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Arts On The Move

## Stories from Other Cultures

### How Anansi Became King Of All Stories

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Once upon a time, all tales and stories belonged to Nyame, the Sky God. But Kwaku Anansi, the spider, yearned to be the owner of all stories known in the world, so he went to Nyame with the request that he be named King Of All Stories and offered to buy them.

Nyame told Anansi that many people had come to him offering to buy the tales and stories, but they were unable to meet his demands. The Chiefs, Great Warriors, Rich and Powerful families had not been able to pay Nyame or meet his demands.

He asked Anansi, "what makes you think that you will be able to do it? Do you think you can do it?"

Anansi replied, "I can do it. What is the price?"

Nyame, the sky God, then said to Anansi, "you could get the title only if you could catch Osebo, the Jaguar with teeth like daggers, Mmoboro, the Hornets whose sting is like fire, and Onini, the great Python. For these things I will give you the title of King Of All Stories and the right to tell all the stories."

"Very well," Anansi said. "I shall bring them to you."

Anansi went home and made his plans. He first cut a gourd from a vine and made a small hole in it. He then took a large bowl, filled it with water and went to the tree where the hornets lived. He poured some of the water over himself, so that he was dripping. He then threw some water over the Hornets, so that they would think it was raining.

Then he put the bowl on his head, as though to protect himself from a storm, and called out to the hornets, "are you foolish people? Why do you stay in the rain that is falling?"

The hornets answered, "where shall we go?"

"Come here, in this dry gourd." Anansi told them.

The hornets thanked him and flew into the gourd through the small hole. When the last of them had entered, Anansi plugged the hole with a ball of grass, saying, "Oh, yes, but you are really foolish people!" He felt pleased with himself: 'Kwaku Anansi has tricked Mmoboro into pretending it's raining and offered them a hiding place in a calabash.'

Anansi took his gourd full of hornets to Nyame and he accepted them with surprise, but then said, "there are two more things." Anansi nodded. Anansi returned to the forest and cut a long bamboo pole and some strong vines. At a nearby river, he sat on a log; he waited and waited until a snake came along.

Then he walked toward Onini, the great python, talking to himself in a very loud voice and pretending to be arguing with someone. "I say he is longer and stronger. My wife says he is shorter and weaker. I give him more respect. She gives him less respect. Is she right or am I right? I am right, he is longer. I am right, he is stronger."

When Onini, the python, heard Anansi talking to himself he said, "why are you arguing this way with yourself? What's wrong?"

Kwaku Anansi replied, "Ah, I have had a dispute with my wife. She says you are shorter and weaker than this bamboo pole. I say you are longer and stronger."

Onini said, "it is useless and silly to argue when you can find out the truth. Bring the pole and we will measure."

So Anansi laid the pole on the ground, and the python came and stretched himself out beside it.

"You seem a little short." Anansi said. The python stretched further.

"A little more." Anansi said.

"I can stretch no more." Onini replied.

"When you stretch at one end, you get shorter at the other end." Anansi said. "Let me tie you at the front so you don't slip."

Anansi tied Onini's head to the pole. Then he went to the other end and tied the tail to the pole. He wrapped the vine all around Onini, until the python couldn't move.

"Onini," Anansi said, "it turns out that my wife was right and I was wrong. You are shorter than the pole and weaker. My opinion wasn't as good as my wife's. But you were even more foolish than I, and you are now my prisoner."

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Anansi carried the python to Nyame, the Sky God, who was pleased. "Anasi, I'm impressed," he said, "you've done two of the three. Now bring me the Osebo, the leopard and the stories are freed." Anansi nodded and, again, rushed home and started to plot.

Anansi went into the forest and dug a deep pit where the leopard liked to walk. He covered it with small branches and leaves and put dust on it, so that it was impossible to tell where the pit was. Then he went away and hid. When Osebo came prowling in the black of night, he stepped into the trap Anansi had prepared and fell to the bottom of the pit. Anansi heard the sound of the leopard falling and said, "Ah, Osebo, you are half-foolish."

When morning came, Anansi went to the pit and saw the leopard still there. "Osebo," he asked, "what are you doing in this hole?"

"I have fallen into a trap." Osebo said. "Help me out." "I would gladly help you," Anansi said, "but I'm sure that if I bring you out, I will have no thanks for it. You will get hungry and later on you will be wanting to eat me and my children."

"I promise it won't happen!" Osebo said.

"Very well." Anansi said. "Since you promise it, I will take you out." He then bent a tall green tree toward the ground, so that its top was over the pit, and he tied it that way. Then he tied a rope to the top of the tree and dropped the other end of it into the pit.

"Tie this to your tail." He said. Osebo tied the rope to his tail.

"Is it well tied?" Anansi asked.

"Yes, it is well tied." The leopard said.

"In that case," Anansi said, "you are not merely half-foolish, you are all-foolish."

And he took his knife and cut the other rope, the one that held the tree bowed to the ground. The tree straightened up with a snap, pulling Osebo out of the hole. He hung in the air head downward, twisting and turning. As he twisted and turned, he got so dizzy that Anansi had no trouble tying the leopard's feet with vines.

Anansi took the dizzy leopard, all tied up, to Nyame, the Sky God, saying, "Here's the third thing. Now I have paid the price."

Nyame said to him, "Kwaku Anansi, great warriors and chiefs have tried, but they have been unable to do it. You have done it. Therefore, I will give you the stories. From this day onward, all stories belong to you and, whenever a man tells a story, he must acknowledge that it is Anansi's tale."

And that is why, in parts of Africa, the people love to tell, and love to hear, the stories they call 'spider stories'. And now you have heard one too.

Taken from the website of the Ghanaian Migrants Information Services:

[www.gmiservices.com](http://www.gmiservices.com)

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