GRIOTS- AFRICAN STORY TELLERS

After a good evening meal, with the moon shining down, the people of a village in ancient Africa might hear the sound of a drum, a rattle, and a voice that shouted, “Come hear, come hear!” These were the sounds of the griot, the storyteller.

When they heard the call, the children knew they were going to hear a wonderful story, with music and dancing and song! Perhaps tonight the story would be about [**Anansi, the little spider**](http://africa.mrdonn.org/anansi.html)!

Everyone loved Anansi. Anansi could weave the most beautiful webs. He was the one who taught the people of Ghana how to weave the beautiful Mud cloth. Anansi had a good wife, strong sons, and many friends. He got into many a mess, and used his wits and the power of humor to escape.

There were other stories the people loved to hear over and over. Some stories were about the history of the tribe. Some were about great wars and battles. Some were about everyday life. There was no written language in ancient Africa. The storytellers kept track of the history of the people.

Anansi the Spider

Once upon a time, a long time ago, there lived a spider named Anansi. Anansi's wife was a very good cook. But always, Anansi loved to taste the food that others in the village made for themselves and for their families.

One day, he stopped by Rabbit's house. Rabbit was his good friend.

"There are greens in your pot," cried Anansi excitedly. Anansi loved greens.

"They are not quite done," said Rabbit. "But they will be soon. Stay and eat with me."

"I would love to, Rabbit, but I have some things to do," Anansi said hurriedly. If he waited at Rabbit's house, Rabbit would certainly give him jobs to do. "I know," said Anansi. "I'll spin a web. I'll tie one end around my leg and one end to your pot. When the greens are done, tug on the web, and I'll come running!"

Rabbit thought that was a great idea. And so it was done.

"I smell beans," Anansi sniffed excitedly as he ambled along. "Delicious beans, cooking in a pot."

"Come eat our beans with us," cried the monkeys. "They are almost done."

"I would love to Father Monkey," said Anansi. And again, Anansi suggested he spin a web, with one end tied around his leg, and one end tied to the big bean pot.

Father Monkey thought that was a great idea. All his children thought so, too. And so it was done.

"I smell sweet potatoes," Anansi sniffed happily as he ambled along. "Sweet potatoes and honey, I do believe!"

"Anansi," called his friend Hog. "My pot is full of sweet potatoes and honey! Come share my food with me."

"I would love to," said Anansi. And again, Anansi suggested he spin a web, with one end tied around his leg, and one end tied to the sweet potato pot.

His friend Hog thought that was a great idea. And so it was done.

By the time Anansi arrived at the river, he had one web tied to each of his eight legs.

"This was a wonderful idea," Anansi told himself proudly. "I wonder whose pot will be ready first?"

Just then, Anansi felt a tug at his leg. "Ah," said Anansi. "That is the web string tied to Rabbit's greens." He felt another. And another. Anansi was pulled three ways at once.

"Oh dear," said Anansi as he felt the fourth web string pull.

Just then, he felt the fifth web string tug. And the sixth. And the seventh. And the eighth. Anansi was pulled this way and that way, as everyone pulled on the web strings at once. His legs were pulled thinner and thinner. Anansi rolled quickly into the river. When all the webs had washed away, Anansi pulled himself painfully up on shore.

"Oh my, oh my," sighed Anansi. "Perhaps that was not such a good idea after all."

To this day, Anansi the Spider has eight very thin legs. And he never got any food that day at all.

The Lions Whisker

Once upon a time, a long time ago, there lived a young husband and wife in a small village in Africa. For some time now, the husband had not been happy with his marriage. He began to come home late from working in the fields. His wife thought he was the most wonderful man. But she was unhappy, too. His behavior was making her miserable.

Finally, she went to the oldest man in her village, the village elder. The elder was sad to hear her marriage was not a happy one. He had married them only two years before. At the time, he was sure that the marriage would be a good one.

"Of course I will end your marriage if that is what you want," he told the young wife, after listening patiently for a while. "You will be free to marry again. But is that really what you want?"

"I want my husband to be loving," she said. "I want to be loving. We are both miserable." 

"I think I can help you," the elder said slowly. "I can prepare a secret potion that will change your husband into a loving man."

"Prepare this magic potion at once!" the young wife cried out excitedly.

"I could make it," he said sadly. "But I am missing an important ingredient. I am too old to get this ingredient for you. You must bring it to me."

"What do you need?" the young wife asked eagerly. "I'll bring it today."

"I need a single whisker taken from a living lion to make the potion work."

Her eyes widened in alarm. She bit her bottom lip. She straightened her shoulders. "I'll get it for you," she nodded.

The next morning, the young wife carried a huge piece of raw meat down to the river where lions sometimes came to drink. She hid behind a tree and waited. After waiting many hours, a lion ambled down to the river to have a drink. He sniffed at the raw meat. In three bites, the meat was gone. He raised his mighty head. He knew she there. The young wife held her breath. The mighty lion moved slowly back into the forest and disappeared.

The next day, the young wife came again. This time, the lion appeared quite quickly. This continued for many days. Days became weeks. Each day, the woman crept from her hiding place behind the tree, moving closer and closer to the lion.

At the end of four weeks, she moved quietly next to the lion and sat silently while he ate. Her hand shaking, she reached slowly out and pulled a whisker from his chin. Holding her prize firmly in one hand, she sat frozen until the lion had disappeared back into the forest.

She ran to the elder, waving her whisker. "I have it," she shouted. "I have it!"

The elder was in awe when he heard her story. "You do not need magic to change your husband back into the loving man he once was. You are brave enough to pull a whisker from the chin of a living lion. It took cleverness and bravery to do what you have done. Can you not use that same patience and courage and wit with your husband?

"But the potion," the young wife said eagerly. "Would not that work as well?"

"Perhaps," the elder told her. "But it would not last. Trust me, my child. Show your husband each day that you love him. Share his problems. Make him feel welcome. Make him feel wanted and needed. Give him time to change and see what happens."

The young wife went home and followed the elder's advice. Slowly, her husband began to return from the fields with the other men of the village. He began to look glad to see her. Within a year, their life was a happy one.

**The Lion and the Jackal**

Shortly after the lion and the jackal set off hunting together, the lion killed a fine fat zebra. 'Run back to my house while I look for more game,' said the lion 'and tell my children to come and carry home the meat.' But the jackal ran quickly to his own house and called his own children who soon carried away all the meat. The lion could find no more game, so he stopped hunting and went home.

'Is that not a fine zebra I killed?' he boasted to wife the lioness. She looked puzzled. 

'We see no zebra,' she growled.

'What? Did not the jackal come and tell the children to carry home the meat?' he asked.

'He did not, and we are starving,' was the reply. The lion was furious. He strode to the jackal's home, which was high up on a rocky ledge, and could only be reached by a rope.

In a little while, the jackal came down to drink after his large meal, and out jumped the lion. The jackal ran with all his might and just managed to dodge down a small hole, but not before the lion grabbed him by his tail.

'Now I've got you!' he roared.

'What do you mean?' returned the jackal, 'That is not my tail you are pulling, it is just an old root. If you don’t believe me, hit it with a stone and see if it bleeds.’

The lion thought this would be wise and went look for stones, which, however, were not plentiful. When he returned the jackal was long gone. On finding that he had been tricked, the lion was furious, and went rampaging off to the jackal's rocky stronghold. ‘Ho there, little jackal,' he roared. The jackal peeped the edge. He was safe, so he was cheeky.

'Who are you?' he shouted back. 'What is your name? Whose son are you? Who was your father? Where are you from? Where are you going? Who do you want? Why?'

The lion replied, 'I have merely come to see you. Just let down the rope so I can come up.' The little jackal let down a rope of mouse skins, and when the lion climbed a good way up, it broke and he fell. The jackal laughed, and the poor lion went home to nurse a very sore head.