut milk and sugar.

“Grandma,” said Jia-Xin, “Why is Singapore called The Lion City?”

“Why don’t I tell you?” replied the old woman, before taking the children into the living room and taking out a bamboo straw mat. She kindly set it down for her granddaughters and began to tell the tale.
There once was a noble prince from Palembang named Sang Nila Utama. One day he was hunting on the island of Bintan, when he spotted a magnificent stag. Quickly, he started chasing it up a small hill but, when he reached the top, the stag vanished, like magic. He climbed atop a large rock and looked across the sea, seeing another island with a silky white sandy beach. He was told that this was the island of Temasek, and he became determined to explore it.
“To reach the island, he found a boat and crew, and set out to sea. A great storm erupted, and the ship was tossed about in the huge waves and began to take in water. To stop it from sinking, his men threw all the heavy things into the sea to lighten the ship. However, water kept entering. On the advice of the ship’s captain, he threw his crown overboard as a gift to the sea. At once, the storm died down and he reached Temasek safely.

“Once there, he went to hunt near the river mouth on a patch of open ground, now referred to as the Padang. He saw a strange animal. It seemed to move with great speed; it had a red body and a black head; its breast was white; it was strong and active in build; and in size was rather bigger than a he-goat.

“Impressed by this beast’s beauty, the prince asked his chief minister what animal it was and was told it fit the description of a Singah (Sanskrit for lion). He believed it to be a good omen, and he decided to build his new city on the island of Temasek. He and his men stayed on the island and founded a city, renaming the island to Singapura, which in Sanskrit means ‘Lion City’.”
Later that afternoon, Jia-Xin and Wen-Xin joined their grandmother in the garden, picking flowers for the house. The sisters were taking a particular liking to their grandmother’s Koi pond.

“You know, without the land, water and animals that surround us now, Singapore as we know it would never have been.”

“How so, Grandma?” asked Wen-Xin.

“Let me tell you about Kusu Island.”

The sisters ran from the Koi pond to their grandmother, and sat down in the middle of the grass lawn.

“One night, two fishermen, one Malay and the other Chinese, were lost at dark, stormy seas. Just when all hope was lost, the fisherman spotted a giant turtle swimming towards them. Right before their eyes, the turtle magically transformed himself into an island for the fishermen to swim towards and find refuge from merciless waters.

Grateful to the turtle for their safety, the two fishermen returned to the island to give thanks. There, they built a Muslim keramat (a holy shrine of Muslim saints) and a Taoist shrine, which people still visit today to show their respect and gratitude.
When evening came, the old woman was putting her two granddaughters to bed. Jia-Xin and Wen-Xin were restless with energy, eager for more tales.

Looking lovingly at her two beautiful grandchildren, she said, “You know, you remind me of the Sisters’ Islands.”

“Because we’re sisters?” asked Jia-Xin.

The old woman laughed, “Not only that, but you two are inseparable. You would do absolutely anything for one another.”

“What are the Sisters’ Islands?” asked Wen-Xin.

“Minah and Linah were sisters, joined at the hip, just like you two. One day, the Chief of the Orang Laut (sea people), caught sight of Linah and realised his desire to spend the rest of his life with her.

So when he approached Linah and asked for her hand in marriage, she refused. Unhappy with her answer, the Chief and the Orang Laut made a plan to take Linah away from her family and out to sea.”

“Did the Orang Laut win, Grandma? Did they take Linah away?”

“The two sisters made a vow to never leave each other. When dawn broke, the Chief and his men came to take Linah away. The sisters clung to each other but were forced apart. Minah swam after the boats but was swept under the wave. Linah broke free from her captors and threw herself overboard. Just then, the sky turned dark and a storm raged on.”

“Then what happened?”
“When the storm subsided, the sisters were nowhere to be found. The next day, a pair of islands appeared where the sisters had perished, and was named Sisters’ Islands in their memory. They have been right next to each other ever since.”

And with that, the old woman kissed both children goodnight, leaving them to sleep soundly and happily together.
Did you know?

Did you know the legend of Sang Nila Utama’s encounter with the lion has been told through puppetry, dance and traditional performances. However, lions have never been native to the region, and it may have been a Malayan tiger that he saw.

The tale of Kusu Island is set in the early days of the Malayan Peninsula. Kusu means “tortoise” or “turtle” in the Hokkien dialect. These days people make the annual pilgrimage to worship at the island’s sacred sites.

Listening to Chinese street storytellers was a popular pastime in Singapore during the colonial period and right up until the 1960s before the introduction of television and radio.

Sisters’ Islands are two of the Southern Islands to the south of the main island of Singapore. They are called Big Sister’s Island (Pulau Subar Laut in Malay) and Little Sister’s Island (Pulau Subar Darat in Malay).

Some pray for wealth, good health, calm seas and sons at the Da Bo Gong (Tua Pek Kong) Temple on Kusu Island, while others pray for wealth, good marriage, health, harmony and fertility at the shrines of three Malay saints.
KAZAKHSTAN

How the Mouse Got His Year

Illustrated by Amina Khassenova

The Year of the Sheep is the simplest for people, bringing the most happiness and the least burden. The Year of the Cow often brings difficult winters with merciless blizzards and snowstorms. A man who is born in the Year of the Dog is destined for an unforgiving life that will forever test his patience. Years of the Sheep, Horse, Cow, Snake, Snow Leopard, Chicken, Snail and Boar have their own signs and meanings too. But the first year belongs to the Mouse. Let us tell you the story of how the little Mouse got his year.

For an endless amount of time, the animals found themselves fighting and arguing constantly over who should get the first year of the Eastern calendar named after them.
Cow said, “I provide men with milk to drink, food to eat and pelt to keep warm. The first year rightfully belongs to me.”

“Well, not only do I provide men with everything that you do, but I can carry men to faraway lands on my back,” replied Horse.

“Poor Horse, you are so fragile,” challenged Camel. “How can your strength be compared to mine? Put half of my load on you, and you will fall and groan. You also live in idleness, when you are blessed with plenty of food. Your appetite is fed with good hay and oats, and your thirst quenched with spring water. Yet, I eat mere thorns and can survive without a single drop of water for several days on end. My milk is also very tasty, my meat is edible and my pelt is sturdy.”

Pushing everyone aside, Sheep ran to the middle and declared, “From what wool would a Kazakh man make a felted cloth to cover their yurt? Why, a sheep’s wool of course! My wool can grace any man with a wonderful sheepskin coat. Take a hunk of a lamb and you have the best meal for yourself. The milk and cheese that comes from me is unique from any of yours. The first year should be mine.”

For once, the animals couldn’t argue or deny what Sheep had said. Could he be right?
Suddenly, Dog jumped into the middle of the animals’ huddle.

“Nonsense!” Dog exclaimed. “If it weren’t for me, your precious wool would have been gobbled up by the wolves.”

And in this futile fashion, the animals argued until the last rays of sunshine sank behind the mountains and the purple skies grew dark and filled with stars.

As Cow, Horse, Camel, Sheep, Dog and even Rooster argued, Mouse did not make a single peep.

Once the animals grew tired and silent, Mouse spoke up.

“Whoever sees the sunrise first, shall get the first year of the Eastern calendar.”

The animals were delighted, each one thinking they were guaranteed to be the first to see the sun.

Camel had no doubt that his height would promise him victory in seeing the sunrise first.

Mouse stood next to Camel as the animals gathered to face the East. Camel laughed. “Poor little foolish Mouse, you can’t possibly think you will be the first to see the sun,” Camel grinned.

“Waiting one hour in the morning is better than waiting two hours in the evening,” Mouse responded.
“Oh please,” Camel huffed. “I am the tallest of all and will be the absolute first to see the sunrise.”

Before the dawn, the animals began looking into the distance. Camel could feel something tickling the top of his hump.

“The sun! The sun!” Mouse shouted, pointing and jumping with excitement.

Only then did Camel realise that Mouse had quietly climbed up his long hair to stand on his hump. Angry, Camel threw Mouse off his hump and squished him with his foot. Sly little Mouse escaped and slipped into a nearby pile of ashes. Mouse claimed the first year and Camel’s arrogant thoughtlessness lost him a year in the Eastern calendar. To this day, Camel continues rolling around in that same pile of ashes, hoping to trample over Mouse and get his year back. ■
Did you know?

Kazakhstan has a rich oral tradition which largely consists of epic poems, ballads and verse tales performed in songs called kyui by travelling storytellers called zhyrysy, and improvisational poets and musicians called akyns.

Ancient Kazakhs were the first people to domesticate and ride horses.

Like many traditional stories from Kazakhstan, this one most likely originated between the 18th and 19th centuries.

Recitals and contests known as aitys with akyn were popular forms of entertainment in the old days and are featured at many festivals and gatherings today.

Kazakhstan hosted the 2017 International Specialised Expo in its capital city of Nur-Sultan (formerly known as Astana), under the theme of Future Energy.
A long time ago in the northern part of Kiribati, there lived a young woman on the island of Makin. Her name was Nei Mwanganibuka and she was the most skilled navigator in Kiribati. She mastered navigating and sailing the seas for many miles. She was brave enough to attempt even the roughest of seas. Despite being bound to her household duties and chores, she would always show interest and make time to learn about every star in the sky, every peak and trough of a wave, and every species of fish.
Nei Mwanganibuka had three older brothers and a sister who would play among themselves. While her older siblings were busy having fun, Nei Mwanganibuka would spend each evening with her parents and older relatives, reading the stars and listening to the winds. Nei Mwanganibuka’s brothers and sister had no interest in spending time with their elders; they thought they had all the time in the world to learn about navigating the seas. Yet Nei Mwanganibuka embraced the opportunities to improve her knowledge of navigation which were as endless as the seas and the skies that stretched before her. As the years went by, Nei Mwanganibuka realised how eternally grateful she was for the time she had spent with her elders.
After her parents passed away, Nei Mwanganibuka left the comfort of her home in Makin. On a broken branch of te buka tree she set forth, onward to the island of Nikunau at the southern end of Kiribati. The distance between the two islands was huge and required sophisticated navigation knowledge and skills, but Nei Mwanganibuka was up for the challenge. On the lone branch of te buka tree, she sailed through perilous waves under the scorching sun for hundreds of kilometres. When the dark and stormy seas seemed insurmountable, the stars lit her way and the wind whispered, guiding her to safety. She could master any wave the universe threw at her.
After many nights under the stars, she finally reached the shores of Nikunau. There she met a man named Namataimoa, who was charmed by her endless curiosity and thirst for navigation knowledge. Realising his strong feelings for Nei Mwanganibuka, he asked her to be his wife. She accepted and together they had three children. Nei Mwanganibuka decided to name her youngest son Teraka, after her brother. She made a promise to herself that she would pass down to her children the great wealth of knowledge her ancestors had once passed down to her. Nei Mwanganibuka loved Teraka the most because of his similar zest for knowledge, and she taught him well. Just like her, Teraka knew every star, wave and fish.
One day, Teraka took his canoe and braved the infinite seas, just as his mother had done many years before. He wanted to visit his mother’s homeland because he was curious to know why she wasn’t as close to her siblings as he was to his own.
After many days and nights at sea he reached Makin; Teraka paid a visit to what used to be his mother’s home, a local hut where his mother grew up and spent her childhood memories with her siblings, parents and elders. An old man greeted and welcomed him to his humble home. Teraka introduced himself as the older man’s nephew and met the rest of Nei Mwanganibuka’s siblings, his uncles and aunty.
The old man was impressed with his namesake’s successful journey from Nikunau to Makin. Fetching his canoe, the older man brought his relatives to Nikunau where they were reunited with their younger sister. Witnessing the sweet reunion and the tears of happiness in his mother’s eyes, Teraka realised that he was thankful for his mother sharing her wisdom and knowledge with him. Otherwise he would never have been able to conquer large distances and obstacles, and use his curiosity to return the favour to his mother.
Did you know?

Nei Mwanganibuka is an important figure in Gilbertese mythology. She taught the people of the Gilbert Islands the art of long-distance canoe navigation.

This folktale is essential to Kiribati’s oral tradition, and has been passed down through generations by great ancestors through word of mouth.

In Tungaru, the language of Kiribati, “Nei” is the equivalent of “Ms”, and “Mwanganibuka” means “old woman of the Buka trees.”

The Buka tree (pisonia grandis) is a large softwood tree that can grow about 30 metres tall.

The Republic of Kiribati has the largest ocean boundary within the Pacific Ocean. Overfishing is prohibited and sustainable fishing methods are accepted solely to provide sources of nourishment.
Princesses, Dragons and Demons

A Princess disguised as a warrior, a magical wish-granting fish, a dragon with seven (yes, seven!) heads, a daughter whose love for the King and salt knows no bounds, and a demon who lives in the mangroves.

This is the stuff of fairytales and fantasies. And they all lived happily ever after, of course.

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The Salt Princess

Illustrated by Janka Üveges
King, loved by all, shared his castle with his three beautiful daughters who were even more beloved by the people. As the years went by and the King grew older, he began to wonder how to leave his legacy to each of his precious daughters. Their father ruled over three kingdoms, and the King viewed one kingdom as certainly more beautiful than the others. However, he could not bring himself to decide which of his daughters would inherit the most beautiful of the kingdoms.

While the King held equal amounts of affection and love for each of his three daughters, the thought occurred to him that, surely, one must love him more than the others?

“The daughter who ultimately loves me the most will get to rule over my most precious kingdom,” the King decided one day.

While the King and his daughters were savouring their evening feast, he asked his daughters how much they loved him.

Each daughter, with a spirit distinctive from her siblings, expressed herself in her own unique way.
“Why Father, I love you as a dove loves good grain,” the eldest replied.

“And you, dear child?”

“Dear Father, I love and cherish you the way a hot summer day loves a cool breeze.”

“What about you, my littlest one?”

“Why, Dear Father, I love you like people love Só (salt).”

The King found himself in quite the quandary with his youngest daughter’s response.

Stroking his beard, the King grew restless.

“What do you mean, ‘like people love salt’? How could you compare my love to something as cheap as salt?” the King demanded, growing angrier by the second.

“I have given you the world, my daughter, and it saddens me to think that your love for me is not the same as your love for air to breathe.”

“But Father, you don’t understand. Addig nem tudod, hogy mennyire szeretsz valakit, amíg meg nem tapasztalod a hiányát. You don’t understand how much you can love someone until you have to live without them.”

“Enough,” the King interrupted. “My love does not deserve your lack of gratitude.”
His youngest daughter desperately tried to explain to her father, but he banished her from the castle.

Distraught, the youngest Princess trudged for miles until she reached a forest on the outskirts of the kingdom. Scared and lonely, she found shelter in the hollow of a tree. The Princess spent the days and nights foraging for forest fruits to eat, and finding comfort in the forest’s animals. However, nothing could heal the hole in her heart as she yearned for her father’s warmth and kindness.
One day, a young Prince from the neighbouring kingdom spotted the Princess while in the forest. Recognising the raw and natural beauty of the Princess, which had been tainted by her sorrow, he was eager to know the reason for her sadness.

“My love for my father is too much for him to understand,” replied the Princess. “So he sent me away.”

“One day, he will understand. I will make sure of it,” said the Prince. The Prince vowed to take the Princess back to his castle to be wed, and personally invited the King to their grand wedding ceremony and feast. The King, although hurt by his youngest daughter’s words, missed her terribly. He could not have been happier when he received the invitation and learned that he would see his youngest daughter again.
The King and his two other daughters arrived in their finest clothes and sat at the grand table on either side of the Prince and Princess. Once he gave his thanks for the meal he had been given, the King lifted his fork and took the first bite of the lavish feast set before them. To his surprise, the food had no flavour at all. The food did not contain a single grain of salt. Just as he was about to complain, he finally understood what his youngest and gentlest daughter meant when she told him she loved him the way one loves salt.
The King didn’t realise how much he had loved his youngest daughter until she left, just as he did not realise his love for salt until its absence. Seeing that his punishment towards his daughter was unjust, he embraced her warmly and with tears in his eyes. The King watched his daughter and the Prince live happily together, and when he died the most beautiful kingdom of all was left in their tender care.
Did you know?

Folktales continue to play an important role in Hungarian society and the largest and most popular Hungarian television channels broadcast Hungarian folktales in prime time.

The Salt Princess folktale from the early 20th century is one of many that are sacred to Hungary’s oral tradition.

Almost as essential as salt, paprika is a spice used in many traditional Hungarian recipes.
The Longest Folktale

Illustrated by Goabaone Mogwe
Once upon a time, in a land far, far away, there lived a poor herdsman named Makgaola. One day he ventured out into the marketplace, and saw that it was alive with whispers about a challenge decreed by none other than the King.

The challenge was that any man who could recite the longest folktale to entertain the King would be awarded the Princess as his wife.

Men from all walks of life came from far and wide to line up outside the King’s castle and vie for the beloved Princess’s attention. Makgaola was no exception.

On foot, he traversed the vast kingdom and finally caught a glimpse of the long line of suitors wrapped around the King’s castle.

Makgaola’s arrival to the back of the line brought about hundreds of gasps, and bursts of endless laughter from the men. Not a single one considered Makgaola a worthy opponent, given his shabby and meagre appearance.
Silent to the ridicule, Makgaola stood in line until it was his rightful turn. As he stepped in front of the King, the King raised his hand to silence him. Before Makgaola could begin his tale, the King waved him off.
“Please, this man needs to be escorted away from my chamber,” he said. “He clearly thinks my challenge is some kind of joke, he is not worthy of my daughter’s attention and affection.”

Just as he was being dragged outside of the chamber and the King turned his back to him, Makgaola raised his voice and began his folktale. Verse upon verse, rhyme upon rhyme, Makgaola stunned and entranced the King. His eyes were fastened on the humble yet masterful herdsman.
While he may have appeared a poor man, his mind and heart were anything but.

Pleasantly surprised and satisfied, the King named Makgaola the winner of the challenge. He rightfully married the most beloved and beautiful Princess in all the land, and they went on to live happily ever after.
Did you know?

This story is one of many in the Setswana culture, which grandparents would tell to younger children gathered together around the fire in the evenings.

Folk singing, traditional dances and praise poetry are just a few of the art forms that exist in Botswana's diverse and rich culture, narrated creatively through mainane (which means 'traditional stories' in Botswana's Setswana language).

Such stories, often fictional and entertaining, contained important moral and educational lessons.

Praise poems, both in oral and written form, are a form of go tlhabelwa dinaane (storytelling) that celebrate historical figures.
Fantaghirò, Beautiful Person
In times of old, there was a King who had three beautiful daughters. His eldest daughter was called Carolina, his middle daughter Assuntina and his youngest daughter Fantaghirò, beautiful person, because she was the most beautiful of them all.

This King was ill and spent his days shut in a room in which there were three chairs – a blue one, a black one and a red one. When his daughters came to see him in the morning, they always looked to see which chair he was sitting on. The blue chair meant cheerfulness, the black chair symbolised death and the red chair stood for war.

One day the girls came into his bedroom and saw that the King was sitting on the red chair, an open letter in his hand. His eldest daughter said, “Lord Father, what has happened?”

“Our neighbouring King has declared war upon me,” he said. “I am sick and cannot guide our army alone. I will have to find a good general.”

The eldest daughter, Carolina, replied. “If you let me, I will be the general.”

“Absolutely not. This is no job for a woman,” said the irritable King.

“Put me to the test, please,” his eldest daughter pleaded. “I want to talk to our neighbour first and see if there is anything to be done. We might manage to avoid a war.”

“Alright then,” the King sighed. “But if you start acting like a girl, you are coming straight back.” His daughter accepted these terms, so the King ordered his most trusted squire Tonino to accompany the Princess to war. “If my daughter starts to talk about women’s things, you must bring her straight back to the palace,” the King added.

The Princess and the trusted Tonino left for the neighbouring kingdom, followed by an entire army. Eventually they came across a thicket of reeds. “Such beautiful reeds,” exclaimed the Princess. “If we had them at home, imagine how many nice distaffs we could make on which to spin our wool.”

“Back home with you,” shrieked Tonino. “You have let a woman’s thought slip into your head.” They returned home with their army of 1,000 soldiers.
The next day, the middle daughter, Assuntina, begged the King to let her lead their army into battle. The King made the same agreement with her and put the faithful Tonino on her tail. As they rode past the thicket of reeds, the Princess kept her mouth shut, but as they made their way through a forest of tall straight poles, she forgot her promise to her father.
“Tonino, look at those beautiful smooth upright poles. Perhaps we could take some with us. I wonder how many spindles we could make for spinning wool.”

“Back home with you too,” bellowed Tonino. “You have welcomed womanly thoughts into your mind.” Dejected, they returned to the palace with the soldiers close on their heels.

The King didn’t know how to right this tricky situation and thought that all was lost. Then, his youngest Fantaghirò tried to persuade him into sending her into battle.
“Neither of your big sisters managed, how could I trust you with this task?” the King responded.

“I understand,” replied Fantaghirò with a smile, “but what would it cost you to let me try? You have nothing to lose.” She was so convincing that the King caved. He called upon the trusted Tonino and gave him the same instructions as before.

Fantaghirò was disguised as a warrior. Armed with a sword and pistols, she looked like a valiant dragoon. She and Tonino left with the army in their wake. They rode past the thicket of reeds and then the forest of poles, but the young Fantaghirò stayed as quiet as a mouse.

When they reached the border, she ordered the soldiers to stop. “You stay here with our men. I want to talk to our enemy face to face,” she told her trusted Tonino.

Their enemy was a young and handsome king called Romualdo. He took one look at Fantaghirò and thought to himself, “This Prince is not like other men. I bet he is a girl.” But all he said was, “Come with me, your Grace. I want to have you as a guest at my palace.”

When they reached the palace, Romualdo ran to his mother and told her about the warrior in charge of the opposing army. “Fantaghirò, persona bella, ha occhi neri e parole dolci, O mamma mia, mi pare una donzella. Fantaghirò, beautiful person. With those black eyes and sweet voice, Mother, she looks just like a damsel.”

“Bring her to the arms room,” his mother said. “If she really is a woman, she won’t look at them and she certainly won’t touch them.”
Romualdo followed this wise advice, but not much came of it. Fantaghirò took the swords off the wall and started to try one after another, handling them deftly. She even took the pistols and the muskets, and tried them too.

Romualdo went back to this mother, captivated. “He swung every sword like a man. But I still believe what I said before: Fantaghirò, persona bella, Ha occhi neri e parole dolci, O mamma mia, mi pare una donzella. Fantaghirò, beautiful person. With those black eyes and sweet voice, Mother, she looks just like a damsel.”

His mother thought hard. Moved by her son’s desperation, she said, “Invite our guest to lunch. If she takes the bread and holds it against her chest to cut it, one simply can’t doubt she is a woman. However, if he cuts the bread holding it up in the air, he is definitely a man.”
But Fantaghirò passed that test with flying colours. Romualdo couldn’t accept it. He went back to his mother looking dejected and said, “He cut the bread while holding it high up in the air, like any true warrior. But I still believe what I said before: Fantaghirò, persona bella, Ha occhi neri e parole dolci, O mamma mia, mi pare una donzella. Fantaghirò, beautiful person. With those black eyes and sweet voice, Mother, she looks just like a damsel.”

“You are acting like a fool,” his mother replied. “But if you really can’t convince yourself otherwise, you had better try for a third time. Ask our guest to spend the night at our palace and try to catch a glimpse of Fantaghirò in his or her bedclothes.” Romualdo went to Fantaghirò and invited her to stay at the palace. “I would love to, your Majesty,” she replied.

Before they went to bed that evening, they had supper. Romualdo put a powerful sleeping potion in her drink, but Fantaghirò wasn’t to be fooled and didn’t drink one drop. After their meal, she proposed a toast and Romualdo took a sip, not realising he drank from the bottle with the sleeping potion. By the time he reached his bedchamber, he was so groggy that he threw himself onto the bed and started snoring. Romualdo woke the next morning and saw Fantaghirò up and dressed in her uniform. Even with a vision as clear as day, he was still unable to say whether she was a man or a woman.

He went back to his mother who berated him for his behaviour. But the love-struck Romualdo insisted, saying, “Fantaghirò, persona bella, Ha occhi neri e parole dolci, O mamma mia, mi pare una donzella. Fantaghirò, beautiful person. With those black eyes and sweet voice, Mother, she looks just like a damsel.”
“I will give you one last chance,” his mother said. “Invite Fantaghirò
to swim with you in the garden fish pond. If she is a woman, she will
refuse. And if she or he does come, the secret will be revealed.”
And so, Romualdo invited Fantaghirò, who agreed on one condition — that they swim the next day instead. Romualdo left brimming with joy, while Fantaghirò called the loyal Tonino and gave him a letter to deliver to her father. In the letter, Fantaghirò asked her father to send her a soldier early in the morning with a message saying that he was on his deathbed and wanted to see his beloved son before he passed away.

The following morning, Fantaghirò and Romualdo met in front of the garden fish pond. He jumped into the water, shouting, “Join me. It is very hot out there and the water is so refreshing.”

But Fantaghirò was stalling while waiting for her father’s messenger. “I am too hot to get in,” she said. “Before I get into the water, I need to cool down a little, otherwise I may fall ill.”

Romualdo kept asking, but Fantaghirò would not budge. “I can't do it. My legs and shoulders are shaking. It is not a good sign. Something is wrong.”

A soldier appeared suddenly and gave her a letter from her father. After Fantaghirò had read it, she said to Romualdo, “I am sorry, your Majesty, but I have just received some very bad news. My father is on his deathbed and he wants to see me before he passes away. I told you that those shivers were a bad sign. I have to rush home. If you want, we can make peace now. Then, whenever you are ready, you can come and visit me in my kingdom. We can swim together another time.”

Before she left, Fantaghirò returned to the room that she had slept in and placed a note on the bed. “Fantaghirò came here as a woman and as a woman she leaves, but the king has not known her,” the note read.
The next morning Romualdo went into the room to see where his mysterious guest had slept, and found her note. He ran immediately to his mother. “I was right! Fantaghirò is a woman,” he exclaimed. Without waiting for his mother to answer, he stormed out to his carriage and sped off on her trail.

In the meantime, Fantaghirò was with her father, telling him how she had made peace with the enemy without waging a single battle. A loud noise in the courtyard interrupted Fantaghirò’s story. It was Romualdo, who declared his feelings for his true love.
From that moment on the two kingdoms lived peacefully side by side, and Fantaghirò was free to marry Romualdo without any delay. The young king took her to his palace where he and his bride lived happily for years to come, and in time the brave and clever Fantaghirò inherited her father’s land and became Queen of the two kingdoms.
Did you know?

This Italian favola (fable) was passed orally from generation to generation. It was first published in 1880 by Gherardo Nerucci in his collection of stories from the oral tradition of the Montale area in the Pistoia district of Tuscany.

This story seems to have its origins from ancient chronicles of the city of Genoa, which told of a warrior princess who leaves in command of a large and fundamental expedition to go and defeat a Turkish king.

During the Middle Ages, there were numerous 'spreaders of popular stories', including the many pilgrims who walked the Italian peninsula on foot.

Fantaghirò's story was adapted for television in the 1980s and as a film in 1991.
The emirates of Abu Dhabi and Ras Al Khaimah are home to stunning mangroves, but none are as beautiful and majestic as those in the mangrove forest of Kalba. It is here, in the Eastern Region city, where Fattouh, the fearsome djinn (demon), lives. With long limbs, sharp claws and the piercing eyes of a cat, Fattouh is a formidable creature, tall enough to touch the skies.
Fattouh doesn’t like to leave his home in the mangroves, nor does he welcome visitors. You see, people have been unkind to Fattouh because of his appearance. The countless screams and moments of ridicule hardened him, draining him of every drop of kindness and warmth.

One day, a woodcutter ventured into the mangrove forest to fetch some dry wood to sell. He arrived early in the morning and started counting his blessings when he chanced upon a large amount of good-quality wood. He set to work and worked very hard indeed, until the midday heat bore into his back. My, how the time got away from him!

The wise never dared to step foot in the mangrove forest of Kalba at midday, when the feared Fattouh would emerge to guard his beloved home. The djinn did not take kindly to people entering his home, and made sure that any naïve trespassers learned their lesson.
The woodcutter was so focused on his work that he didn’t notice Fattouh’s shadow drift over him. He raised his head and saw the demon’s long arms and legs, the sharp claws on his fingers and toes. He trembled as his gaze met Fattouh’s yellow, feline-like eyes. The demon hissed and bared his razor-sharp teeth.

The woodcutter threw his wood onto the ground and ran as fast as his legs could carry him. Fattouh took off after him, thrilled by the chase. It had been a while since he’d chased someone away, and he worried that he might be losing his scary edge. Fattouh thought about all the unkind things he could do to this mindless man who dared to enter his forest.
“Maybe I could tickle him,” he thought while running, his feet sinking into the mud one after the other. “Or, ooh! Maybe I could blow raspberries in his face. I could call him a goat. Oh! What if I tripped him? Ha! I could hang him from the branches by the sleeves of his kandoora.”

The man ran fast, as fast as his n'aal (sandals) would allow, but he was no match for Fattouh. After a while, the man slowed to catch his breath and Fattouh seized his weakness as an opportunity to pounce. He leapt on him, knocking him to the ground. The woodcutter fought hard but Fattouh was not going to back down. At first, he enjoyed the tussle, but the excitement quickly faded into boredom. Normally his opponents had given up by this time, leaving Fattouh basking in the glory of victory.

“Arrgghh!” Fattouh roared in frustration, his eyes rolling back to reveal the whites beneath. Terrified by the ferocity of the demon’s cry, the woodcutter fell to the ground unconscious.
Fattouh stared at the still man, dumbfounded. “Uh oh! That wasn’t supposed to happen,” Fattouh mumbled, scratching the back of his head. He poked the man. Nothing. He shouted at him, but his piercing cries didn’t jolt the man’s senses. Did he just take this man’s life? His confusion quickly turned into regret and sadness.

He held the man’s body in his arms and, for the first time in a long time, he wept. He wept because he had been foolish. He wept because he hurt a man who had done nothing to deserve this treatment. He wept because of the unfriendly attention his appearance attracted. He wept because he always tried to hurt people before they could hurt him first.
The man groaned. Fattouh’s relief crashed over him like a tidal wave. “Shh, shh. It’s OK. You’re alive and you’re safe,” Fattouh whispered to him gently. The man’s eyelids slowly fluttered open.

“I’m so sorry I hurt you. I shouldn’t have scared you. Please forgive me. I will never hurt you or anyone else again,” he promised, seeing the fear behind the man’s eyes.
The man nodded, still dazed. A weak smile crept over his face, showing he was no longer scared.

“You are known to be fearful, Fattouh. Why do you let people believe that?” he asked the creature.

Fattouh was caught off guard. Nobody had ever cared enough to ask him that. In the warm company of the woodcutter, Fattouh began to realise that acts of kindness and forgiveness produced far more pleasure than those of fear and revenge. It was in the mangrove forest of Kalba where Fattouh pledged never to hurt anyone again. To make up for his behaviour, he invited the woodcutter back to his home with the offer, not just of firewood, but friendship as well. The woodcutter gratefully accepted, acknowledging that friends can come in all shapes and sizes.
Did you know?

Fattouh is one of the best-known and most-feared characters of the UAE’s fables. Stories about the mangrove demon have been passed down through generations as cautionary tales and, like many of the UAE’s folktales, are told to warn children against dangerous places or activities.

The Eastern Region of the UAE, where Kalba is located, is rich with folktales inspired by its beautiful nature and scenery, and its location surrounded by the Hajjar Mountains. Kalba has a rich biodiversity with large mangrove swamps, including the Kalba Conservation Reserve.

Mangroves are very important habitats. They provide food and shelter to many marine and bird species, and act as nurseries for young fish. They help protect shorelines from flooding, storms and erosion and also store carbon, which can help to regulate climate change. The UAE has many mangrove forests along its shoreline.

A kandoora is a traditional man’s robe, which is typically white. Kandoor as are worn throughout the Arabian peninsula, with each country having its own unique flourishes.
Once upon a time there was a fisherman who sailed the open seas, leaving daily at dawn and returning at sunset. Out on the water he took pleasure in every wave and ripple, yet his favourite part of the day was the evening return home to his wife and daughter, Hamda, beaming from ear to ear as he displayed the fish caught that day.
Hamda’s twinkling eyes and beautiful smile reflected her joyful home. Their life was humble and happy, but destiny had other plans.

Her mother fell sick and passed away. Time went on and the fisherman saw his daughter filled with sadness. Her bright eyes dimmed and her smile was no more. The fisherman thought of ways to bring back his daughter’s joy.

“She must be lonely,” he thought, “And so am I.”
It was not long until he asked his widowed neighbour for her hand in marriage. She gleefully accepted and moved into the fisherman’s home with her own daughter. The sweetness of their married life soon turned sour. The wife grew bitter and cruel, while Hamda’s stepsister grew lazy, leaving all the housework to Hamda.

One day, Hamda was given a new task.

“Clean these fish by the seef,” ordered the stepmother, forcefully handing Hamda three small fish. Hamda hurried to the seef (shoreline) to descale and gut the fish.
“Hideeny w baghneech.” Hamda startled and jumped back. Did one of the fish just speak?

“Hideeny w baghneech,” pleaded the faskar fish, promising Hamda a reward in return for her release.

“Please, don’t let that cruel woman eat me. Please, Hamda. Spare me.”

Hamda hesitated as her heart filled with fear. “I’m afraid of my stepmother,” she said.

“Hideeny w baghneech,” repeated the fish. “I will fulfill your every wish if you set me free.”

Hamda considered the faskar fish in front of her and with shaking hands, set the fish back into the sea. The fish zipped around under the water with delight, then rose back to the surface and turned to Hamda. “My name is F’saichrah. Call my name in your time of need and you’ll find me.”

Dazed and full of dread, a weary Hamda returned home with only two fish to face the wrath of her stepmother, claiming that the third fell into the sea. This, of course, angered her stepmother, who punished Hamda by denying her food.
Once her family had gone to sleep, a hungry Hamda snuck out to the seef.

“F’saichrah, ya Yuma,” she cried as she rinsed empty cooking pots. “They ate without me.” Hamda wept and wept.

A bright glow appeared floating under the water, and before Hamda knew it, F’saichrah emerged.

“Labaich w saa’daich.

“Khademtch bain yedaich.

“Aamry, tedatele.

“Tell me your heart’s desire, dear Hamda,” said F’saichrah. And Hamda did.
In the blink of an eye, a delicious dinner from the depths of the sea was laid before her. That night, Hamda feasted on her favourite foods. Happy and content, she went to sleep with a full belly. From then on, Hamda looked to F’saichrah for food and companionship. Time passed and Hamda grew into a vibrant young woman, despite her stepmother’s attempts to starve her.
One day, the son of the Nukhida announced a grand party. All were invited. Women applied their finest oud perfumes and adorned themselves with their most precious gold and pearls in anticipation of an eventful night.

“A party? I never dreamed I’d attend a party in the Nukhida’s house,” said Hamda.

Hamda’s stepmother laughed at her hopes. “You silly girl. You thought you could escape your housework for one night? The only thing you will attend to are your chores,” she said with a sneer as she dumped bags of rice, lentils and wheat into one large pot. “Separate these before my return,” she ordered.

Knowing that the son of the Nukhida was seeking a wife of his own, the cruel stepmother plotted to keep Hamda away. That night, once her stepmother and stepsister left, Hamda sprinted to the shoreline and called out for her friend.

“F’saichrah, ya Yuma.”

“Tell me your heart’s desire, Hamda. Why do you look so sad?”

“F’saichrah, my stepmother banned me from the party. They’ve gone without me and I have to separate the grain before their return.”
In the blink of an eye, Hamda found herself in the most exquisite *thoub* (dress) and golden shoes. Her hair flowed around her shoulders, under a glowing golden *gub-gub* headdress.

“Go, Hamda. But remember the Nukhida’s son will love you for your heart more than your beauty. I will handle the grain. Be sure to be back home before your stepmother. This spell won’t last.”

Hamda hurried to the Nukhida’s house. The party was exuberant and elegant with sumptuous food and lively music. Hamda searched through the crowds, eager to see the Nukhida’s son, yet mindful of the time. As she moved through the party, heads turned to ask about the beautiful girl who looked so familiar.

But no one was as captivated by Hamda as the Nukhida’s son. He caught a glimpse of her and then – suddenly – lost her in the crowd. In her haste to return, Hamda raced out of the house, losing her golden gub–gub along the way. She returned to find the grain separated and sighed with relief, she had arrived in time. She was safe.
The Nukhida’s son was desperate to find the girl he had laid eyes on and bid his companions to help with the search. The lost gub-gub was recovered and the Nukhida’s son was elated to have an excuse that would expand his pursuit. The search went from door to door, asking after the girl who had caught his eye.

Eventually, the group arrived at the fisherman’s door.

Upon learning that the Nukhida’s son was looking to reunite the lost gold with its owner and asking to meet the family, she rushed to conceal Hamda.

“Hamda!” ordered the stepmother. “Go hide behind the tanoor. Quickly.” Her voice carried a hidden threat.

Confused, Hamda left the birds she was tending to and complied. The stepmother covered Hamda with a sofra (mat) and dumped the grain on top before returning to the door.

She introduced her daughter, answering that the only girl who lived here was her own.
The Nukhida’s son despaired. This was the last house in the village. It wasn’t her. Would he ever find the girl who won his heart? And just as he was about to depart, he heard a strange noise.

“Cuckoo,” cried the rooster.

“Cuckoo, cuckoo. Hamda is behind the tanoor,” he crowed, revealing Hamda to the Nukhida’s son.

Finally, they were reunited. Hamda married the Nukhida’s son and they spent the rest of their lives together happily. Hamda found love and fortune through grace, compassion and humility in the face of adversity. Never one to use her fortune for greed, Hamda remained kind and continued to spend her evenings with F’saichrah by the seef.
Did you know?

This folktale has been told and retold many times across the Gulf, and communicates the region’s seafaring heritage.

Bahrain’s waters are home to more than 200 species of fish. The faskar fish, locally known as Bint Al-Nukhida - the Captain’s Daughter - is native to Bahrain and known for its flavour and attractive appearance.

The name F’saichrah is a colloquial derivative of the species’ name.

Hazawi is an oral folklore tradition in the Arabian Gulf that uses storytelling to entertain, inform and deliver important lessons.

Readers may recognise elements of the folktale most widely known as Cinderella. The origins of this tale are attributed to both China and Greece. F’saichrah is one of thousands of variants from around the world.
Once upon a time in a village, there lived a mother and her one and only son. This young man was the apple of his mother's eye and she loved him more than anything. All winter long the people of the village struggled to survive, for food was scarce and hunting barely yielded any reward. It was widely known that there was an abundance of food and animals on the Mount of Kulshedra, however the young man was forbidden to go there.

“Hark, my dear son,” his mother cautioned him, “You can go hunting on every mountain, but you are never to set foot on the Mount of Kulshedra, for the she-dragon Kulshedra is evil, my boy. She gobbles up people without mercy. Many men have braved the journey, but none has ever returned.”
The son paid no heed to his mother’s warning, for he had ears only for a fair maiden who had won his precious heart.

“Brave man,” she said, “if you do love me, do not hunt on any other mountain but the Mount of Kulshedra.”

The young man never disobeyed his fair maiden, for his love for her knew no bounds. He bore his armour, took his spear, bow and arrows, and set off on his valiant horse for the Mount of Kulshedra before the mist on the hillside cleared and the ice melted inside the well.

At the base of the mountain grew a vast forest. The trees towered over him and the grass rose up to his knees. Nature’s beauty and abundance mesmerised him as he ventured deeper into the forest with no concern for his safety. Suddenly, the earth began to shake around him. The evergreen trees trembled, shaking the leaves from their branches. A deadly howl echoed from one side, then the other, causing the once valiant horse such fright, that it bolted into a clearing.
To the young man’s horror, he came face-to-face with the hideous she-dragon, the gargantuan Kulshedra. Seven horns adorned her seven heads, her eyes burned bright like torches, her enormous mouth opened as wide as a cave, and her leathery bat-like wings were large enough to eclipse the sun. Yellow flames and smoke blew through her cavernous mouth, turning every blade of grass, flower and bush to ash. The earth shuddered as she pounded her huge tail on the ground once, twice, and thrice.

The brave man did not fear. He reached for his bow, but Kulshedra snapped it in two before he could lose a single arrow. He then threw his spear, but it couldn’t pierce her thick scales. He unsheathed his sword, but Kulshedra wailed so loudly, that the tremors caused his sword to fall from his shaking hands. Kulshedra’s laughter echoed from all seven mouths, chased by the flames that scorched his armour.

“Now I will devour you,” the she-dragon said, “for you stepped on my mountain. Haven’t you heard that those who approach this mountain do not come back alive? Many courageous men have set foot on my mountain before you, and I have had each of them for dinner. I will do the same to you.”
“Kulshedra, mighty Kulshedra!” answered the young man. “I know that you will devour me. You certainly are very strong and powerful. I beseech you only one thing: allow me to go home to my mother and ask for her blessing before I die. After that, I shall return for you to eat me, as promised.”

“Don’t make me laugh, young fellow,” scoffed the monster. “If I let you go, there is no chance you will come back. What will you give me in return, so that I can allow you to leave?”

“Do tê tê jap besên time! I give you my besa,” the brave man replied, “my word of honour.”

“Besa!” cried the monster. “What is this?”

“It is more than a simple promise, or vow. Besa is the most sacred of all promises.”

“I have never heard of your besa or of its sacredness to mere mortals. Now I am curious to know what it really means. You may go now, but you must return tomorrow by daybreak,” Kulshedra boomed.

The young man gave his besa to Kulshedra, mounted his horse and galloped straight home, where his mother was waiting for him anxiously.
“Dear mother,” the young man said, “the she-dragon Kulshedra caught me on her mountain as I was hunting and now she is going to eat me alive, like you said. I gave her my word of honour and promised that I would go back. She trusted my word and allowed me to come here. Give me your blessing before I surrender myself to her.”

His mother wailed in pain and fear.

“My beloved son,” she cried, “Why did you go to the Mount of Kulshedra? Why didn’t you heed my warning? Do not go back, I beg you. You are all I have left.”

“No, mother!” the young man shouted. “I will return to the she-dragon, because I gave her my besa, my word of honour.”

He smiled bitterly, kneeled before his mother and waited for her blessing. With a touch of her hand, she assented and then the young man rose up, leaving everything he knew and loved and turning back only once, at the end of the road, to see his mother’s broken face one last time. After he left, she dressed in black mourning clothes, and locked herself in the house, resigned to her unbearable loss.
Meanwhile the young man rode through the village to the house of his fair maiden.

“My fair lady,” he said. “I came to fare thee well, for I am going away forever. The she-dragon Kulshedra is going to devour me, for she caught me hunting on her mountain. My arrow could not touch her, my spear could not penetrate her skin, my sword fell from my hands when I lifted it to slay her. I gave her my besa and I will not go back on my word of honour. Fare thee well, my beauty.”
“Are you sorry that the she-dragon will eat you?” the fair maiden asked with a smile on her face.

“No, my fair lady,” he replied. “You gave me so much happiness with your grace and your smile that I welcome death with open arms. I wish you happiness and good health always, for I want to go back as soon as I can. Kulshedra awaits me.”

“Wait, brave man, for I will come with you to the mountain.”

The young man frowned. “Do not come, my fair lady, to that place where even rocks and trees shiver. Kulshedra is evil. She will scorch your skin and devour you, too.”

“Stay here with me forever and I won’t come.”

“I cannot, my lady,” he exclaimed, “for I must stand by my word. I am better off dead than dishonest.”

The fair maiden smiled. “I will come with you,” she said firmly.
Mounting a white horse, the young man and his fair maiden galloped up to the Mount of Kulshedra. She was so radiant, as if bathed in light. Her unspeakable beauty sent pleasant shivers through his body. He wondered, “How can I allow Kulshedra to devour my fair lady? If only I had three lives, I would bestow them all to Kulshedra, so that my fair lady could return home and live happily.”

“What are you thinking about, brave man?” the beautiful maiden asked, catching him in his thoughts.

“If I had three lives, my beautiful one, I would bestow them all to Kulshedra, so she would allow you to return home safely and live happily.”

Her radiant smile lit up her eyes. “To live without you?” she asked with a frown.

“To live happily, even if that life does not include me.”

“That is how much you love me?”

“So much, my fair lady.”
Suddenly, the mountain quaked and every stone and tree shook violently. The seven-headed she-dragon appeared and started singing in glee. “Good for me, oh, good for me! I had one, now I have two! A fresh maiden comes to me. I will eat and devour her, too.”

The fair maiden laughed and answered. “Poor Kulshedra, oh, poor you. You had one, now you have none. You will bury yourself to the bottom of the earth, for this mountain is of the people and it will remain so.”

The maiden and the brave man came closer to Kulshedra, who started grinding her teeth and breathing fire from her enormous mouth. Yet suddenly the huge she-dragon froze in fear at a single look from the maiden. Kulshedra tried to step back.

“Who are you, fair maiden, for you are making my skin crawl!” asked the she-dragon, stepping back in terror. “What is this light that gleams from your face? What is this fire that is burning me alive?”
“I am the Daughter of the Moon and Sun. The droplet of the skies, I blanket the mountains and fields, and land on the heads of the evil for the sake and salvation of the good people.”

“What is this brave man to you, o fair maiden?”

“He is my companion for life.”

“Maiden beyond maidens of the earth,” the she-dragon replied, “you may return back happily. Spend your youth with the courageous man you have chosen. You have both been loyal to your besa, and I admit defeat.”

“What about you, oh mighty Kulshedra? What will you do now?” asked the Daughter of the Moon and Sun, holding an arrow of light: the droplet of skies.

“I have no place in this world,” Kulshedra answered, “for you have defeated me. I will go to the bottom of the earth, never to resurface.”
The she-dragon disappeared forever. Perhaps she turned to ashes, or remained buried at the bottom of the earth. The fair maiden and her loyal, brave man, lived happily for all eternity. The Mount of Kulshedra was restored to life, welcoming the bravest and meekest of men to hunt, just as they did on every other mountain.
Did you know?

In Albanian mythology and folklore, Kulshedra is a demon from the underworld, known to spit fire and wreak havoc in the natural world through storms, droughts, earthquakes and other natural disasters.

Besa is an Albanian cultural precept, usually translated as "faith", which means "to keep the promise" and "word of honour".

In Albanian folk stories, besa consists of an oath taken by the sun, moon, sky, earth, stone, mountain and water, which are all considered sacred objects.
Crafty and cunning, hares, monkeys, roosters, tigers, tortoises and turtles engage in battles of wits and prove that one doesn’t have to be big and ferocious to be strong and resilient (also, don’t pass wind near the baobab tree).

Don’t say we didn’t warn you!

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A rooster named Cockadoodle was invited to the wedding of his Uncle Cockatiel. On the morning of the big day, Cockadoodle fluffed and tidied his feathers, and left his coop looking smart and stylish.
As he walked and walked, the rooster came across a worm in the muddy path. Realising that he had missed his breakfast that morning, a hungry Cockadoodle said to himself,

“To peck or not to peck? If I peck at this worm in the mud, my beak will get dirty and I won’t be allowed into Uncle Cockatiel’s wedding.”
He was still thinking when the worm asked, “Where are you going, Cockadoodle the Rooster?”

“It’s none of your business, so I’m not going to tell you.”

“Can I come along?”

“Certainly not,” the rooster balked. “You don’t have feet and can’t even walk.”
Cockadoodle saw how big and fat the worm was, and thought about how hungry he was. “Fine, I’ll take you with me,” Cockadoodle relented. In one big peck, he swallowed the worm whole, but since the worm was in the mud, Cockadoodle dirtied his beak.

“What should I do now? They won’t let me go to Uncle Cockatiel’s wedding with a dirty beak.”

A very worried Cockadoodle continued down the path. He walked and walked, tramped and trekked, until he came across a violet. “Violet, dear violet, clean my beak so I can go to Uncle Cockatiel’s wedding.”
“Okay, but first tell me: where is the little worm?”

“How should I know? I don’t know and I don’t care to find out.”

Then, from inside the rooster’s belly, the worm shouted, “¡Aunque no lo diga, me lleva en la barriga! He’s telling lies, I’m here inside.”

“Tricky rooster!” the violet said. “You lied to me, so I say be on your way and clean your own beak.”
So a very angry Cockadoodle carried on down the path. Walking and walking, he came across a sheep. “Sheep, dear sheep, eat up the violet that wouldn’t clean my beak so that I can go to Uncle Cockatiel’s wedding.”

“Okay, but first tell me: where is the little worm?”

“I don’t know and I don’t care to find out,” said the rooster.

“¡Aunque no lo diga, me lleva en la barriga! He’s telling lies, I’m here inside,” said the worm from the rooster’s belly.

“Tricky rooster! You lied to me, so I say be on your way.”
And Cockadoodle went on, walking faster and faster. He didn’t want to be late for Uncle Cockatiel’s wedding. He walked and walked, and came across a wolf. “Wolf, dear wolf, eat up the sheep that wouldn’t eat the violet that wouldn’t clean my beak so that I can go to Uncle Cockatiel’s wedding.”

“Okay, but first tell me: where is the little worm?”

“I don’t know and I don’t care to find out.”

Again from the rooster’s belly, the worm shouted, “¡Aunque no lo diga, me lleva en la barriga! He’s telling lies, I’m here inside.”

“Tricky rooster!” said the wolf. “You lied to me, so I say be on your way. Or you’ll be guzzled by my muzzle.”
A very frightened Cockadoodle ran and ran on his way. Running and running, he came across a stick. “Stick, dear stick, hit the wolf that wouldn’t eat the sheep that wouldn’t eat the violet that wouldn’t clean my beak so I can go to Uncle Cockatiel’s wedding.”

“Okay, but first tell me: where is the little worm?”

“I don’t know and I don’t care to find out.”

Deep in the rooster’s belly, the worm bellowed once again, “¡Aunque no lo diga, me lleva en la barriga! He’s telling lies, I’m here inside.”

“Tricky rooster! You lied to me, so I say be on your way and clean your own beak.”
Cockadoodle hurried away. He ran and ran and came across a fire. “Fire, dear fire, burn the stick that wouldn’t hit the wolf that wouldn’t eat the sheep that wouldn’t eat the violet that wouldn’t clean my beak so that I can go to Uncle Cockatiel’s wedding.”

“Okay, but first tell me: where is the little worm?”

“I don’t know and I don’t care to find out.”

“¡Aunque no lo diga, me lleva en la barriga! He’s telling lies, I’m here inside,” the worm shouted once more.

“Tricky rooster! You lied to me, so I say be on your way and clean your own beak.”
A very angry Cockadoodle ran and kept running until he reached a river. “River water, river water, put out the fire that wouldn’t burn the stick that wouldn’t hit the wolf that wouldn’t eat the sheep that wouldn’t eat the violet that wouldn’t clean my beak so that I can go to Uncle Cockatiel’s wedding.”

“Okay, but first tell me: where is the little worm?”

“I don’t know and I don’t care to find out.”

“¡Aunque no lo diga, me lleva en la barriga! He’s telling lies, I’m here inside.”

“Tricky rooster!” said the river water. “You lied to me, so I say be on your way and clean your own beak.”
Cockadoodle, in ever more of a hurry, came across a donkey. "Donkey, dear donkey, drink the water that wouldn’t put out the fire that wouldn’t burn the stick that wouldn’t hit the wolf that wouldn’t eat the sheep that wouldn’t eat the violet that wouldn’t clean my beak so that I can go to Uncle Cockatiel’s wedding."

"Okay, but what about the little worm?"

"I don’t know and I don’t care to find out."

One last time, the little worm cried from the rooster’s belly,

"¡Aunque no lo diga, me lleva en la barriga! He’s telling lies, I’m here inside."
“Tricky rooster! You lied to me. Let’s see if I can lighten that load you carry. Take that!”

And the donkey gave the rooster a kick that sent him flying through the air. Cockadoodle was scared, so terribly scared, that he ejected the worm, still in one piece, right out of his you-know-what.
And that’s how the little worm was saved at last and Cockadoodle the Rooster finally arrived at his Uncle Cockatiel’s wedding. But it turned out there were so many guests that they had run out of food.

And since it was very late, all the shops were closed and there was nowhere to buy more. So the cook, who saw Cockadoodle the Rooster come flying in, do you know what he said? Well...

“This goose is cooked!”

He grabbed Cockadoodle and stuck him in the pot.

And that is the end of this true story.
Did you know?

This Spanish tale is a very old, traditional story, which continues to be loved by children today. It is often represented with marionettes and is used frequently in schools and children’s theatre.

There are many versions of Cockadoodle the Rooster and the Little Worm. This version was written by one of the best-known Spanish contemporary tale writers, Antonio Rodríguez Almodóvar, and translated by Kate Whittemore.

Antonio Rodríguez Almodóvar is a specialist in Spanish tales of oral tradition. The novelist, poet, playwright and former professor of literature at the University of Seville was awarded the Spanish National Children’s and Young Adult Literature Prize in 2005.
The Tortoise and the Drum

As told by Solange Adeogun-Phillips
Illustrated by Adedunni Olowoniyi

Our characters

Tortoise is Ijapa (in Yoruba)
Lion is Zaki (in Hausa)
Elephant is Eni (in Bini)
Rabbit is Ehoro (in Yoruba)
Monkey is Ewe (in Igbo)
Gazelle is Egbin (in Yoruba)
Food and water were rare and the dry heat was abundant in the Animal Kingdom. Protected under his shell from the strong rays of the sun, Ijapa the tortoise spotted a fruit hidden in a lone palm tree. “Omo, see food,” he exclaimed. Eager to claim it for himself, Ijapa began to slowly climb the tree. Just as he reached out to grab the delicious fruit, it tumbled down into a hole by the palm tree. The hungry Ijapa didn’t hesitate to follow his meal into the endless hole.
He slid down the long, winding tunnel and found himself in the home of the underground animals. “Wey dis hole dey carry me go o?” he wondered. One caught sight of Ijapa and recognised the hunger in his eyes.

“Ijapa, what brings you into our humble abode?” asked Elder Ehoro.

“I was chasing my dinner. It escaped my grasp on the palm tree and is somewhere down here,” replied Ijapa.

“Oh dear Ijapa, you don’t mean that lone, juicy fruit, do you? We gobbled it up in a second,” said Elder Ehoro.

“Oh no, that was the only thing I had to eat,” Ijapa whined.

“Look Ijapa, we didn’t know you caught the fruit first. Otherwise we wouldn’t have taken it ourselves. Let us make it up to you.” Elder Ehoro went into his tunnel and emerged with a drum.

“Here,” he said, giving Ijapa the little drum.

“I came here to fill my stomach and quench my dry throat. Do you think this is funny?” asked Ijapa, staring at the drum, wondering if the animals were playing a cruel joke on him.

“Ijapa, this is no ordinary drum. Beat it seven times and you could have all the food you desire.”

“Shuo, na awoof? (Really?)” asked Ijapa.

“On one condition. Don’t ever let any dirt touch the drum,” said the Elder.
With the drum strapped on his back, Ijapa crawled as fast as his little legs could carry him, home to show his wife what he had found.

With seven beats of his drum, the Tortoise summoned a feast for himself and his wife, to her amazement. They ate like they had never eaten before, until their stomachs were filled to the brim. Seeing that they still had plenty to spare, Ijapa invited his fellow animals to join him in his incredible feast.

“Yowa, abinchie! Ezigbo nri! Obe tọ dun! Come one, come all, to enjoy a feast for your eyes and your stomach!” called Ijapa.
However, neither Egbin the gazelle, nor Eni the elephant, nor Ewe the monkey, thought Ijapa spoke the truth. “Biko nu, good old Tortoise must be up to his old tricks again,” remarked Ewe.

However, when they saw the feast at Ijapa’s home with their own eyes, they ate until they could eat no more and sang Ijapa’s praises. As the days passed, animals from far and wide were welcomed into Ijapa’s home and to his endless supply of delicious food.
Ijapa became loved and admired by all, except one: the King of the Wild himself, Zaki the lion. As the animals’ chorus of praise for Ijapa grew louder and louder, Zaki grew more and more jealous of Ijapa’s newfound popularity and fame. How could anyone be the sole protector and saviour of the Animal Kingdom, but the King himself? thought Zaki. Lailai, I no go ‘gree!

The next day, Zaki was on a mission to find out how Ijapa got all his food. He kept his watchful eyes on Ijapa’s home and watched his little foe leave his house. Zaki approached the house only to find that Ijapa’s wife was still inside.

Ijapa’s wife startled, seeing the King outside their home. “Ranka Dede, Your Highness! What brings you here? Is everything alright?”

Just when he thought his plan was ruined, Zaki thought of a little white lie.

“Kia Kia, maza maza, Zaki sprinted back to his palace with the drum, raising clouds of dust and mud in his trail. In his rush, he didn’t notice the dirt falling onto the drum. He summoned the entire Animal Kingdom to his palace for a lavish feast. As he saw the animals walking to his palace, he passionately beat the drum. With seven beats, his palace was filled with food. Zaki’s excitement soon turned to disgust, when he discovered that the food was rotten and smelly. Zaki helplessly watched his subjects recoil at the pungent stench, and retreat to their homes.
Talk of Zaki’s miserable feast was carried on the wind and eventually made it to Ijapa. Ijapa grew furious, realising that his magical drum had been stolen. He did however, find joy at the idea of Zaki kicking dirt onto the drum, against Elder Ehoró’s warning, and ruining his own feast.

Ijapa needed to get another drum from the underground animals. He decided that he would feed the animals that had chosen to make him King.

Finding a lone groundnut, Ijapa teetered on the edge of the hole and dropped the groundnut down the burrow, baiting the underground animals. Down Ijapa jumped, all the way to the bottom.

“Oh Ijapa, don’t tell me that was your groundnut we just ate,” said Elder Ehoró.

“My luck is surely poor today, Elder Ehoró. First, my drum gets stolen and then my dinner,” sighed Ijapa.

Feeling sorry for Ijapa, the underground animals once again gifted him with another magical drum.
Ijapa gleefully accepted it and rushed back home. “Come one, come all, to enjoy a feast for the eyes, the nose and the stomach – not like Zaki’s!” announced Ijapa to his fellow animals. All the animals gathered outside Ijapa’s home, and even Zaki came as well, and apologised to Ijapa and his wife for stealing the drum.

Seeing an opportunity, Ijapa presented the ruler of the Animal Kingdom with an ultimatum.

“Your Highness, I’m afraid I am unable to forgive you.” Seeing the sadness in Zaki’s eyes, Ijapa pressed his advantage. “Unless, of course, you make me King. As I have the power to feed the entire Kingdom, it is only fitting that I have the power to rule,” said the cunning Tortoise. *Na my chance bi dis, abegi!* This is my opportunity.

The furious Zaki challenged Ijapa. “And if I didn’t?”

“Well, then it looks like the rest of you will starve,” said Ijapa.
The animals erupted, debating and arguing among themselves. They eventually agreed to crown Ijapa as their King in exchange for food.

Ijapa beat his drum seven times, but to his surprise, no food appeared in front of the new King nor his hungry subjects. Instead, a swarm of bees emerged from the drum and chased him far out of the kingdom. Even with the fortune of a delicious meal and the respect of his King, Ijapa had still been hungry for more power — and it was this greed that eventually cost him everything.
Did you know?

Trickster tales are very common in West, East and Central African storytelling culture. Ananse the Spider, Soungoula the Monkey and Ijapa the Tortoise are a few of the beloved trickster heroes.

Ijapa is a popular hero among the Yoruba ethnic group in West Africa. In times of scarcity of food, he relies on trickery and the reluctant generosity of friends to obtain food.

In the Igbo culture of southeastern Nigeria, stories can be historic representations of real events presented in everyday conversation, or as coded messages.

Stories that originate from everyday conversation are called ákúkó, while those in the form of coded messages are known as ílú, a term that also applies to proverbs, riddles and symbolic comparisons that may rise from a story.
Who Ate Papa Tig’s Children?

As told by Penda Choppy
Illustrated by Frances Chang-Him

“Sirondann!”
“Zanbagel!”

The South East Monsoon was blowing and there was very little food to put in the stomach. The fish had disappeared to the bottom of the sea. People had padlocked their chicken coops and Medor the dog stood sentry protecting the flock. Everybody knew that in these times, Soungoula did his foraging in their chicken coops and vegetable gardens to fill that deep belly of his.

Papa Tig, on the other hand, was quite fat. Papa Tig was a strong fellow who could forage deep into the forest. He was not lazy like Soungoula. Papa Tig had recently become father to seven little baby tigers and he had to make sure they ate well, monsoon or not.

It was not the same story for Soungoula. Hunger was hard for him. Every morning, Soungoula observed Papa Tig as he and his seven little ones strolled past. Soungoula’s eyes lingered on their fat, full little bellies and he started thinking.
One morning, when Papa Tig was out with his children, he was surprised to see a fellow with a long tail pass by with six pens in his jacket pocket. He held a huge book beneath his arm. Papa Tig said to himself, “That must be a really clever guy.”

“Good morning, good morning, Papa Tig. See how well-fed your children look.” Papa Tig did not take long to fall into the trap. “Brer Soungoula, is that you? But where did you get all these pens?”

“My brother, things have changed in this life. Education before all. I am about to open a school for young children. We must teach our children,” Soungoula replied.
The next day, when Papa Tig passed Soungoula’s house with his children, he heard reciting. “A, B, C, D! A, B, C, D!”

Papa Tig was curious. He tried to peer in, but all the windows were closed and he couldn’t see anything. When he next met Soungoula, he asked, “Brer Soungoula, how is your school going? When I pass by your house, all I hear is A, B, C, D!”

“Oh Papa Tig, my school is almost full. There aren’t many places left. You know how I love to teach young children. I don’t like to see them growing up ignorant.”

Not wanting his seven children to grow up ignorant, he immediately enrolled them in Soungoula’s school. But, there were conditions.

“When children are learning,” Soungoula said, “it is not good to interrupt them. All the children who learn at my school stay there until they have completed everything. But their parents can come to see them every day.”

Papa Tig was a little wary. Soungoula explained that every evening, he would show the children to him through the window, but Papa Tig could not come too close in case it distracted the children and stopped them from learning.

On the first day that the little tigers were at Soungoula’s house, he ate one. In the evening, when Papa Tig came to see them, Soungoula went to the window and lifted them one by one, counting as he went.

“One! Two! Three! Four! Five! Six!”
But there was one missing. What do you think Soungoula did? He hurried and changed the first little tiger into the clothes of the one he had eaten. Then he lifted him up and declared, “Seven!”

Papa Tig was satisfied. He had seen seven little tigers. The distance from the house that Soungoula had imposed did not allow him to tell the children apart. So he left, to return the next day.

The next day, Soungoula ate the second tiger, then he continued teaching the others.

“A, B, C, D! A, B, C, D!”

Papa Tig heard the recital and swelled up with pride, happy that his little children were learning. In the evening, he hurried to see them, and Soungoula repeated the same drama as before.

“Enn! De! Trwa! Kat! Senk! One! Two! Three! Four! Five!”
Six and seven took a little while, but at last Soungoula lifted them up for Papa Tig to see. Papa Tig saw seven children because they were dressed in seven different sets of clothes. With each passing day, Soungoula ate a little tiger, then dressed the rest in clothes of the missing ones, until one day he had eaten them all. What to do now? There were no more children to show to Papa Tig. Papa Tig would know something was wrong. That was when Soungoula started to think of Papa Tig’s fury. He thought of Papa Tig’s big claws. Oh, that was certain death.

The Elders say that cats have seven lives. Soungoula has more than that. After a good rest to digest the seventh little tiger, he got up and formulated a plan. In the evening, when Papa Tig came, Soungoula was ready. What was strange was that on this day, Papa Tig could come closer. He did not hear “A, B, C, D!” at all. There was barely a sound.

However, Papa Tig could hear groaning. Oh yes, that was Soungoula’s voice. What could have happened? True enough, when Papa Tig got near him, Soungoula was sitting with his hand supporting his jaw, tears streaming down his face.

“Soungoula, what has happened? Where are the children?”

“Oh dear, Papa Tig. Last night a thief came and stole all the children. Now I don’t know what to do.”
Papa Tig saw lightning. He did not want to accept what he had heard. “What’s that, Soungoula? My children are not here? You have until tonight to bring them all back. All seven of them, you hear? If I come back tonight and you haven’t brought them back, you will know who I am.”

Soungoula was terrified. How was he going to escape from this situation? That very night, Papa Tig was going to eat him. Oh, no! Not this Soungoula. He settled in his armchair to think of a good trick. Before long, he was seen going towards Brer Monkey’s house. Brer Monkey was next door trying to boil some banana flowers. These days, farmers cut down their bananas before they were ripe enough for monkeys to eat. What could one do? Only the flowers were left on the ground. When Brer Monkey saw Soungoula coming, he hurriedly hid his boiled banana flowers in the bushes because he did not want to share it with him, even though they were supposed to be good friends. When there was hunger, nobody was a friend. However, what Soungoula had to tell him was a real surprise.

“Brer Monkey, my good friend. Tonight there will be a small occasion at my house. Nothing big, just a little dance among friends. I’ve got a little chicken to put in the pot, I think it will fix us just right.”
A chicken in the pot! Brer Monkey could not remember the last time he had had chicken. He jumped to accept Soungoula’s invitation. However, Soungoula was not done yet. As usual, there were conditions.

“Brer Monkey, I will sing a new song which I’ve just composed. I will sing out, you will answer.”

Brer Monkey was happy to accept any conditions. So, Soungoula taught him the song.

“Brer Monkey, I will sing: Lekel ki’n manz piti Papa Tig? Who ate Papa Tig’s children? You will answer: Mwan sa, Mwan sa, Mwan sa! Pour ganny lapo pour fer beleke ek beleko! It’s me! It’s me! It’s me! To get the skin, to make beleke and beleko!”

Har ya! Brer Monkey was careful to learn the song very well so he could sing later tonight. Before six o’clock, he was at Soungoula’s house. When he got there, he saw a boiling pot. A little steam and some bubbles escaped from under the lid from time to time. Ahh! Dinner was ready. Tonight he would eat chicken. Soungoula had an old broken violin over his shoulder and was trying to tune it.
“Brer Monkey, the food is not ready yet, so what do you say? Shall we tune up?”

“Of course, Brer Soungoula. I am ready when you are.”

It wasn’t long before the ball was in full swing.

“Lekel ki’n manz piti Papa Tig? Who ate Papa Tig’s children?”

“Mwan sa, Mwan sa, Mwan sa! Pour ganny lapo pour fer beleke ek beleko! It’s me! It’s me! It’s me! To get the skin, to make beleke and beleko!”

Brer Monkey was so happy at the prospect of having some chicken to eat that he jumped as he sang, until he was almost reaching the ceiling. Soungoula gave that violin everything he had. He thought Papa Tig must almost be there. He played louder and louder, and Brer Monkey jumped higher and higher, and sang louder and louder. True enough, Papa Tig was not far. As he approached, he was thinking about what he would do to Soungoula if he did not get his children back. When he heard the din, he stood back a little and listened. That was Soungoula’s voice. He listened harder. It was then that he understood the song.

“Lekel ki’n manz piti Papa Tig? Who ate Papa Tig’s children?”

“Mwan sa, Mwan sa, Mwan sa! Pour ganny lapo pour fer beleke ek beleko! It’s me! It’s me! It’s me! To get the skin, to make beleke and beleko!”
Papa Tig looked through the window and saw Brer Monkey responding to Soungoula’s chorus. He burst inside and went for Brer Monkey. Brer Monkey only had time to see Papa Tig’s claws coming for him. He told his feet to carry him, his tail stuck to his back as he went. It was a good thing the Great Master had given him long arms so he could swing up into the tree branches, otherwise that would have been the end of him. Soungoula almost died with laughter.

And that is why the Elders always say, as long as there are fools, the clever will always live.
Did you know?

Creole *konter* (storytellers) in the Seychelles begin their performances by calling out “Sirondann”, to which the listeners will reply “Zanbaget”.

Creole is one of three official languages of the Seychelles. The other two are English and French.

*Rakont zistwar* (storytelling) is a treasured part of Seychellois heritage and storytellers and singers pass on culture and social customs through folk tales, stories and songs.

Brer Soungoula is a monkey-like trickster who appears in many traditional Seychellois folktales.

Although this story features a family of tigers, tigers are not found in the wild in the Seychelles, or anywhere in Africa.
Once there was a smart little girl named Shasha. Curious and brave, she wanted to know everything. She lived with her family in the village of Wondi, which was surrounded by a beautiful forest.
In this forest lived a creature called Tumbu, who looked exactly like a maggot. But Tumbu was a giant maggot. Smaller than a grown-up elephant yet far bigger than a cow, he was a wonderful sight to see.

People loved to watch Tumbu while he was sleeping, but nobody dared venture close enough to disturb him. Tumbu became very angry when woken up. He slept most of the day and moved around at night looking for food. Tumbu was a quiet and peaceful creature, but could attack when angry or hungry. The villagers believed he could swallow a whole child if he became very hungry.
In Wondi, animals were protected by law. People killed only animals that were hunted for food, or those that wounded or killed people. All other animals were left alone. So, Tumbu was left alone to live peacefully and happily in the forest. He too left the people alone, letting them watch him from afar.

Children were warned not to go close to Tumbu. They were not even allowed to watch him by themselves. But Shasha was curious. She wanted to know everything about Tumbu.

"Is Tumbu’s skin tough or soft?" she asked one day during supper.

“We don’t know,” Mama and Papa answered.

“I will find out more about Tumbu for myself,” Shasha told Bukari, her older brother. Bukari told their parents.

“You know you must not go near Tumbu,” Mama said.

"Ar di se i lakunyi na ni kònkò ka mida. He will swallow you whole if he is hungry," Papa warned, and made Shasha promise not to go near Tumbu.

Shasha felt sad. She wanted to know many things about Tumbu.

No one knew whether Tumbu had teeth. No one had seen the inside of his mouth. She made up her mind to find out, but she would be careful. She would go near, but not too near. She waited for a chance.
One day Bukari took Shasha and the other children in their compound to go and pick mangoes in the nearby forest.

Half a mile inside the forest, they saw Tumbu sleeping under a tree far away from them. They stopped for a while to watch him and they all admired the great size of this giant maggot. They continued their journey holding their empty baskets and soon came to a place where there were lots of mangoes.

Bukari asked them to fill their baskets. He climbed from tree to tree, plucking mangoes, while the other children gathered them in their baskets.

Shasha coaxed four of her friends to join her to go back and watch Tumbu. They went quietly. The others did not notice.
Tumbu was fast asleep. They could hear him snoring. “We will take turns to go near and watch. Tamba you go first,” Shasha said. Tamba went forward but did not go very close.

“You go next, Makalay,” Shasha said. Makalay went forward. She went closer than Tamba, but not very close.

“You go next, Khalifa,” Shasha said. Khalifa went forward, watched and returned quickly.

“Your turn now, Jenebu,” Shasha said. Jenebu too watched and returned quickly.

“Now it’s my turn,” Shasha said and went forward.
She went closer than Jenebu. Too close. She stood and watched. Then she sat and watched. Then she jumped up and down and watched. Then she went even closer and watched. Her friends told her to be careful, but she did not hear them. They became very afraid. They ran back to tell Bukari and the others.

Shasha continued to watch Tumbu. She lay down and watched him. Then she stood on her head and watched him. And, finally, she stood right in front of Tumbu’s mouth and watched him.

At that moment, Tumbu opened his mouth wide and swallowed the young girl in one gulp. As she was being swallowed, Shasha noticed that Tumbu’s very large mouth was lined with very small teeth. Bukari and the others rushed back. They found Tumbu fast asleep again and saw that his belly was swollen. Tumbu had swallowed Shasha whole!
The children ran to the village to tell the grown-ups. The chief and the elders had a meeting. The chief told the hunters to capture Tumbu and save Shasha. Everyone felt sorry for Tumbu. He was such a wonderful creature.

But the hunters did not catch Tumbu. Their footsteps woke him up and he escaped into the thick forest beyond Wondi. The hunters chased him and searched everywhere. Days turned into months, which turned into years spent searching. Finally, they stopped. They believed they would never find Tumbu again.
Three years after Tumbu disappeared with Shasha, he returned to Wondi Forest. It was another mango season and Bukari and the other children were out again picking the sweet juicy fruit. They were greatly surprised to see Tumbu back in the forest, sleeping in the same spot where they saw him three years prior when he swallowed poor Shasha.

The children ran to the village to tell the grown-ups. The chief sent the hunters to go after Tumbu. “Make sure he doesn’t escape this time. Bring him to the village centre alive.”

This time the hunters were very careful. They captured Tumbu and took him to the village centre. The chief, the elders and all the villagers were waiting. The chief ordered the chief hunter to open Tumbu’s belly. Nobody knew what they would find inside. Would Shasha still be there? If she was there, would she be alive?

The chief hunter took out his knife. The people held their breath. But before the hunter could cut him, Tumbu opened his mouth wide. For the first time people saw the inside of Tumbu’s mouth. He had a fine set of teeth.
As they watched, out came Shasha.

Crying from happiness, she embraced her mother and father. She embraced her brother Bukari. She embraced her friends, Tamba, Makalay, Khalifa and Jenebu. Everyone in the village rejoiced. Shasha’s father slaughtered two goats. The women went to work preparing food and drinks. The musicians were invited. They had a great feast celebrating the return of Shasha. The feasting continued until late in the night.

Tumbu was taken back to the forest where he lived happily ever after next to the people of Wondi.

And Shasha never disobeyed her parents again.
Did you know?

Shasha and Tumbu the Giant Maggot is a version of a Mandingo folktale handed down through several generations. The theme and moral lesson of the story are as relevant today as they were centuries ago.

In rural communities, children usually gather around an elder during a full moon to hear the stories, once the evening chores are finished.

Storytelling is a lively tradition in Sierra Leone, incorporating dance, drumming and singing to enhance the story and provide entertainment.

Sierra Leone's capital, Freetown, hosts an annual storytelling festival to keep alive traditions of literary and oral storytelling. Students are encouraged to participate through competitions and special prizes.
Master Po and the Tiger

Story contributed by ASEAN Secretariat
Illustrated by U Kyaw Thu Rain
A young boy named Master Po used to play and wander in the forest. He was friends with all the animals, but he was particularly fond of the Tiger. မောင်ပိုကကျားကိုသိပ်ချစ်ခင် (Maung-Po-Ka-Kyar-Ko-That-_) Master Po loved the Tiger dearly but the Tiger could not be trusted. He longed to visit Master Po’s village to steal food from the villagers.

One day, the Tiger asked Master Po to take him to the village. “I cannot do that, Tiger,” replied Master Po. “The villagers dislike you because you hunt and eat their cattle.”

“If you won’t take me, I will go there by myself,” said the Tiger grumpily.

That evening, Master Po saw the Tiger wandering around the village gate. Master Po warned, “Friend Tiger, do not wander around here, the villagers will trap you.” But the Tiger ignored him.
That night, the Tiger went into the village and came out dragging a fat calf. The next day, Master Po visited the Tiger in the forest and begged, “Tiger, please listen to me. The villagers will prepare a trap for you, so do not come to our village again.” But the Tiger again ignored Master Po’s advice, only to walk right into the trap set by the villagers.

In the morning, the villagers found the Tiger in the trap and decided to leave him there. Master Po felt sorry for his friend, but he was afraid of his parents and other villagers. On the seventh day, Master Po went and opened the trap. “Run away now, Tiger,” said Master Po. “For our friendship, I will face the anger of my parents and other villagers.”
“Thank you,” replied the Tiger, “but I must eat you because I am so hungry and cannot hunt.” Master Po reasoned with the Tiger that he should not eat him because he had released the Tiger from the trap. In the end, they agreed to find a wise judge to decide the dispute.
They went into the forest and met the Banyan Tree. After listening to the story, the Banyan Tree gave his decision: “The Tiger should eat Master Po, because there is no such thing as a debt of gratitude. For example, human beings rest in my shade, from the heat and glare of the sun, yet they break my branches and take away my flowers.”
After listening to the story, the Rabbit said he would have to visit the trap before he could give his decision. So they went to the trap in the village. “Show me exactly how you stood in the trap,” the Rabbit ordered, and the Tiger went and stood in the trap. Master Po locked the trap. “The Tiger is back in his place, and you also have to go back to your place. The dispute is now over,” concluded the Rabbit. The Rabbit then went back to the forest, Master Po went back to his home, and they left the Tiger alone in the trap, punished for his greed.

Pleased with the Banyan Tree’s judgment, the Tiger roared: “I will eat you now!” But Master Po said they should find another judge, so they continued their search until they met the Rabbit.
The Monkey and the Turtle

Story contributed by ASEAN Secretariat
Illustrated by Jomike Tejido, in collaboration with Fundacion Sanso

Monkey and Turtle were once dear friends. While on a stroll by the river, they saw a banana plant floating on the water. Turtle decided to swim against the strong current with the tree, while Monkey stood at the edge of the stream and watched.

“Oh, Monkey, I have caught the banana tree. Will you help me drag it to the clearing and plant it? It will grow and there will be sweet bananas for all of us.”
Turtle pulled the tree by its heavy end – the roots and the trunk – across the ground. Monkey carried just a couple of green leaves from the top end of the tree.

“Share the tree,” said Monkey.

“Very well,” said Turtle.
Monkey climbed halfway up the tree, just below where the green leaves grew, and with his strong hands he broke off the top of the tree and ran away with it.

Monkey thought the top part was better, so he planted it and watched in dismay as it died. Meanwhile, Turtle planted the roots and was rewarded with a fine tree with fruits.

Since Turtle could not climb to get the bananas himself, he asked Monkey to get one for him.
Monkey then climbed the banana tree, took one yellow banana and ate it, tossing the skin down upon the shell of Turtle. Monkey ate one banana, then another, and another, burying Turtle under empty banana peels.
An angry Turtle went and fetched thorns and placed them around the trunk of the banana tree. When Monkey found himself full after eating all of the bananas, he jumped down from the tree, only to land on the sharp thorns. Monkey ran, the thorns pushing further into the bottom of his feet with each stride. Full of pain and anger, he sat down to pull the thorns from his feet.

When he was done, he ran and quickly caught Turtle.

"I am going to carry you to the cliffs and dash you down upon the rocks so your shell breaks! I’m going to take you to the top of the mountain of fire and throw you into the flames!"

"Yes, yes," said Turtle. "Ihagis mo ako sa apoy! Throw me into the flames! O kaya’y itulak mo ako sa bangin nang mahulog ako sa batuhan! Yes, dash me from the cliff onto the rocks! Pero kahit ano pa gawin mo Matsing, huwag na huwag mo lang akong ihagis sa malakas na agos ng ilog! But whatever you do, Monkey, don't throw me into the torrent of the river!"
“Ah, that’s what you’re afraid of,” said Monkey. Monkey ran, carrying Turtle to the edge of the river, and tossed him high into the air. Turtle landed with a splash in the deep waters and sank down... and rose to the surface with a bright smile. “Oh, Monkey, don’t you know that turtles love to swim in the river?” And with that, he escaped and left Monkey alone on the riverbank.
Did you know?

**Kuwentuhan**, in the Philippines' Tagalog language, is associated with the act of sharing and preserving stories.

In Filipino culture, storytelling is a way to stay close to one's ancestors, and pass down knowledge, wisdom and values to the next generation.

The Philippines' body of myths, tales and belief systems attempts to explain the nature of the world through the lives and actions of gods, heroes and mythological creatures.

Most of these myths were passed on through oral tradition and preserved through the aid of spiritual leaders, community elders, or healers known as shamans.
Nekwa lived in a village with lots of baobab trees, and just like many of the other children in the village, she loved playing around their huge thick trunks.

Baobab trees often have giant holes in their trunks, so the adults of the village had warned the children to be very careful around them. And the children were told to never, ever pass wind near the tree, or it would swallow them up.
One day, Nekwa and her two friends, Niilonga and Nuusiku, went to play under the baobab tree. While they were playing, Nuusiku passed wind. Suddenly, a big hole opened up and before they could run away, the hole pulled them in and closed from inside.
A few days later, an old woman came to look for firewood. As she was hitting the baobab tree roots to get her firewood, she heard singing.

“Woman hitting the roots of the baobab tree – pum pum.

“Go speak to our family – pum, pum.

“Tell them the baobab tree has swallowed us up – pum, pum.

“It has swallowed Nekwa – pum, pum.

“It has swallowed Niilonga – pum, pum.

“And Nuusiku – pum, pum.”
The old lady ran quickly to tell the other villagers about the voices she had heard singing from the baobab tree. The old woman and the villagers returned to the tree, bringing carpenters who could cut it open and free the children.
The carpenters tried with their big axes and sharp knives. They used all the tools they could find, but none of them could open the tree.

“What can we do?” the villagers asked each other. “There must be a way to free the children.”

“I know,” said a very wise person. “Let’s ask the birds for their help.”
First, they called Kathithi, the blue waxbill. Kathithi started hitting the baobab tree with his beak. He looked proud as he did it, and he was singing “I’m Kathithi, I’m Kathithi.” After a while, though, Kathithi bent his beak.

The second bird that came was Kola, the crow. He also acted very proud, singing “I'm Kola, I'm Kola, I’m fearless and I’m proud.” But before long, the crow bent his beak too.

Next, Ekodhi, the hawk, came and sang “Ekodhi is here to save you, Ekodhi is here to save you.” But the hawk also bent his beak.
They decided to call yet another bird, Mbangula, the woodpecker. Mbangula came and sang, “When you’re eating you never call Mbangula, but when you have work to do you’re quick to call Mbangula. Dig, dig, dig.” Mbangula started digging through the baobab tree using his beak, singing while he was doing it.

Once there was a small hole, Mbangula sang: “When you’re eating you never call Mbangula, but when you have work you’re quick to call Mbangula. Hit, hit, hit.”
Soon enough the hole was big enough for the children to reach their hands out. Then it was big enough for people to see the children’s faces. Eventually the hole was big enough for the children to crawl through.

The villagers cooked food and served drinks to thank Mbangula and the other birds for saving their children. And the children learned their lesson, and never played too close to the baobab tree again.
The baobab tree is also known as the Tree of Life. Its naturally dried fruits and leaves make it a food source, and its medicinal properties are sought around the world. Its bark can be turned onto cloth and the tree also stores water.

The baobab tree has an incredible lifespan and can survive for 1,500 years or more. It is often called the ‘upside-down tree’ because its branches look like roots.

Many of Namibia’s stories involve the country’s native plants and animals, and offer lessons about how they should be treated and respected.

Namibia has a strong tradition of omahokolo (which means oral storytelling in Namibia’s Oshiwambo language). Different ethnic communities have their own traditions of storytelling, however the messages and lessons all have a purpose – to educate, entertain and inform.
There once was a hare named Tsuro, whose best friend was a baboon named Gudo. Tsuro and Gudo were as thick as thieves and utterly inseparable. Their bond had been destined by their families, who shared a special husahwira (which means 'friendship' in Zimbabwe's Shona language), one for the ages and generations to come.
Much of the time, however, Tsuro and Gudo’s friendship would often land them in trouble. With matching mischievous smiles and playful twinkles in their eyes, the dynamic duo would never run out of cunning ways to play impressive pranks on each other.

No matter how well Tsuro and Gudo knew and loved each other, neither could anticipate the tricks the other had up his sleeve. Each new prank was more hysterical than the last and taught them something about themselves and each other. In fact, their love for tricks and hilarious treachery strengthened their bond.

One afternoon, Tsuro was lost in his imagination trying to concoct new tricks, when Gudo’s yells made him jump from his thoughts. Gudo told Tsuro of his upcoming journey to a faraway land where a tribal festival was taking place. Tsuro, who had never had the pleasure of long-distance travel before, leapt up and pleaded with Gudo to let him accompany him on this exciting journey.
Gudo was touched by the fact that Tsuro cared so much about their friendship to want to travel such long distances with him. He gladly accepted, grateful for the opportunity to experience a great new adventure with his closest friend.
Shamwari mbiri idzi dzakafamba kamufambo karefu refu dzamara dzasvika kumabiko.

The two friends travelled far and wide, and finally arrived at the festival.
Upon their arrival, Gudo was swept up in the excitement of meeting his tribal kith and kin and scampered up the trees to the lofty venue, forgetting that his companion, Tsuro, could not climb trees.

He blended in with his extended family of fellow baboons, not realising Tsuro’s sense of discomfort as he stood on the sidelines watching the festivities, all the while dodging the occasional bones and other food bits thrown to the ground, narrowly missing his head.

Tsuro didn’t experience the same ease in blending in with the baboons and was convinced that Gudo had found better friends.
Feeling abandoned by his one true friend, he began to concoct his most treacherous prank yet. He patiently waited until the troop had had their fill and retired to bed. Back then, baboons slept in a circle, facing away from each other, with their tails together in the centre of the circle.

Seizing his moment of mischief, Tsuro crept up to the centre of the circle and carefully tied all the tails together in one tight knot. He then skipped to the outer edge of the circle and lit a large ring of fire around the sleeping troop.
Feeling the intense heat, the baboons tore themselves out of sleep and tried to run, but because they slept in a circle, they ran in opposing directions and their tails being tied together, anchored them to the centre of the circle. Like rubber bands, their tails sprung them back to the centre of the circle each time they tried to run.

Meanwhile, the fire grew bigger and ever so nearer. With tears in their eyes, the baboons begged Tsuro, who was by now roaring with laughter, to untie them. Tsuro, who was still bitter from the way his friend Gudo had treated him earlier, reluctantly agreed. But, on one condition; that they give him all of their family’s wealth. Tsuro grabbed a large sack and began to empty Gudo’s family’s home of every piece of gold, every coin, every item of jewellery. Without a second thought or a single regret, Tsuro walked away proud of committing his most treacherous – and least humorous – prank.
After watching his friend disappear into the horizon, Gudo opened the door to find that their entire house had been emptied of everything that generations of his family had worked tirelessly to earn. While Gudo was ridden with guilt over costing his family their wealth, Tsuro returned home a wealthy man with a mountain of treasure.

Sadly, as the years passed, however, he found himself deprived of and missing true friendship. Never again did he meet anyone as faithful as Gudo and over time he came to realise that friendship, built on kindness and understanding, had been his greatest and most precious wealth.
In Zimbabwe, oral storytelling is the primary form of preserving history, traditional culture and ritual ceremonies. Storytelling was part of Zimbabwe's heritage long before writing and reading.

A call-and-response format is often used in Zimbabwe's oral storytelling. This involves a mutauri wengano (storyteller) starting with “Paivepo” (“Once upon a time”) to which the audience responds by saying "Dzepfundę" (a phrase assuring the storyteller that they are following the story). As the storyteller goes through the storyline, the audience continues to respond until the story is finished.

There are many versions of this story due to dialect and tribal variations as well as the natural evolution of language and creative license of storytellers, but the general story and its lessons remain unchanged.

Did you know?

The story of The Hare and the Baboon has been told for generations around fires as adults and children relaxed and bonded after supper and before retiring for the day.
Friends come in all shapes and sizes, which explains how a tiny worm and a mighty whale might help each other and become lifelong companions.

That's a happy story.

But could you trade away your most valuable possessions and discover that you are somehow even happier than ever before? Read the stories of Meme Heylay Heylay and Hans to find out.

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Meme
Heylay Heylay

As told by Kunzang Choden
 Illustrated by Tharchen Tharchen
Meme Heylay Heylay was an elderly man who lived with the support and goodwill of his fellow villagers. One day he decided to dig a plot of land so he could plant some buckwheat. He dug and he dug until he came across a huge stump of a tree, but rather than going around the tree stump, Meme Heylay Heylay decided to dig it out. After a tremendous effort lasting the whole day, he finally uprooted the stump. To his great surprise and delight, he found a giant piece of turquoise beneath the stump.
Meme Heylay Heylay decided to sell the turquoise, in the hope of finding an even greater treasure. First, he accepted a horse in exchange for the precious stone, despite the greater value of the turquoise.
Next, he swapped his horse for a goat. With each exchange, he accepted something smaller in value than what he gave away. Yet he grew happier and more joyful, even though people saw him as a fool.

On his way home, carrying the rooster he received in exchange for the goat, the old man heard someone singing in the distance. The closer he walked to the singer, and the louder the song became, the more joyous he felt. With tears in his eyes he thought, “I am content hearing this song. How much happier I would be if I knew how to sing it myself.”
He told the singer of his discovery of turquoise and his many exchanges, saying that no exchange would be as precious as that for the singer’s song. After much discussion, the singer was convinced that the old man was serious and he taught Meme Heylay Heylay the song. The old man departed, singing merrily.

Meme Heylay Heylay felt like the most successful trader in the village, the richest man in Bhutan and, most importantly, the happiest person in the world. Even though he had in the end swapped the valuable turquoise stone for a simple song, it was this that brought him the greatest pleasure.
Did you know?

The story of Meme Heylay
Heylay is a well-known and well-loved folk story in Bhutan. Although it is set in a rural village, its messages of contentment and happiness are for people everywhere.

Meme means ‘grandfather’ in Dzongkha and spending time with family is a wonderful part of life in Bhutan. During this time, parents and grandparents will entertain the younger members of the family with their favourite folktales and stories.

The Bhutanese tradition of oral storytelling is musical and vibrant. Traditionally it was interactive and the words of the story were often sung so everybody could join in the chorus.

In Bhutan, success is measured in different ways to many other countries. Happiness and contentment are very important, as is the well-being of the environment.
It was a winter’s day and Worm was wriggling around in his underground home. It was nice and warm down there, with an earthy smell and just the right amount of moisture in the soil.

All of a sudden, the peace and tranquility was interrupted by something sharp and cold crashing through the ceiling of Worm’s home. It was a ‘huo-sipeiti’ – a gardening spear. Worm fled as fast as his long, squishy body would allow and didn’t stop until he reached the seashore.

Once he’d caught his breath, Worm looked out to sea and saw a Vaka La (which means ‘sailing boat’ in the Tongan language) getting ready to leave. Fearful of the spear being on his tail, he wriggled his way into a nearby basket and took cover.
He felt the woven basket move and peered out through a gap. Uh oh! The basket had been picked up and taken onto the sailing boat. Away Worm went, out to sea in a woven basket on a sailing boat.

Worm looked around. He saw spears and harpoons, and realised with horror that he was on a whaling boat and the men on board were whalers. They had their eyes focused on a sleeping whale and began to close in for the kill.

Worm thought hard. What could he do to save this beautiful creature of the sea? An idea popped into his head. He screamed, louder than he’d ever screamed before, to wake the whale. “Whale, wake up! Wake up Whale!” he roared.

Luckily whales have very good hearing and pick up sounds and frequencies that humans otherwise can’t register, such as worms using their loudest voices. Whale woke with a startle, realising the imminent danger. In his haste to escape, he flipped the boat, sending Worm tumbling into the sea.
Worm was scared. He didn’t know how to swim. But Whale knew he could not let Worm drown after Worm had saved his life. Whale took a deep breath and plunged beneath the surface. Worm wriggled onto Whale’s smooth, rubbery skin and held on for the journey back to land. Upon his safe return, Worm was so grateful that this journey, although life-threatening, gave him a new Kaume'a (friend). From that day on, Worm and Whale promised to be there for each other in times of joy and trouble.

Since then, in the months of June and July when humans prepare the soil for yam planting by digging the earth with ‘huo-sipeiti’, Whale, mindful of his scared little friend, will appear close to the shore to offer comfort. And Worm closely watches the horizon, making sure that the only boats that go near Whale are those carrying humans with cameras and not harpoons.
Humpback whales grow to between 15 and 19 metres in length (about the size of a bus) and weigh around 40 tons. Their annual migration from the Antarctic, along the east coast of New Zealand to Tonga is around 6,000 kilometres.

Did you know?

Storytelling is a family event in Tonga and traditional fables and myths are passed down through the generations, as is the case throughout the Pacific islands.

In 1978, Tonga became the world’s first whale (Tofua’a) sanctuary. Since the ban on hunting and killing whales in Tongan waters, the whale breeding population has grown from fewer than 50 whales to more than 2,000.

There are many popular myths and fables (Talatupu’a moe Fepale in Tongan) across the Kingdom of Tonga, however The Worm and the Whale is best known in the most northern island groups.
Hans had spent many years away from his home. He worked and studied tirelessly to become a master craftsman, putting in many hours, day and night, to hone his skills. After seven years, he was finally given permission to return home to his mother, who he loved dearly and had missed terribly during his time away. Hans was overjoyed.

“You have been a hard worker, Hans,” his mentor said as he was about to set off on his journey home.
“I would like to reward you for your years of dedicated service with this gold nugget.” Hans gratefully accepted the large and very heavy lump of precious metal. It was beautiful and shiny, but it was so, so heavy.

After expressing his gratitude and bidding his mentor a fond goodbye, Hans began his long journey home on foot. Before long, the gold nugget started to slow him down. It was becoming heavier with each step and Hans was growing weary of its weight. He sat down to rest under the shade of a tree and closed his eyes.
Clip clop, clip clop, sounded the hooves of an approaching horse. Hans opened his eyes just as the horse’s rider dismounted and called out a greeting.

“Why are you taking a nap under this tree?” the rider asked.

“I am on my way home to see my mother. I have been working away from home for seven years and have not seen her this whole time. I am so eager to return, but this heavy lump of gold is slowing me down,” Hans replied.
The horseman had an idea. “Why don’t I swap you my horse for your gold? The horse is very quick, so you will arrive home much faster, and you won’t be weighed down by that big lump of gold.”

Hans agreed that it was indeed a very clever idea and eagerly swapped his heavy nugget for the speedy horse. After a quick horse-riding lesson, Hans was on his way once again, grateful that the horseman had come along at such an opportune time.

The horse walked comfortably at first and as Hans settled into his new ride, he decided to give it a kick to make it go faster. “Heeyah, faster horse, faster,” Hans commanded as he nudged the horse in its sides. The horse bolted at such a speed that Hans lost his grip and fell off.

Assessing his body for damage, Hans slowly got to his feet and started to look for his horse. A farmer with a cow came along and offered to help the limping Hans find his horse. As they searched, Hans told the farmer about his journey so far and his desire to get home to see his mother.
The farmer had an idea. “Why don’t I swap you my cow for your horse? Your horse is wild and has given you nothing but trouble, but my cow is gentle and can provide you with Milch, Butter und Käse (milk, butter and cheese).”
Hans agreed that this was indeed a very clever idea and once they had caught the horse, he eagerly handed over the reins and set off again, walking with the cow by his side and counting his blessings that the farmer had come along at such an opportune time.

After some time, Hans grew hungry and stopped to have some lunch. He was so hungry that he ate all of his bread and butter, and drank all of his water. He wasn't worried though. He would be able to get fresh milk from his cow to quench his thirst and quell his hunger.

Although he didn’t have a bucket to catch the milk, he knelt down beside the cow and tried to squeeze some milk into his hat. Nothing came out. Hans tried again and again, to no avail. His cow was dry. The cow was irritated by Hans’s persistence and kicked him hard in the head, sending him tumbling to the ground.

When Hans awoke, a butcher with a pig in a wheelbarrow had stopped to check on him. Hans told him the story of how he was trying to get home to his mother and had swapped his heavy gold nugget for a horse, which had thrown him off, so he swapped it for this cow, which unfortunately produced no milk.
“This cow is good for nothing but the plough or the butcher,” the man replied as he passed Hans a drink to satisfy his thirst.

“But I don’t like beef,” Hans said. “It is not juicy enough for me.”

The butcher had an idea. “Why don’t I swap you my pig for your cow? You can make some nice sausages.”

Hans agreed that this was indeed a very clever idea and fetched the pig from the wheelbarrow and handed the cow’s rope to the butcher. He set off again, walking alongside the pig to get home to his mother and thinking how lucky he was to meet the butcher at such an opportune time.

A man carrying a white goose joined Hans as he walked and Hans shared the story of his journey. The man’s goose was fat and heavy, and was destined for a christening feast.

“This is a fine goose,” the man said. “It has been fattened up for eight weeks.”

“My pig is also a fine fat one,” Hans replied cheerfully.
The man agreed as he eyed the pig suspiciously from all angles. “I don’t mean to alarm you, but the mayor’s pig was stolen recently and there is a search party looking for it. Your pig looks a lot like the one that’s missing,” the man warned.

Hans started to get nervous. If this was the stolen pig and he was caught with it, he would not get home to see his mother.

The man had an idea. “Why don’t I swap you my fat goose for your pig? I know this area well and I can hide the pig.”

Hans agreed that this was indeed a very clever idea and eagerly exchanged the pig for the fine white goose. He set off again, thinking about the meal the goose would provide and how its soft feathers would plump up his pillow. He was grateful that the man with the goose appeared at such an opportune time.
As Hans passed through the final village before his home he came across a scissor-grinder merrily singing a song as he worked. Hans stopped to listen to his tune and ask why he was so happy.
“I have the best trade in the world,” the scissor-grinder explained. “Each time I put my hand in my pocket, I find money.”

The grinder admired Hans’s goose, so Hans told him the story of his journey and his good fortune as he swapped a heavy lump of gold for a wild horse, which was exchanged for a dry cow, which was swapped for a stolen pig, which was exchanged for this fine fat goose.

“Yes, that is a lovely goose, but it won’t make you money and after you eat it, it will be gone. If you were a grinder you would have enough money to buy several geese.”

Hans thought about this. The man was right.

But how could he become a scissor-grinder?

The scissor-grinder had an idea. “All you need is a grindstone. Why don’t I swap you a grindstone for your goose? Then you will have the right tool to earn a good living.”
Hans agreed that this was indeed a very clever idea and handed over the fat white goose for the grindstone.

It was heavy, but Hans could not believe his luck at this exchange. He had met the scissor-grinder at such an opportune time.
With a spring in his step, Hans set off on the final leg of his journey home. Before long however, he was tired and thirsty.

The grindstone was very heavy and he longed to be free of it.

He stopped at a well to get some water to drink and placed his grindstone down beside him. As he reached into the well, Hans slipped and fell on the grindstone.

It slid deep beneath the water’s surface, never to be seen again.

Hans could not believe this fortunate turn of events. He was now free of the heavy grindstone and the final steps of his journey would be quick and easy with nothing weighing him down. He ran home to his mother and told her he was surely the luckiest man in the world.
Did you know?

This German folk tale is an adaptation of Hans im Glück, which was recorded by the famous Brothers Grimm and published in Grimm’s Fairy Tales in 1812.

The Grimm Brothers were among the best known collectors of European folktales and popularised traditional oral stories such as Cinderella (Aschenputtel), Sleeping Beauty (Dornröschen) and Snow White (Schneewittchen).

Many Disney stories are adaptations of folktales originally published by the Brothers Grimm.

The English fairy tale “The Hedley Kow” contains a similar sequence to Hans in Luck, in that the main character persuades herself that every exchange is proof of her good luck.

This story shares many similarities with the Bhutanese folktale “Meme Heylay Heylay”, which explores how ultimate happiness can be achieved with simpler pleasures instead of precious materials.
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