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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Daniel S. Qualls entitled "Tricksters from Three Folklore Traditions." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

Thomas Turner, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Ed Counts, Dorothy Hendricks, Schuyler Huck

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Tricksters from Three Folklore Traditions

A Dissertation Presented for
the Doctor of Philosophy Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Daniel S. Qualls
August 2008

For
Wendy

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful first and foremost to my mentor and dissertation chair, Dr. Thomas Turner, for his guidance and patience. I know that I would not have had the confidence to tackle a project involving children's literature if not for his encouragement and his wealth of knowledge. I also wish to acknowledge the assistance and creative insight of my dissertation committee members: Drs. Ed Counts, Dorothy Hendricks, and Schuyler Huck, all of whose input was much appreciated. Dr. Hendricks has been a great social science educator model for me to emulate, and I have enjoyed working as her graduate assistant this past year. I would also like to acknowledge the support I have gotten over the years from my former Lyndhurst supervisor and the coordinator of School Based Experiences, Amy Wormsley. I have been able to bounce ideas off her over the years, and I hope to do so in the future.

A year ago, me and fellow doctoral candidate, Joellen Maples, decided to start a dissertation support group. The purpose was to help ensure we stayed focused and worked on our dissertations. We jokingly called it an accountability group, but regardless, it was a successful endeavor. We worked in the summer at the university library and later moved to Fountain City's Panera Bread. We were often joined by other doctoral students, Randy Collins, Wendy Mueller, and Rebecca Payne. Joellen's insight into critical literacy and research knowledge were both invaluable. There are Joellen fingerprints in the form of suggestions and recommendations throughout this dissertation. Her husband, Nick, was also a contributor as well during the prospectus phase of this process. I look forward to future critical literacy collaborations.

My brother, Matthew, and his wife, Qiana, have been a great emotional support for the past four years. They have both listened with interest and amusement as I have kept them abreast of my research and findings. Their daughter, Freya, has prompted me to acquire more children's books featuring tricksters to turn over to her so that she can enjoy the tales that I have grown to love. I am glad they are interested in Maine. Similarly, I would be remiss not to also acknowledge my friends, Jake Williams, Brad Stansberry, and Joe Fox. Like my family, they have been both a source of encouragement and emotional support.

This dissertation is dedicated to Wendy Gowder. I know that Wendy is my muse because I have never been inspired to write poetry for anyone else. I can remember when I first saw her 28 years ago in a crowded cafeteria. In hindsight, my memory of the scene is somehow in slow motion with the morning sun flooding through the bay windows. The uncertainty of the future gives me comfort though, that and the prospect of a better tomorrow.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to see how folktale tricksters are portrayed in children's literature and to see if the portrayals are culturally authentic. The study was limited to three specific tricksters from three different non-western cultures. In the cross case analysis, the following five themes emerged: 1) authors who do prior research about the cultures of origin produce more culturally authentic children's books; 2) the occurrence of overlapping story devices; 3) a moral thread of misbehavior being punished and intelligence being rewarded; 4) the stories set in Africa often perpetuate African stereotypes; 5) and the spiritual and supernatural aspects of the tricksters were minimized. Educational implications of this study include: 1) educators should examine the moral lessons in folktales; 2) there are a variety instructional uses of folktales; 3) there are dangers in using inauthentic cultural material; 4) and educators should look at cultural material critically and research them for accuracy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
CHAPTER I: OVERVIEW.....	1
Anansi the Spider.....	3
Coyote.....	4
Rabbit.....	4
Organization.....	5
CHAPTER II: ANANSI THE SPIDER.....	6
Introduction.....	6
What Does Anansi Look Like?.....	7
How Does Anansi Behave?.....	11
Where Does Anansi Live?.....	16
West Africa.....	16
The Role of Plants.....	18
The Role of Animals.....	20
Anansi's Culture.....	21
The Ashanti of Ghana.....	21
Tools of the Trade.....	24
Food of a Hungry Spider.....	29
Kente Cloth and Head Wraps.....	30
Does Anansi Speak Akan?.....	32
Fairies, Gods, and Spirits.....	34
Conclusions.....	35
CHAPTER III: COYOTE.....	36
Introduction.....	36
What Does Coyote Look Like?.....	37
How Does Coyote Behave?.....	42
Where Does Coyote Live?.....	45
Western Panorama.....	46
Animals Are Not Always Lunch.....	47
The Role of Plants.....	48
Coyote's Culture.....	49
Native Americans, Cowboys, and Hispanic Farmers.....	49
Tools Not Mail Ordered from ACME.....	51
Food of a Hungry Coyote.....	54
Western Clothing.....	55
Native American Languages and Spanish.....	57
Animistic Spirits and Roman Catholicism.....	58
Conclusions.....	61
CHAPTER IV: RABBIT.....	62
Introduction.....	62
What Does Rabbit Look Like?.....	66

How Does Rabbit Behave?	67
Where Does Rabbit Live?	73
Africa and North America	73
The Role of Plants	74
The Role of Animals	75
Rabbit's Culture	76
Swahili and Others	76
Tools of the Trade	78
Rabbit Food	81
African and North American Clothing	81
Does Rabbit Speak Swahili?	83
Ancestors and Spirits	84
Conclusions	85
CHAPTER V: CROSS CASE ANALYSIS	87
Introduction	87
Themes	88
Conclusions	96
CHAPTER VI: EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS	97
Introduction	97
Moral Lessons	98
Instructional Purposes	101
Dangers of Inauthentic Cultural Material	102
African Stereotypes	103
Importance of Researching Cultural Materials	105
The Role of Critical Literacy	107
Conclusions	109
LIST OF REFERENCES	111
PRIMARY SOURCES	112
SECONDARY SOURCES	115
APPENDIX	121
METHODOLOGY	122
Methodological Approach and Rationale	122
Selection of Tricksters	124
Data Collection Techniques	125
Data Analysis	125
Limitations of the Study	127
VITA	130

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
Fig. 2.1. Spider Features.	9
Fig. 2.2. Innovative Design.....	10
Fig. 2.3. Anansi’s Appetite.	15
Fig. 2.4. Anansi in a Calabash Tree.....	20
Fig. 2.5. Fairies?.....	23
Fig. 2.6. Blonde Fisherman.....	23
Fig. 2.7. Typical Hut.	25
Fig. 2.8. Anansi Clears a Field.....	28
Fig. 2.9. Western Furniture.....	28
Fig. 2.10. Female Clothing.	31
Fig. 3.1. A Coyote.....	39
Fig. 3.2. Tricky Coyote.....	39
Fig. 3.3. Wolf-like Coyote.....	40
Fig. 3.4. Wile E. Coyote.	40
Fig. 3.5. King’s Coyote.....	41
Fig. 3.6. McDermott’s Coyote.....	41
Fig. 3.7. Crashing Coyote.	43
Fig. 3.8. People of the Pacific Northwest.	50
Fig. 3.9. Cowboy and Coyote.	52
Fig. 3.10. Lodge Houses	52
Fig. 3.11. Adobe Pueblo.	53
Fig. 3.12. Conejo Malvado.	58
Fig. 3.13. Icon of the Virgin Mary.....	60
Fig. 4.1. Zomo Riding Hyena.	64
Fig. 4.2. Brer Rabbit Riding Brer Fox.	64
Fig. 4.3. Bugs Bunny in <i>Falling Hare</i> (1943).....	65
Fig. 4.4. General Mills (1969) Trix Rabbit.....	66
Fig. 4.5. Sungura.....	68
Fig. 4.6. Purple Rabbit.	68
Fig. 4.7. Rabbit Racing Turtle.	72
Fig. 4.8. Archaic Costumes.....	77
Fig. 4.9. Latino Farmer.	78
Fig. 4.10. Rabbit’s Hut.....	79
Fig. 4.11. McDermott’s Zomo.	83

CHAPTER I: OVERVIEW

An uninvited Anansi finds a way into a feast. Coyote places the stars in patterns to amuse his friends. Rabbit outsmarts Leopard with ease and laughter. This dissertation is about three tricksters, specifically Anansi the spider, Coyote, and Rabbit. They are known by many names and they are all from different cultures. They were developed in the oral tradition, moved to folktales, and then to children's literature. That is why they are important to education. Tricksters from folktales entertain us with their antics; while at the same time teach us a lesson or two. The trickster is a cultural phenomenon found in nearly every society across the globe and is characterized by ingenuity and the ability to overcome overwhelming odds. Tricksters have made their way from the oral tradition into children's literature for over a hundred years. They offer educators opportunities to plan meaningful lessons in cultural literacy, storytelling, thinking skills, and literature.

Trickster folktales are popular with both children and teachers (Kraus, 1999 & Norton, 1999). In the classroom, they are often used as an introduction to the genre of folktales and they can also be a component of multicultural education. Folktales are the oldest form of storytelling and they preserve the wisdom of a culture. By giving students insight into other cultures, folktales can potentially increase students' empathy for people from other cultures (Norton, 2001 & Fuhler, Farris & Hatch, 1998). Authentic folktales also allow students to see what issues are important to other cultures and to hopefully discover the universal need for a stable society (Santino, 1991). Educators can also use authentic trickster tales to springboard into discussions about values, moral dilemmas, and different worldviews.

In reality, of course, animals do not talk or use speech to trick each other, and there are naturally regional variations of folktales. So, how can a folktale be truly authentic? The authenticity lies in how well they represent the culture in which they occur in the stories designed for children's books. Since folktales are based on the oral tradition and are listened to and retold by various storytellers, it is understood that there will be variations to in the stories. However, folktales can be culturally inauthentic or even disrespectful, especially when a specific culture is identified in the story. The causes of this are varied and can include publisher requirements, author error, or folktales being altered to fit into a different culture. Without authentic representation, the multicultural benefits of cultural material may be diminished and even negated with misinformation and the perpetuation of stereotypes (Kurtz, 1996; Mo & Shen, 1997; and Yokota, 1993). Bishop (1997) stated that to "Help readers gain insight into and appreciation for the social groups reflected in the literature, then the literature ought to reflect accurately those groups and their cultures" (p. 16). This stands to reason that a story about the Swahili or Hopi should accurately portray these cultures. According to Noll (2003), culturally authentic literature has the "capacity to break down negative stereotypes and encourage understanding and appreciation of different cultures" (p. 183). To be able to do this, it is vital that the selection of multicultural children's literature is authentic.

These researchers and scholars make a convincing case and I believe that authentic folktales are powerful agents for sharing cultural material. My convictions led me to undertake this study to see how folktale tricksters are portrayed in children's literature, and to see if their portrayals are culturally authentic. Since there is a vast array of trickster tales available, I limited the study to three specific tricksters from three

different non-western cultures. I narrowed the tricksters down from about a dozen by conducting an initial internet bookstore search to see which ones were more common. The tricksters that appeared to be most available in children's literature were Anansi the spider, Coyote, and Rabbit. I chose children's books featuring the three tricksters from three public school libraries, as well as from the children's section of a university library and local bookstores. I wanted to find sources that were readily available to educators. There were far more stories about Anansi the spider than Coyote and Rabbit. I obtained thirteen books about Anansi, nine on Coyote, and eight featuring Rabbit. They were published from 1966 to 2007. I also included stories about each trickster from five books that were collections of folktales. It is worth noting that the three tricksters range on a size continuum from small to large and are African, North American, and then an African-North American hybrid.

Anansi the Spider

Anansi the spider is a character from West African folktales best known for tricking people, other animals, and powerful spirits (Christen, 1998). He is described as sly, selfish and greedy. Anansi is physically small, and is often described as fat, slow, and bald. Christen stated that his stories fit into three major categories: stories about Anansi himself, stories about how he shaped the world, and stories about how he shaped society.

Anansi shows children how not to act, while demonstrating that the world is not entirely good or bad, but both. Christen (1998) explains that Anansi illustrates the duality of human nature and, through his stories, shows the negative aspects of antisocial behavior while also alerting people to "the presence of greed, trickery, and disruptiveness in the world" (p. 10).

Coyote

Coyote is the star of many Native American folktales. Christen (1998) states that his most recognizable traits are his flaws. He is a prideful, selfish, irreverent, gluttonous thief. Coyote can be sinister, he even does murder. Coyote, being a typical trickster, disregards most cultural mores. Like Anansi, his adventures can be used to teach children the proper way to act by focusing on what not to do, but often his stories solely meant for entertainment.

Coyote is known by different Native American names based on which culture is telling his tales. He is known as *Mica* (Lakota), *Yogovu* (Ute), *Italapas* (Chinook), *Isaahkawuattee* (the Crow), *Sinkalip* (Northwest North America), and *Yenaldlooshi* (Navajo) (Christen, 1998).

Although Coyote is flawed, he can be a hero. He is god-like in some stories, a creator. For example, the Chinook portray him as the co-creator of their civilization while the Crow believe that he established their social systems (Christen, 1998). Coyote is multifaceted because he can be seen as a protagonist or antagonist. Christen states that it is Coyote's "ability to weave social messages of fidelity, reciprocity, and generosity into his comical and disruptive activities that makes him such a popular character" (p. 34).

Rabbit

Rabbit is known in Africa as *Zomo* the rabbit, *Sungura* the hare, *Kalulu*, and *Sulwe*. He is a proud, cunning, quick, and agile rabbit, or sometimes hare, found in folktales throughout many African cultures. Christen (1998) states that he uses his speed,

along with his intellect, to overcome animals that are stronger than he. Christen also maintains that Rabbit is both entertaining and educational. Rabbit also shows the impact of negative behavior for the individual and the community.

Since this African trickster character is known as both a rabbit and a hare, it should be noted that the two animals are very similar and are both from the genus *Lepus*. Rabbits and hares are slightly different in a couple of ways, basically hares are larger, born with fur, and are able to see. In the folktales, the stories are the same whether the character is a rabbit or a hare. Since the two terms were interchangeable in the stories and *rabbit* was used more often, he will be referred to as Rabbit in this study.

Since Gerber's (1893) work, scholars have linked the American trickster character, Brer Rabbit, to African tricksters. The stories are similar, but were adapted to reflect the people and animals of North America. The Brer Rabbit character became a metaphor for the slave who was tricking his oppressors with his superior wit and became a masked protest against the institution of slavery.

Organization

The study is organized into six chapters. The following three chapters feature each individual trickster, and are arranged in order of their prevalence in the children's literature that I found. Different aspects of each character's portrayal in the selected books will be discussed. Chapters V and VI will discuss common themes found throughout the stories and their educational implications. To preserve the continuity of the descriptive nature of this study, the description of my methodology has been placed in the appendix. A complete list of the children's books that I read is listed under primary sources.

CHAPTER II: ANANSI THE SPIDER

Anansi possessed all the wisdom in the world and being selfish, he put it into a large pot and tried to hide it in a tall tree. He tied one end of a rope around the pot and the other around his neck. He attempted to climb the tree with the dangling pot resting on his stomach, but it was too cumbersome and he was unable to scale the tree. As he pondered how to get to the top, he heard laughter and his son's voice behind him suggesting that if he carried the pot on his back he would find it much easier to climb the tree. Angered by the perceived arrogance of his son, Anansi threw the pot the ground, breaking it and scattering wisdom all over the world (Salm & Falola, 2002, p. 64–65).

Introduction

West African folktales primarily focus on animal characters with human characteristics. The animals exhibit human characteristics and amuse the audience as well as teach a moral lesson. Anansi the spider is the most pervasive trickster character in West African folktales. His name is actually the Ashanti word for spider. The importance of Anansi stories is evident in the Ashanti term, *Anansesem*, which means spider stories, and is used in reference for all folktales dealing with animals. Anansi is portrayed with a variety of character traits in the stories; he might be glutinous and lazy or clever and funny. Like a great many folktales, Anansi stories usually teach a lesson. For example, in the above tale, the obvious lesson is that a single person cannot have a monopoly on

wisdom. The story also teaches general lessons about respect, pointing out that one cannot expect a son to show the proper respect for his father if the father does not share valuable resources with his family and community.

Folktales featuring Anansi the spider usually take place in Africa. Anansi stories are found in many societies of West Africa, and due to the slave trade the stories have spread to the Caribbean and United States. There are different spellings of Anansi's name, but his characteristics remain the same. For example, his name is sometimes spelled *Ananse* or *Anancy*, while in Haiti he is called *Ti Malice*, and in the southern United States they have Aunt Nancy stories, but the actual stories are the same.

In this chapter, I will discuss how Anansi the spider is portrayed in a collection of American children's books. Likewise, the way the physical environment and cultural setting are portrayed in the written narrative and illustrations will be discussed.

What Does Anansi Look Like?

In a way, Anansi the spider is indescribable; his form changes from story to story. In the text portion of the stories, Anansi's physical appearance is rarely described. He is sometimes referred to as being an actual spider, and is often described as fat, bald, and physically weak. His physical weakness is a key element of the story plotlines, but the stories focus on his actions and not his appearance. The written descriptors in the Anansi stories match the way in which he is illustrated. For example, if he is called an actual spider in the text, he is drawn as one in the illustrations.

In the illustrations, Anansi takes a variety of forms. He may be illustrated as an actual spider, a spider with human features, a human with spider features, and as purely a human. When depicted as a spider, he has been illustrated as a shiny black spider that is

usually larger than biologically possible, but still smaller than other creatures. In most cases when he is a spider with human attributes, he is usually drawn as an overweight spider with a human head and hands. In all cases regarding human features, Anansi has been given African racial features. When drawn as a human, he may be portrayed in different ages; anything from a young man to an elderly man. An interesting note is that Anansi was more often the villain or had predominantly negative attributes when he is illustrated as a spider, and is not portrayed as a villain when he is in a purely human form.

In the stories, Anansi has been referred to as wearing clothes even when he is described as being a spider. When it is mentioned, he is usually dressed as a commoner often a farmer. In some stories, Anansi disguises himself in tattered clothes to fool people into thinking he was poor and other times he would dress up in his finest clothes for important meetings or festivals to impress people. When Anansi is illustrated as an older man he has been shown dressing in traditional clothing. In *A Story a Story*, Anansi is drawn as a thin, elderly man wearing a loincloth and sandals. However, when he is drawn as a younger man he wears more modern clothing. In *Anansi and the Pot of Beans*, Anansi is even illustrated as wearing sneaker style shoes and cargo shorts.

In the human-spider form, Anansi is often drawn with extra arms or legs to represent the numbers of limbs of a spider. For example, Fig. 2.1 shows Anansi as a young man, but he has a few spider features. He has inhuman black eyes with white pupils and out of his sleeves are three extra arms which, with his legs, make eight limbs. However, as a hybrid he has not been shown with eight compound eyes like a spider or with fangs. It is important to remember that Anansi always has African racial features



Fig. 2.1. Spider Features.

Source: Norfolk, B. & Norfolk, S. (2006). *Anansi and the Pot of Beans*. Atlanta, GA: August House Publishers, Inc.

when any human attributes were drawn and this is also the case with the spider-human hybrids.

I found one book that has a creative way of having a purely human Anansi with the hint of spider features. In *First Palm Trees: An Anancy Spiderman Story*, Anansi is illustrated with make-shift spider attributes of eight eyes and eight limbs. This is achieved conventionally by having him wear three sets of glasses and multiple limbs simulated by drawing his arms in motion and having his robes moving about as extra arms. This innovative depiction can be seen in Fig. 2.2.

Just because Anansi is drawn in a variety of ways, it does not mean that he has been portrayed inaccurately. There is not a traditional or archetypical physical description of Anansi the spider. For example, a character like Santa Claus is consistently portrayed

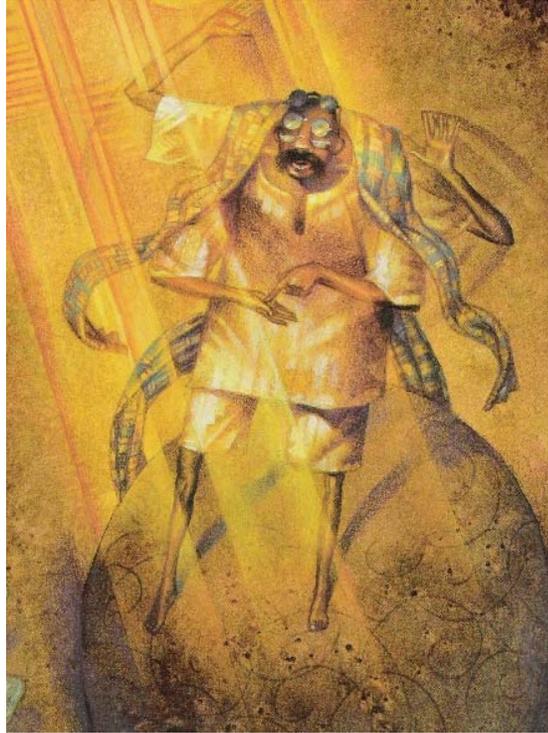


Fig. 2.2. Innovative Design.

Source: Berry, J. (1997). *First Palm Trees: An Anancy Spiderman Story*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

the same in all his stories, but Anansi is not. In older versions of his folktales, Anansi could appear as either a spider or a man, but he was not a shape-changer. This was not rationalized or explained by the narrator and his form was simply accepted by the listener. Gaiman (2005) stated that in the stories, Anansi looked like a spider except when he looked like a man, but that he never changed shape. He explained that Anansi's form depended on the style of the narrative, "It's just a matter of how you tell the story" (p. 39). Despite his portrayal in the illustrations as a half human half spider character, Anansi is never described as a man with spider features or a spider with a human head. Giving Anansi the features of both might be justified as the illustrators of children's

literature trying to represent the duality of Anansi's spider and human natures. This duality will be further explored in following section.

How Does Anansi Behave?

As a well known trickster character, one would assume that Anansi's actions in children stories would be predominantly clever antics where his intelligence wins the day against superior forces. This is not the case. In the stories, Anansi is actually tricked more than twice as many times as he tricks others. He is the victim in 17 of the 25 stories that I examined. These results may be misleading since five of the stories were actually variations of the same tale, "Anansi wins all the stories." This means he was a successful trickster in only four different stories. In adult literature he is more known as a great trickster, albeit roguish, character. However, in the 25 stories that I examined he is more of a villain or a victim of his own demise. This is a discrepancy with his traditional role as mainly a trickster as described by Christen (1998).

In the written versions of the stories, Anansi's behavior is described differently based on whether or not he is the victor or villain. When Anansi is a victor, he is described with both negative and positive characteristics. For example, in those stories we are told that he is clever, wise, shrewd, cunning, loveable, and is also a great farmer. In the same stories he is also called a rogue, a trickster, a mischief maker, the tricky one, and is greedy, lazy and mischievous. However, when Anansi is the victim or the villain, he is only described in negative terms. He is called undeserving, lazy, greedy, jealous, disobedient, selfish, fake, rude, boastful, and gluttonous. This suggests that in the stories where he is being punished, he is being used as warning to children for the consequences of misbehavior and greed. According to Hanzl (2001), children readers would easily be

able to interpret the message from the above negative descriptors and then apply them to the consequences of Anansi's actions.

As mentioned in the previous section, Anansi is portrayed with a dual nature of being a man and a creature. In the written narrative Anansi is either a man or a spider depending on how the story was told. In the illustrations he is depicted in a variety of forms which are consistent throughout the story. He was not a shape-changer going back and forth between the two forms. Similarly, Anansi is not illustrated as a spider and then later on in a story as a human. His form is consistent. Anansi's duality was depicted in his physical shape alone. Anansi did not live as a spider would live, but as a human. For example, Anansi had human problems and issues to resolve not spider problems like fixing torn webs. Some of Anansi's human problems include acting as a judge for the chief, farming, deciding what feast to attend, and dealing with marital problems. Anansi usually lives in a human house, and only once is he shown in a spider web in *Anansi does the Impossible*.

In the folktale with five variations, "Anansi wins all the stories," all the versions of the tale have Anansi winning the ownership of all the Ashanti stories through a series of cunning feats. The methods and who is being tricked, or bested, varies in the different versions. It is a combination of two or more animals being tricked in a specific way. The animals are Python, hornets or honeybees, fairies or forest dwarves, and Leopard. Python is tricked into allowing Anansi to tie him up under the false pretense of measuring him. Hornets are convinced that it is raining and Anansi offers them the shelter of a gourd which he traps them in. A fairy is trapped by a tar baby baited with food that Anansi animates like a puppet. Finally, Anansi offers to help Leopard out of a pit but only if he

lets Anansi tie a rope to his tail. In accomplishing these feats, Anansi is able to secure all the stories from the sky god, Nyame. In the Caribbean version Anansi wins the stories from their original owner, Tiger.

In the other stories where Anansi is a successful trickster, he uses either quick thinking or lies to trick other animals. In *African Folktales*, Anansi simply lies to Ant, saying that he had to go to the market. He asks Ant to carry a package that is cursed and when Ant accepts, Anansi is freed from the curse. In *Anansi and the Moss-Covered Rock*, Anansi uses a magic stone to render most of the other animals unconscious and then he steals food from them. *The Pot of Wisdom: Ananse Stories* is a collection that includes one story in which Anansi tells money lending Pig that a pole contained money in it. He convinces Pig to put his once long snout into a pole to extract fictitious money, only to get it stuck. Finally, in *The Adventures of Spider: West African Folktales*, Anansi outsmarts Leopard by fooling him to reveal himself while hidden in Anansi's house waiting to ambush him.

Remember, Anansi himself is tricked by a variety of adversaries. Some of his adversaries are humans. One was a fisherman from *The Adventures of Spider: West African Folktales*, who uses Anansi's laziness against him. A story in *The Pot of Wisdom: Ananse Stories* featured an Old Woman who uses Anansi's greed to expose him as a glutton. However, Anansi was predominantly tricked by other animals instead of humans. In a story from *The Pot of Wisdom: Ananse Stories*, Chameleon used Anansi's greed and pride to get revenge on him. Similarly Lizard used Anansi's pride and trust to steal the king's daughter from him in *Ananse and the Lizard: a West African Tale*. *Anansi Goes Fishing* is a variation of the story of the clever fisherman. It has Turtle also using

Anansi's laziness to trick him into doing all the work. In *Anansi and the Moss-Covered Rock*, Bush Deer uses Anansi's own trick against him. Fish and Falcon catch Anansi unawares in *Anansi the Spider: A tale from the Ashanti* and his sons end up saving him. Akye the turtle made Anansi adhere to cultural laws in *Ananse's Feast: an Ashanti Tale*. Finally, in *Why Leopard Has Spots: Dan Stories from Liberia*, Deer steals from Anansi's garden and then frames Leopard.

Anansi's actions are usually motivated by food acquisition. Even in stories where Anansi was primarily trying to win the right to marry the chief's daughter, his main motivation was because of the quality of food he would have as a chief's son-in-law. Food had the smallest role in the stories where Anansi was trying to complete three tasks to win ownership to all the stories, it was still mentioned as bait that he would use to capture his adversaries. Food is an integral part of one of Anansi the spider's character flaws: Anansi cannot get as much food as he wants. He is never satisfied and always wants to eat more. Figure 2.3 is an illustration that demonstrates Anansi's enthusiasm for food. When it comes to sharing food, Anansi is greedy and loathes sharing it even with his family. In several stories, Anansi actually steals food from his own children. Several different stories revolve around Anansi the spider trying to get invited or attending feasts. He is often described as someone who wanted to eat a feast, but had not done the work to deserve a feast. Unlike some of his failures based on his negative qualities, Anansi actually succeeded in a couple of times in going to a feast and eating. *The Pot of Wisdom: Ananse Stories* has one such feast which revolves around the cassava root. While visiting a village having a cassava feast, Anansi first thought cassava was



Fig. 2.3. Anansi's Appetite.

Source: Mollel, T.M. (1997). *Ananse's Feast: An Ashanti Tale*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company.

beneath him so he told them he was allergic to cassava. Once he saw how the villagers prepared cassava in delicious way, he changed his mind. The story then focused around how Anansi could get out of the lie. Anansi eventually changed his story and said he had been confused and meant to say it was his favorite dish.

Anansi the spider's obsession with food and his struggles with droughts could reinforce stereotypes that Africans are plagued with drought and lack of food, so this subject will be further discussed Chapters V and VI regarding themes and educational implications of these folktales.

I found in some stories that Anansi exhibits other behaviors and activities besides tricking and being tricked. They are predominantly agricultural activities like farming and gardening, and more specifically, planting, weeding, watering and harvesting crops. On many occasions, Anansi attends festivals and feasts. Anansi and other characters in the

stories are also described as dancing. Occasionally, Anansi also conducts commercial activities in the market, like buying or selling agricultural materials. All these are behaviors that could be found in a West African agricultural society. I will discuss cultural components further in the sections below.

Where Does Anansi Live?

Typically, Anansi is depicted living in a forest near a river with a variety of African wildlife. Additionally, after examining the Anansi stories, I noticed several broad categories emerge concerning the depiction of the physical environment. These categories are based on evident characteristics, and they are the descriptions of the terrain and climate and the flora and fauna of the region. I will discuss each of them including their accuracies.

West Africa

Geographic place names identifying where the Anansi stories take place can sometimes be found in the titles and introductions of the stories. Two examples are *Anansi the Spider: A tale from the Ashanti* and *The Adventures of Spider: West African Folktales*. In *Anansi the Spider: A tale from the Ashanti*, a map is also provided that shows the outline of Africa and identifies Ghana's location. Most of the stories are set in West Africa, specifically in modern Ghana, Liberia, and Nigeria, with Ghana being the most common. *First Palm Trees: An Anancy Spiderman Story* states in the introduction that Anansi stories were told by the indigenous peoples of the Gulf of Guinea. Only one story, *Trickster Tales: Forty folk stories from around the world*, has a non-African setting and is located in Jamaica. The author explained that Anansi stories were brought to the Caribbean and southern United States across the Atlantic from Africa via the institution

of slavery. Specific towns and villages are mentioned in several stories. *The Adventures of Spider: West African Folktales* features a village named Akim which is in Eastern Ghana. *Anansi and the Pot of Beans* mentions Kumasi which is the traditional Ashanti cultural capital. Finally, *Ananse and the Lizard: A West African tale* is set in Accra, which is the modern capital of Ghana.

Anansi the spider's localized distribution of his stories is also evident in his given name being used more often than simply going by Spider. Anansi, Ananse, and Anancy are not significant variations in his name compared to the variety of regional names of other trickster characters like Rabbit (Zomo, Kalulu, Sugura, and Lapin) and Coyote (Sendeh, Sinkalip, Isaahkawattee, and Yenaldlooshi).

The written narrative and illustrations commonly depict the geographic features in the stories. In the written text, I found that the stories take place exclusively along a river and in a forest. The coast is mentioned a few times as a place for people or Anansi to travel. The illustrations further depicted the terrain as usually being red-brown earth with sparse vegetation. Besides illustrations with little vegetation, there are also many depictions of lush forests and jungles. There were several stories that had rivers and mountains illustrated in the background, but rivers are not shown as often as they are mentioned in the written text.

These physical descriptions in the stories accurately describe Ghana and West Africa in general, but over emphasize the jungles. Ghana does have a tropical climate and many forests as well as rain forests but it is not covered in them. Due to extreme deforestation, erosion has damaged some of Ghana and this may have been purposefully depicted in the stories with sparse vegetation. The mountains and rolling hills illustrated

in the stories' backgrounds are also similar to western Ghana. As indicated in the stories, Ghana has several major river systems (like the Volta and the Pra rivers).

Weather often played an integral role in the stories. Drought and its consequences for agriculture were a common weather phenomenon. Many of the stories start during a drought which then acts as a catalyst for Anansi to look for food to supplement his failed garden. *The Adventures of Spider: West African Folktales* mentions the rainy season briefly as a reference to yearly events. These weather patterns are true to location according to Salm and Falola (2002), but like the jungles, droughts may be over emphasized in the stories. The over emphasis of certain aspects of Africa's environment is further discussed in Chapters V and VI.

The Role of Plants

Specific vegetation is often named in the written versions of the stories. The calabash vine or tree, mimosa, odum, kola, breadfruit, palm, silk cotton, coconut, and mango trees are all specifically mentioned. Each of these plants is included in stories for some particular attribute. Many of the plants are sources of food and places where Anansi would climb to hide things, to get high enough to talk to the gods, or to climb into the heavens.

The mango, coconut, and palm trees are all common in West Africa. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the more exotic sounding odum, mimosa, kola, and silk cotton trees are also all native vegetation of West Africa. The odum tree is a local name for, iroko, which is a common tropical hardwood. The kola tree is a common nut producing tree found throughout Africa. The silk cotton tree, known as bombax, is

another tropical tree. However, again according to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* the breadfruit tree is not indigenous to the continent of Africa. The breadfruit tree is instead native to the Malay Peninsula and western Pacific islands.

The specific plant that was mentioned the most in the text was the calabash, which is a common vine that grows gourds. The calabash was utilized in the stories as both a container and as food. In West Africa, the hollowed out and then dried calabash gourds are a traditional utensil in households. They are used to contain rice, water, and food in general and smaller sizes are used as bowls. It is primarily referred to as a vine, but in *Anansi Does the Impossible* it is referred to as a tree. The calabash vine is located throughout the world, but the calabash tree (*crescentia cujete*), is indigenous to Central and South America, not Africa. Figure 2.4 shows Anansi in spider form in a calabash tree holding a gourd.

Other general vegetation is also mentioned in the written narrative of the different stories, and the vegetation is all commonly found in West Africa. Gourds, bananas, grass, nettles, thorns, bamboo, yam vines, and saplings all appear in the text of the stories. The calabash gourds are the most common vegetation in the stories. The illustrations of the stories also show a variety of vegetation, including flowers, palm trees, and tall grass. The most common vegetation in the illustrations is generic foliage drawn as fern-like. As I mentioned earlier, occasionally the settings of the Anansi stories are sparse in vegetation. However, it is far more common for them to be illustrated in a lush jungle or forest habitat. This overuse of jungles in the illustrations will be further discussed in Chapters V and VI.



Fig. 2.4. Anansi in a Calabash Tree.

Source: Aardema, V. (2000). *Anansi Does the Impossible*. New York, NY: Aladdin Paperbacks.

The Role of Animals

A plethora of local animals are mentioned in the written text and illustrations, either as victims, tricksters, or as bystanders. Most of the animals belong in a West African habitat, like the insects, leopard, warthog, python, and bush deer. According to the *African Encyclopedia*, some of the animals in the stories, such as the lion, rhinoceros, zebra, giraffe, and river hippopotamus, are definitely not indigenous to West Africa and are instead located in East Africa. The misplaced animals are in *Anansi and the Moss-Covered Rock* and *Anansi and the Pot of Beans* and in both cases the authors did not explain why they included animals from East Africa. This issue of misplaced animals will be further discussed in the educational implications chapter.

True to the trickster tradition of smaller, weaker characters outwitting larger, stronger characters, the animals that Anansi tricks are predominantly dangerous, predatory creatures. His most reoccurring victim is Leopard. When Anansi himself is tricked, it is usually by small, less dangerous animals, the most common were Turtle, Lizard, and the Bush Deer.

In the stories I examined, Anansi also tricks supernatural creatures such as forest dwarves and fairies. These two types of creatures have interchangeable roles in the stories, but they are drawn differently in the illustrations. The forest dwarves resemble monkey-like humanoids and the fairies are depicted in two ways; one being that of a European winged fairy, lithe and feminine and the other as a diminutive, graceful dancer with African features. These supernatural characters will be further discussed in the following cultural section.

Anansi's Culture

How does Anansi live? Usually, he is shown as a food obsessed farmer living in a human hut. I also found several broad categories concerning the depiction of the cultural setting of the Anansi stories. These categories were descriptions and illustrations of the people, technology, food, clothing and adornments, language, and spiritual. As with the physical environment, the accuracies of the cultural settings as depicted in the written text and illustrations will also be discussed.

The Ashanti of Ghana

Authors occasionally include a description of the cultural origins of the Anansi stories in the stories' introductions. In these introductions, the origins of Anansi stories

and the actual human inhabitants presented in the stories are predominantly credited to the Ashanti people of Ghana. In *First Palm Trees: An Anancy Spiderman Story* the people are described as the people of Ashantiland and it also states that Anansi stories were told by the indigenous peoples of the Gulf of Guinea. *Why Leopard Has Spots: Dan Stories from Liberia* accredits Anansi stories to the Dan people of Liberia instead of the Ashanti.

In the written versions of the stories, humans are loosely described as the people of the coast or the people of the forest, if at all. These humans were usually just called villagers, farmers, or fishermen. In the illustrations, the inhabitants are men, women, and children and are predominantly portrayed with African racial features such as dark skin, wiry hair, full noses, and full lips. As mentioned earlier, Anansi is often depicted as a spider with a human face and African features; similarly sometimes inanimate objects like the sun were also drawn with African features.

There are however three examples in which characters have non-African physical features. In *Anansi Does the Impossible*, the god Nyame is drawn as a giant blue face with the Caucasian features including a thin nose and thin lips. Fairies in the same story are not only drawn with Caucasian features, but actually resemble winged fairies of European folktales. Figure 2.5 is an illustration of these fairies. In *The Adventures of Spider: West African Folktales*, the human characters are shown with dark skin, but with Caucasian features. The characters specifically have angular noses, rosy cheeks, and blonde hair. This is demonstrated in Fig. 2.6. No explanation was given in any of the examples, even though they were both specifically set in West Africa.



Fig. 2.5. Fairies?

Source: Aardema, V. (2000). *Anansi Does the Impossible*. New York, NY: Aladdin Paperbacks.



Fig. 2.6. Blonde Fisherman.

Source: Arkhurst, J. C. (1964). *The Adventures of Spider: West African Folktales*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company.

According to Salm and Falola (2002), the Ashanti, who are the ethnic Ghanaians attributed to a majority of the Anansi tales, are the largest tribe in Ghana. Most of the stories appear to have been set in the distant past during the Ashanti's pre-colonization period. At this time they were still a highly developed agricultural nation, and farmed the land effectively enough so that hunting did not play a principal role in their society. As in the stories, the Ashanti obtained fish primarily from trade from coastal groups who specialized as fishermen, and had extensive trade relations with neighboring kingdoms. The stories disproportionately portray the rural, rain forest dwelling aspects of the Ashanti people.

Tools of the Trade

Two categories emerged in the examples of technology portrayed in the stories, shelter and implements. In this case, shelter is defined as huts or houses and implements are any other device used to help perform some task. The level of technology in the stories is almost entirely pre-industrial, although there are some exceptions in the illustrations which will be discussed below.

In the written narratives, shelter is often simply described as being a house. In *The Adventures of Spider: West African Folktales*, a village is described as little round houses arranged in a circle. The only interior room ever mentioned in any of the stories is the kitchen. The most common form of shelter in the illustrations is a yellow hut with conical thatched roof and with walls made of either bamboo or clay. Figure 2.7 is an illustration of a typical hut of this style. When Anansi is shown as an actual spider, he sometimes

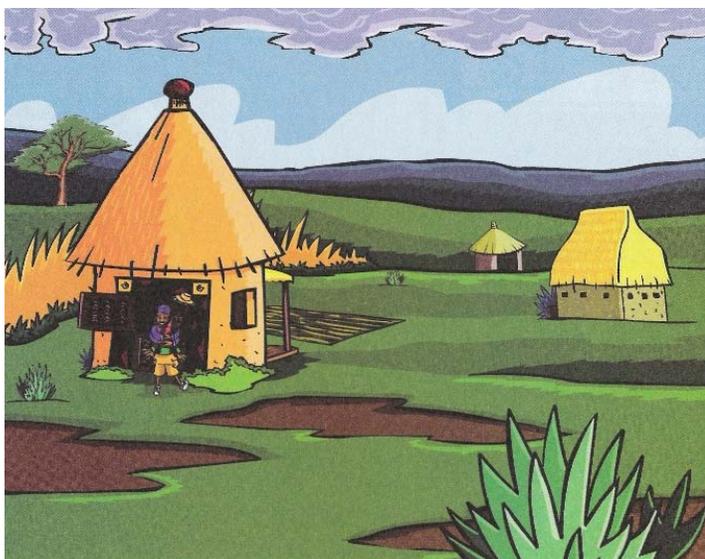


Fig. 2.7. Typical Hut.

Source: Norfolk, B. & Norfolk, S. (2006). *Anansi and the Pot of Beans*. Atlanta, GA: August House Publishers, Inc.

lives in a spider web, but more often he lives in a home similar to that of humans. In some stories his house is one of the conical roofed huts, but in *The Adventures of Spider: West African Folktales* it is a little house made from banana leaves, with wooden door, and brick chimney. In *Anansi and the Moss-Covered Rock* and *Anansi Goes Fishing*, his house is a wooden clap board cabin with a spider web hammock on the front porch. The doors in almost all the different types of houses are mainly open portals with oval arches above them, but in *Anansi and the Pot of Beans* the house has an actual door that is a Dutch door. Even houses in remote parts of West Africa have doors, so I am not certain why they were usually absent in the illustrations. Wooden porches are also common in the illustrations and are the social gathering point of the stories. A final example regarding shelter is from *Ananse and the Lizard: A West African tale*, it depicts a palace of a king that is strikingly familiar Ghana's late fifteenth century Elmina Castle which was built by the Portuguese.

Salm and Falola (2002) described the traditional housing of the conical roof and mud walls mentioned above as being primarily a Northern Ghana architectural style. This style includes round houses using mud as the common building material for the walls and bamboo and palm fronds for the roofs. Although the mud huts do exist in modern times, the rectangular houses made of wood are a more prevalent style of architecture in modern Ghana. Like the descriptions of the archaically dressed people above, the more primitive mud huts without doors are disproportionately depicted in the stories more than the common wooden structures.

The tool technology shown is exclusively pre-industrial with only a few uncharacteristic modern exceptions. The tools mentioned in the stories are mainly used for binding (rope and strings), containers (bags, gourds, and pots), and commerce (gold, coins, and money pouch). The most prolific tools in the stories are ones used for agriculture (machetes, shovels, and traps) and food preparation (bowls, spoons, and pots). Food, in general, is so common in Anansi stories that it is covered in more detail below.

Traps appearing in the stories about Anansi are primarily fish traps, but another common trap in the stories is a tar baby. Anansi constructs a puppet-like doll and disguises it either as a fairy (as shown earlier in Fig. 2.5) or a forest dwarf. The tar baby is then covered in something sticky such as tar or honey and is then baited with food to entice its target. The victim of the trap would take the bait and thank the doll for the food. When the doll does not respond, the intended victim becomes insulted and slaps the doll, and eventually gets stuck in the trap. Anansi then reels in his prey. *The Pot of Wisdom: Ananse Stories* and *The Adventures of Spider: West African Folktales* both have a different version of this trap story. The variation instead starts with Anansi secretly

stealing from his own family's garden and his sons with the task of trying to catch him. Anansi's sons construct a tar baby disguised as a dwarf and place it in the garden. When Anansi encounters the tar dwarf at night he eventually attacks it for trespassing and gets stuck and caught by his sons. What was interesting about this variation of the story, is the sons do not know that Anansi is the thief, but decide to use one of their father's tricks to capture the thief and Anansi is outsmarted by one of his own tricks. I will discuss the tar baby style traps further in Chapter V.

The most common container shown in the illustrations and described in the written narratives of the stories is a pot. Pots are used for cooking and for storing things. One story in *The Pot of Wisdom: Ananse Stories* includes a magic pot that is able to produce a vast feast for the village in times of famine. In the illustrations, it is common for people to carry pots and other containers on their heads. This behavior is commonly seen in general photographs and videos of people in the region. In the background of Fig. 2.8 this load bearing behavior is depicted with the three women.

Although furniture is not necessarily an implement, it is still a form of technology and is shown throughout in illustrations of several stories. However, most of the furniture shown is Western-style in design. In *Ananse and the Lizard: A West African tale* the illustrator includes a recliner, night stand, bed with headboards, and a flower lamp. Figure 2.9 is an illustration depicting several of these items. In *Anansi Goes Fishing* a turtle character was shown with a folding nylon lawn chair as well as a "boombox" music player and sunglasses. In *Anansi and the Moss-Covered Rock* a deer character was shown

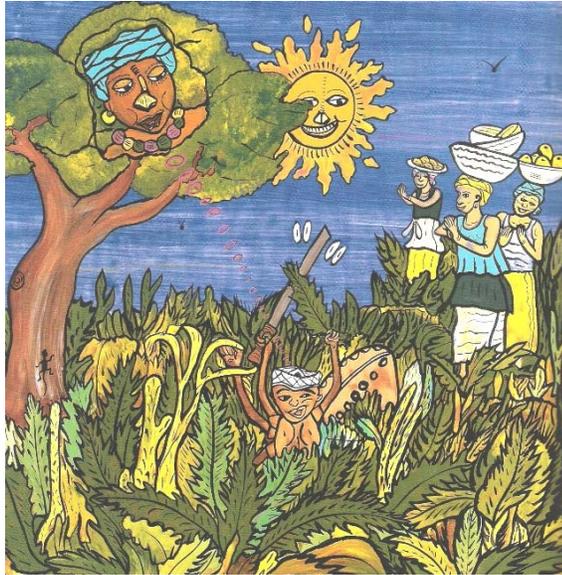


Fig. 2.8. Anansi Clearing a Field.

Source: Badoe, A. & Diakite, A.W. (2001). *The Pot of Wisdom: Ananse Stories*. Berkeley, CA: Douglas & McIntyre.

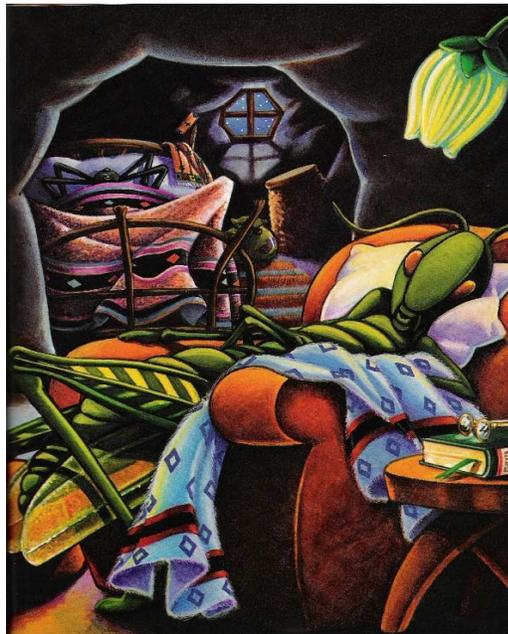


Fig. 2.9. Western Furniture.

Source: Cumming, P. (2002). *Ananse and the Lizard: A West African tale*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, LLC.

sitting in a white wicker chair and another was drawn under an electric ceiling fan.

Interestingly, in these cases these items belonged to animals when at the same time the humans of the same culture are depicted as having pre-industrial technology.

In several stories Anansi works for a king and in some he is trying to win the king's daughter. I found in all cases the kings are depicted as sitting on small golden thrones. This is true to location for Ghana because of their historic relationship with the Golden Stool. Salm and Falola (2002) stated that the Golden Stool is sacred to the Ashanti, and is a key feature in the legend their nation's origin. It was thought to not only contain the soul of the king, but also the soul of the entire Ashanti nation.

Food of a Hungry Spider

We have already mentioned that getting food is important to Anansi. A large variety of food is included in the written text and shown in the illustrations. The most common are yams, cassava (a starchy root), beans, and bananas. They are also portrayed in a variety of dishes like stews, soups, mashes, and sauces, which are all indicative of West African cuisine. Spicy bean soup was mentioned twice in two separate stories as Anansi's favorite food, and a dish called *fufu* was also mentioned several times.

Salm and Falola (2002) described a Ghanaian diet that includes most of the food portrayed in the stories. Ghanaians' diet consists mainly of starchy foods such as yams, cassava, millet, corn, and rice. Salm and Falola also described *fufu* as a thick paste that is made by boiling starchy root vegetables or plantains and then pounding them with a mortar and pestle. These staples are served with soups and stews and portions of meat or fish. As depicted in some of the stories, hot and spicy foods are also common. West

Africans also supplement their diet with a variety of fruits, nuts, and breads all of which can be seen in some of the stories.

Non-traditional foods are also shown in the illustrations of a couple of the stories. In *Anansi Goes Fishing*, the turtle character is shown lounging with a bag of potato chips. In *Hungry Spider*, Anansi and Turtle's feast features only Western-style foods such as hotdogs with mustard, macaroni and cheese, and hamburgers. However, according to Salm and Falola (2002) traditional West African foods remain an important part of Ghana's diet and most West Africans consider Western foods, as nothing more than snacks and not the components of a feast.

Kente Cloth and Head Wraps

Anansi's clothing seldom, if ever, comes up in the stories. The illustrations however show a variety of different clothing for human and animal characters alike. Most male characters are shown wearing what could be described as traditional African garb, which includes loose fitting robes, pants, shirts, and *kufi* hats. Women characters in the stories are often illustrated wearing skirts and shirts and, in almost every story, head wraps. Whenever male and female characters are wearing traditional clothing, the garments are illustrated in bright colors with geometric patterns. In Fig. 2.10 several examples of female clothing like head wraps, skirts and dresses are shown. The style of clothing in Fig. 2.10 is the most salient example of female clothing from the other Anansi stories. This traditional style of clothing is indicative of some of the modern Ghanaian dress as described by Salm and Falola (2002). The multicolored patterned clothing strongly resembles Ghana's *kente* cloth prints. The illustrator of *First Palm Trees: An*

Anancy Spiderman Story credited his depiction of the cloth patterns of the characters' robes on kente patterns. Both the head wraps for women and gold jewelry shown in the illustrations are also common fashions in Ghana. Kufi hats, which are a round flat topped hat, are West African in origin and are worn by older men to symbolize their status as elders or patriarchs. Kufi hats are still commonly worn throughout West Africa.

Several stories have a mix of traditional African and European-style clothing for humans and animals alike, which is also common in most of modern West Africa due to prolonged contact with European countries. In several stories, the human characters are illustrated wearing archaic style clothing. For example, in *A Story A Story*, human characters are featured wearing feather and animal hair plumage as well as loincloths. In

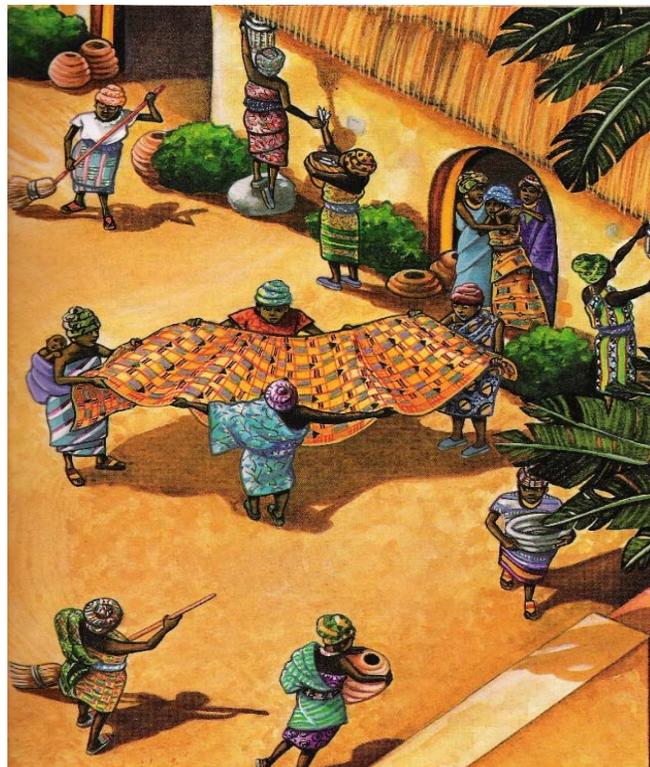


Fig. 2.10. Female Clothing.

Source: Cumming, P. (2002). *Ananse and the Lizard: A West African tale*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, LLC.

another example from *Ananse and the Lizard*, the humans were illustrated wearing archaic robes and armbands, but the animals were drawn in modern clothes. This is the same discrepancy mentioned above in the technology section, where the human characters have lower levels of technology than the animals that share the same culture. Again, I will discuss this issue further in Chapter VI.

Does Anansi Speak Akan?

Many of the stories contain examples of names, words, and phrases from the local Akan language which is spoken by the Ashanti. In some of the stories, names or words may have been invented to simulate what the authors think are African sounding names. Throughout the stories, characters are mostly referred to by African names. Anansi the spider is usually called by his name. Only in three stories is Anansi known merely as Spider. In *Kwaku Anansi Walks the World's Web* and *Anansi the Spider: A tale from the Ashanti*, Anansi is referred to as Kwaku Anansi. There is a Ghanaian tradition of naming of male children based on the day they are born on, and Kwaku is the Akan name for boys born on Wednesday. In *Anansi Does the Impossible* Anansi's wife is a spider named Aso. However, in *The Pot of Wisdom: Ananse Stories* Anansi's wife is the human princess, *Abena Nkoroma*. The children of Anansi appear in almost every story and they are exclusively sons. The names of Anansi's sons differ from story to story, and these names are *Tsin*, *Tacooma*, *Kuma*, *Kwaku*, and *Ntikuma*. In *Anansi the Spider: A tale from the Ashanti* his sons are given non-African descriptive names, like See Trouble and Stone Thrower.

It is common in the stories for other characters to also have African names. The main god was named Nyame, who is sometimes referred to as simply the sky god or the god of all things. Other names used in the stories are *Wowo*, for the honey bees; *Aboatia*, the forest dwarf; *Nanka*, the python; *Ahoafe*, another princess; *Osebo*, the leopard; *Mmboro*, the hornets; *Mmoatia*, the fairy; Akye, the turtle; and another python named *Onini*.

Several stories use other general Akan words. *Anansi Does the Impossible* not only incorporates many Akan words, but it also includes a glossary with definitions of these words at the beginning of the story. Most of the words used were described as ideophones which are used to convey a vivid impression. Examples are *kwo* which is used to show disgust; *rim* which is used to describe a quick movement, and *wasa-wasu* which is used to describe the motion of a crawling snake. *Ananse's Feast: An Ashanti Tale* also incorporates the ideophone, *A-kye-kye-die* which is Akan describing the movement of a turtle. Akan onomatopoeia's are also common in *Ananse's Feast: An Ashanti Tale*, examples are *kpari* which is the sound of something being dragged on the ground, *pesa* which describes the breathy sound of whispering, and another is *bul bul bul bul bul* which is an onomatopoeia for a character swimming. Both ideophones and onomatopoeias are common techniques in oral storytelling. According to the two authors of the stories mentioned, these techniques were included in the written narrative as a planned attempt to keep an oral storytelling feel to the folktales.

Ananse's Feast: An Ashanti Tale incorporates the Maasai phrase “*Oyei-yaai oyei-yaai*,” which means “Oh, my mother!” The author admits that the Maasai phrase is out of place culturally, but is included under artistic license. The author made this disclaimer

because the Maasai are an East African people who live in the Rift Valley of Kenya and Tanzania. They are pastoral nomads compared to the stationary agriculturalist Ashanti. This discrepancy, as with the East African animals included in the stories, will be also be discussed later in the educational implications chapter.

Fairies, Gods, and Spirits

We must not forget there are god-like aspects with Anansi, and several supernatural or mythological characters are presented in the stories. The most common is the sky god, Nyame, and the others are the fairies or forest dwarves, and animistic spirits. Although Nyame is always treated with respect, worship is not depicted in the stories. Nyame's role in the stories is one of a celestial ruler, and in *A Story a Story* he is depicted as a human king. Usually Nyame is drawn in the illustrations as a giant floating in the sky. The fairies and the forest dwarves, however, are always tricked by Anansi. *First Palm Trees: An Anancy Spiderman Story* has Anansi communicating with the spirits of the Sun, Water, Earth, and Air in his search for guidance.

In traditional Ashanti culture Nyame, or *Onyame*, which means Supreme One, heads a pantheon of Ashanti gods and animistic spirits. Salm and Falola (2002) stated that the Ashanti also believe that all plants and animals have souls. These spirits or minor gods, known as *abosom*, act as patrons of households, villages and regions. The fairies or the forest dwarves were not mentioned in any cultural materials about West African religion or mythology, but they could represent the many minor gods or the spirits of the forest. Salm and Falola also explained that the religion in modern Ghana is diverse and despite Christianity being the dominant religion, there is also still strong belief in the

indigenous religion of the Ashanti. In fact, the Christian God is often referred to as Onyame by modern Ghanaians. Many Ashanti people still pray to minor gods who act as intermediaries between themselves and God.

Conclusions

Anansi the spider, traditionally a cunning trickster, was instead portrayed significantly more as a victim or a villain. There is not a uniform physical description of him in the illustrations, but a traditional or classic version of him does not exist. The Anansi stories were basically accurate when they are compared to the cultural customs of the pre-modern West African nation of Ghana. An argument can be made that the culture presented was actually stereotypical with the exotic being overly represented or the primitive aspects being disproportionately portrayed, this concept will be discussed further in Chapters V and VI. There were also several exceptions to cultural accuracy. The most common being the discrepancy between the levels of technology between the animals and the humans, and another being East African animals and cultures being erroneously located in West Africa.

In the next chapter, Coyote's portrayal in children's stories will be discussed.

CHAPTER III: COYOTE

The people had no fire, so they asked Coyote to get it for them from three evil spirits. Coyote climbed the mountain to the evil spirits' dwelling and hid to watch the fire. When the coast was clear, Coyote grabbed a burning stick and fled, with the spirits chasing him. Just as the spirits grabbed his tail, Coyote threw the stick to Mountain Lion. A relay ensued among the animals, ending with Frog in the river. Frog threw the fire onto a tree. The spirits were unable to get the fire away from the tree, and so left. Once they were gone, Coyote showed the people how to rub two sticks together to make fire (Kraus, 1999, p. 91).

Introduction

Coyote is a trickster of many Native American folktales. His stories are told from the Pacific Northwest all the way to Central Mexico. Coyote is a complex character that often baffles some Western readers. Coyote is more fool than hero. He is often the negative example, and serves as a warning to what misbehavior can bring. He is usually portrayed as an insatiable, irreverent fool who is a victim of his own curiosity. Coyote's greatest flaw is his sense of self importance. This could also be called pride. In the Salishan language, Coyote's name for himself is "Smyaw," which is derived from the word "important."

Children's literature often features normal coyotes, but Coyote of Native American folktales is more prevalent. More than half of the authors who wrote the

Coyote stories included a section that explained what research they conducted on Coyote or research on the people encountered in the Coyote stories. In many cases they stressed how they tried to keep their portrayal of Coyote as accurate as possible.

Of the stories examined, three of them were adaptations of other stories that incorporated Coyote in the role of other characters. *There Was a Coyote Who Swallowed a Flea* is a retelling of the song, *There Was an Old Woman Who Swallowed a Fly* and focuses on Coyote's insatiable appetite. *Coyote: A trickster tale from the American Southwest* is similar to an Anansi the spider story where he wants to learn how to fly but is tricked by a flock of birds. Finally, *The Tale of Rabbit and Coyote* is a story that is an amalgamation of several trickster rabbit tales with Coyote as the villain. These last two examples are common amongst storyteller traditions where different characters are swapped or adapted to different regions and cultures. All three of the stories partially stayed true to the nature of Coyote in that they depicted him as being hungry and curious, but in all three cases he was not very clever.

To better understand Coyote, we need to see what he looks like, how he acts, where he lives, and who interacts with him. In the following sections, I will discuss how Coyote is portrayed in the written narratives and illustrations of the children's books.

What Does Coyote Look Like?

Coyote may not be a fox, but in the stories he is often drawn fox-like. Both in the written text and illustrations of the stories, Coyote was only described and drawn as the animal of his namesake. Figure 3.1 depicts a real coyote. Sometimes he is illustrated as walking upright, like in Fig. 3.2, and using his paws like human hands, but just as often he is drawn walking on all four legs. In two stories, *The Evolution of Trickster Stories*

Among the dogs of North Park After the Change and *One Odd Shoe*, Coyote is depicted as a non-speaking animal without any human affectations. Coyote is usually shown as being brown or tan colored, but in *The Tale of Rabbit and Coyote* and *Coyote: A trickster tale from the American Southwest* he is colored blue. McDermott (1994) explained that blue was used because it is the traditional Hopi color of Coyote. In the full version of the story above with Coyote stealing fire for humans, every aspect of Coyote is that of an animal except for his ability to speak. The story is *Coyote and the Fire Stick: a Pacific Northwest Indian Tale* and he is drawn as a skinny fox-like coyote, and in the written text and illustrations he did not use his paws as hands. When he grabbed the stick with fire on it, he did so with his mouth as did the other animals. In the stories like *Coyote & Little Turtle*, *The Tale of Rabbit and Coyote*, and *Borreguita and the Coyote*, Coyote was featured as the villain. In these three stories, Coyote is illustrated as being larger and more brutish. In *Borreguita and the Coyote*, he strongly resembles a wolf more than a coyote and this can be seen in Fig. 3.3.

In three stories, Coyote bears a strong resemblance to the Warner Brothers' Looney Tunes cartoon character, Wile E. Coyote. Figure 3.4 has a video capture from a Wile E. Coyote cartoon. The character Wile E. Coyote and the three Coyote depictions are similar in that they all have black bulbous noses; hyper-extended snouts, rabbit-like long ears, and pencil thin waists, all of which are not indicative of an actual coyote. This description is evident in the illustrations in Figs. 3.5 and 3.6. Additionally, in the stories that have Coyote resembling Wile E. Coyote, he is also in the same southwest American desert of the cartoon character. Another similarity between Wile E. Coyote and the three stories of Coyote is the action of falling from great heights. In *Coyote Sings to the Moon*,



Fig. 3.1. A Coyote.

Source: coyote. (2007). In *Save the Coyote*. Retrieved December 10, 2007, from Coyote Information: <http://www.savethecoyote.org/images/coyote-3.jpg>

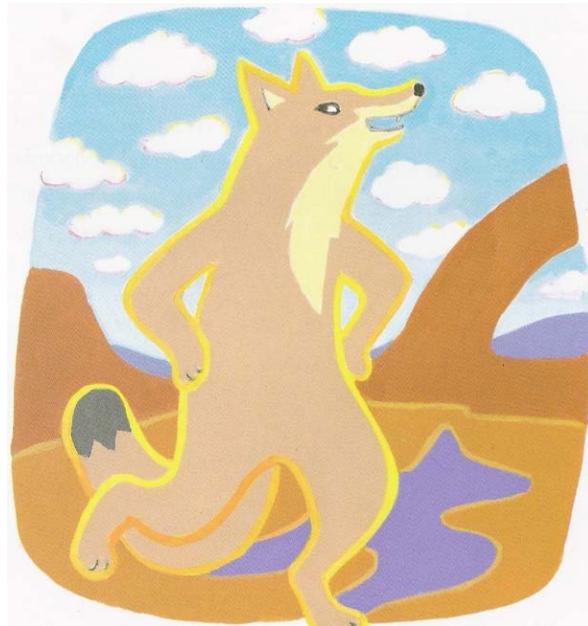


Fig. 3.2. Tricky Coyote.

Source: Mayo, G. W. (1993). *Meet Tricky Coyote!* New York, NY: Walker and Company.

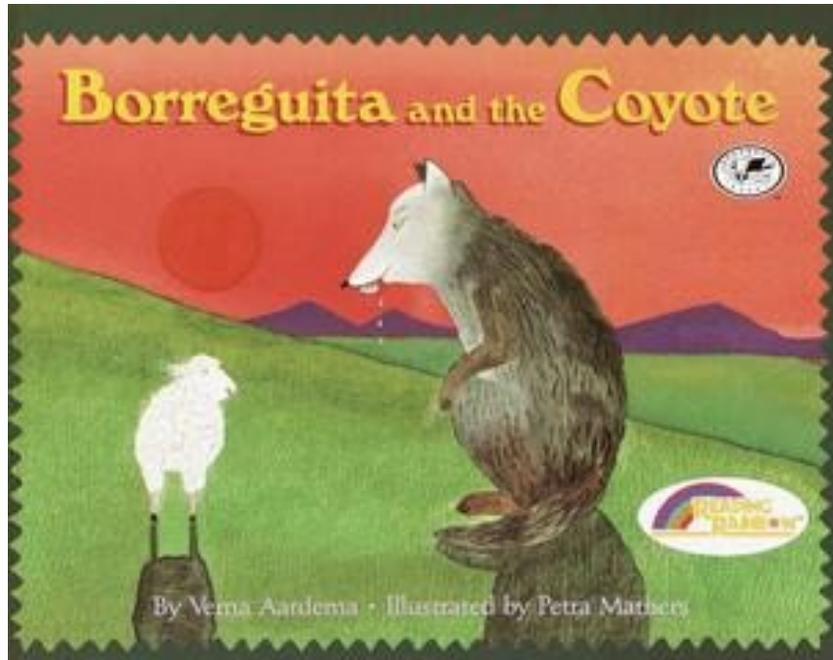


Fig. 3.3. Wolf-like Coyote.

Source: Aardema, V. (1991). *Borreguita and the Coyote*. New York, NY: First Scholastic.

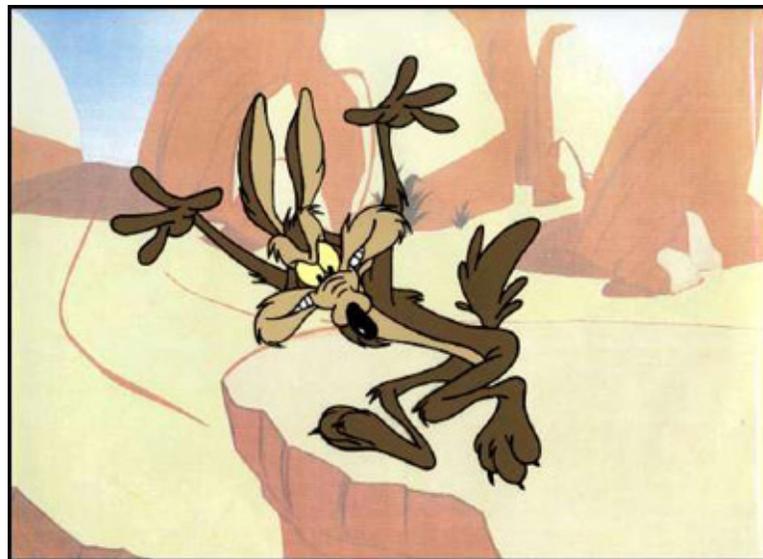


Fig. 3.4. Wile E. Coyote.

Source: Wile E. Coyote. (2007). In *Toonsart.com*. Retrieved December 10, 2007, from Wile E. Coyote: <http://www.toonsart.com/asp/dbImage.aspx?blobId=543>



Fig. 3.5. King's Coyote.

Source: King, T. (1998). *Coyote Sings to the Moon*. Toronto, Canada: Key Porter Books.

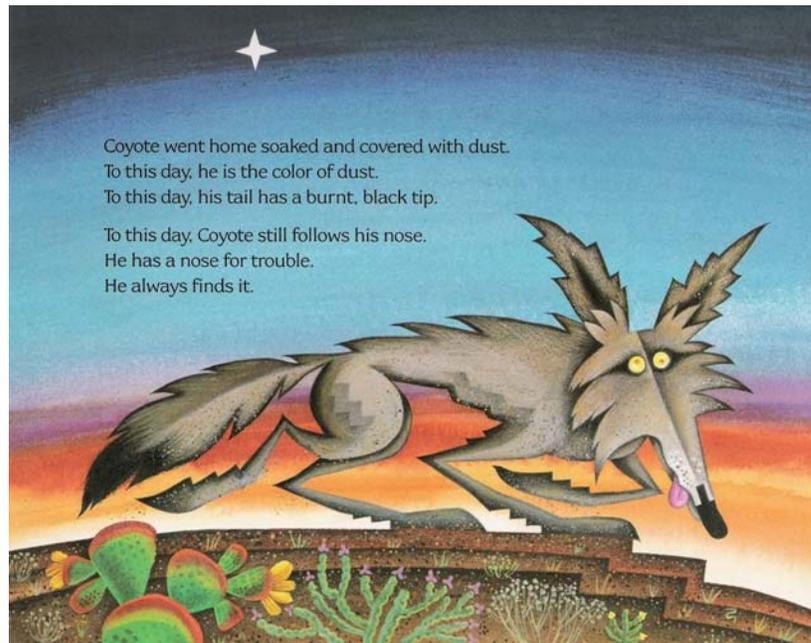


Fig. 3.6. McDermott's Coyote.

Source: McDermott, G. (1994). *Coyote: A trickster tale from the American Southwest*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace & Company.

Coyote is shown falling off a cliff, and in *Coyote: A trickster tale from the American Southwest*, Coyote falls from the sky to crash into a mesa. Figure 3.7 shows Coyote's crash landing. It is evident that the authors or illustrators were probably influenced by the cartoon. It should be noted that in *Coyote & Little Turtle* all the illustrations in the story were drawn by Hopi elementary students.

I thought perhaps that the character of Wile E. Coyote could have been based on the Coyote of Native American folktales. However, the cartoon creator Chuck Jones (1989) stated that he designed the look of Wile E. Coyote from Mark Twain's colorful description of a coyote in his autobiographical book, *Roughing It*. The description of the coyote was "a long, slim, sick and sorry-looking skeleton" that was "a living, breathing allegory of Want. He is always hungry" (Twain, 1981, p. 76). Reading on, I found that Wile E. Coyote was in fact an animated version of Twain's coyote. I believe that Twain's description is also a fair representation of the desires of the Native American Coyote, and that Wile E. Coyote's antics still reflect Coyote's buffoon nature.

How Does Coyote Behave?

Usually, Coyote is a hapless, but clever character. Coyote is presented three different ways in the stories, either as a trickster, a blundering victim, or a villain. He is not portrayed as one more than the other. When Coyote gets to be the cunning trickster, he is happy-go-lucky. In the stories where he is the winner, he is described as crafty, very tricky, and clever. However, he is also described as misbehaving, greedy, and silly, and is known to cheat and brag. In stories where he is defeated, Coyote is portrayed as either a victim who is defeated by his own curiosity, or as the Big Bad Wolf of European

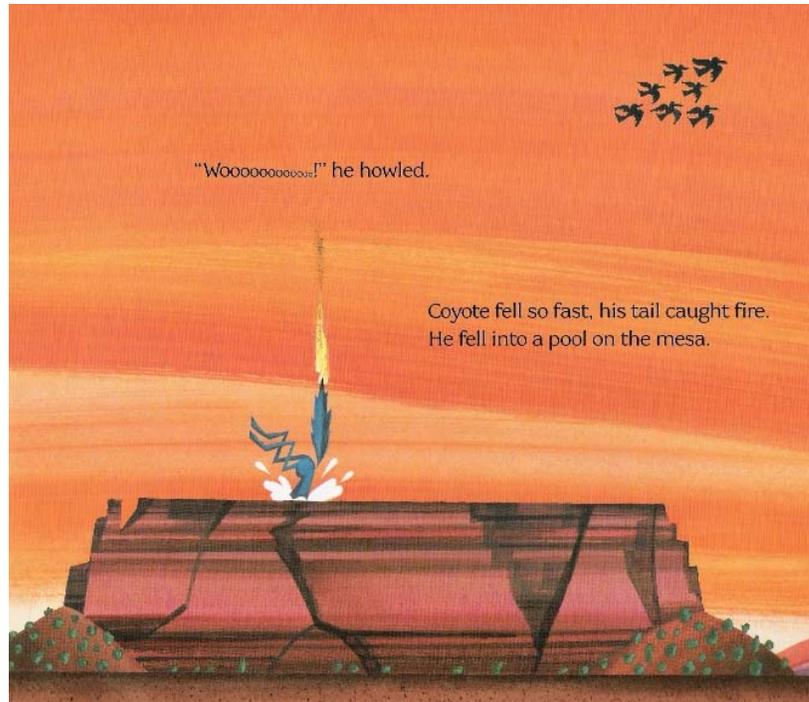


Fig. 3.7. Crashing Coyote.

Source: McDermott, G. (1994). *Coyote: A trickster tale from the American Southwest*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace & Company.

stories. When Coyote has been cast in these two roles, he is only described negatively as being greedy, having a nose for trouble, boastful, and unreliable, and never with any positive descriptors.

In the stories in which Coyote is defeated, he is never discouraged or remorseful. He does not feel shame or embarrassment from failure, and is usually satisfied if he can at least end things in a draw. This half hero, half buffoon is indicative of the general Coyote folklore. He is just as likely in those stories to do good for mankind or mischief. Since Coyote is not always punished for his crimes, his stories are not necessarily used to teach children not to do wrong. According to Dove (1990), the more outlandish Coyote stories were used by Native American women to entertain each other as they stayed up through the night with the sick or dying.

Pourquoi stories, which are fictional narratives that explain why things are the way they are, were found throughout the Coyote children's stories. The origins of the natural phenomenon in these stories were where fire came from, how the moon, sun, and stars got in the sky, why coyotes are brown, and what happened to frogs and squirrels' tails. There were a couple of the origins of fire stories and they were very Prometheus-like, but in Coyote's stories he is not punished as Prometheus was.

In the stories I examined, Coyote tricked three different categories of creatures, the supernatural (the Moon, evil spirits, Saynday, and weather spirits), people (cowboys and settlers) and animals (flea, lizard, rattlesnake, bird, horse, and bull). The supernatural characters and the humans are more powerful than Coyote, but the animals he tricked are not necessarily ones that are more powerful than him. Coyote preying on weaker animals contradicts the common trickster attribute of a weak character using his intelligence to outwit larger, more dangerous characters. However, when Coyote is tricked, it is exclusively by animals who were weaker than he (rabbit, locust, turtle, squirrel, mole, and birds), with rabbit characters being the most common.

When Coyote wins it is usually because of his skillful planning. In one story he fools another trickster character named Saynday by first disguising himself as sickly and weak, and then challenges Saynday to a race. Coyote convinced Saynday not only that he was feeble, but that he was so feeble that to be fair Saynday should tie heavy rocks to his self to make the race more balanced. After the race started, Coyote dropped the ruse and ran back to eat Saynday's supper. Tricking is almost synonymous with lying, but Coyote tricks in other ways as well. In the two different stories where Coyote acquires fire for mankind, he uses his cunning and ingenuity instead of lying. In *American Indian*

Trickster Tales, he cheated at a game of chance against the spirit of Thunder, by stealing the winning markers when Thunder was not paying attention. In *Coyote and the Fire Stick: A Pacific Northwest Indian Tale*, Coyote plots to obtain fire from evil spirits to give to humanity. Coyote organizes an animal relay race with the stick of fire to avoid the vengeful spirits and get the fire to humanity.

When Coyote is the victim in the stories, it is usually because of his inability to control his curiosity. The other characters in the stories know that his curiosity is his weakness and they often use it against him. For example, in *Meet Tricky Coyote!* a character named Mole had a bag of fleas he wanted to get rid of so he refused to show or tell Coyote what was in the bag. Coyote stole it to satiate his curiosity, and ended up getting covered in fleas. Coyote did not have a traditional or re-occurring nemesis in the stories, but he was tricked by rabbits a couple of times and by smaller animals in general.

Compared to other personified animal characters, Coyote is not presented as having many human attributes. Coyote never owned human clothes or lived in human houses. He also does not usually have problems that are associated with being human. For example, Coyote would not worry about his crops doing poorly or how he was going to pay taxes. His problems focus on his boredom, curiosity, and hunger. Coyote also encounters many inhuman, animistic creatures. The reason behind this lack of human affectations could be that Coyote tales are not based on stories of real people in which animals are substituted for actual people.

Where Does Coyote Live?

There is not a typical description of Coyote's world, but whatever his environment, Coyote is perpetually traveling. The Coyote stories can be described by

using several broad categories that include the depiction of a variety of features from the physical environment. These categories were the descriptions of the terrain and climate as well as the flora and fauna of the region. The accuracies of the settings as depicted in the written text and illustrations will also be discussed.

Western Panorama

For the range of geographic settings of the Coyote stories, broad regions such as the American Southwest and the Pacific Northwest are given by the authors. More often very specific place names are attributed to the locations of the stories. The examples are Thompson River in Northwest Canada, West Sierra Range in Northern California, Northern California along Pit River, the Sonoran Desert in Arizona, the Arizona Great Plains, the Hopi lands of Oraibi, Leenangwva, and Ismo'wala, and the Mexican cities of Ayutla and Juchitan. All of the above mention sites are also locations of traditional Coyote stories.

With such a vast geographic setting, the physical terrain in the stories is varied and represents the distinctive land formations of the large North American region. The most common terrain feature in the written narrative is mountains, followed closely by canyons, mesas, and rivers. Forests are mentioned only once in the written text. However, in the illustrations, forests are the most common terrain feature. Mountains, mesas, and deserts are also commonly depicted in the illustrations (as shown earlier in Fig. 3.7). The deserts portrayed in the illustrations are drawn in the style of the Painted Desert of Northeast Arizona.

Weather is usually not a factor in the Coyote stories. However, twice Coyote's adversaries are weather spirits, Cloud and Thunder. Cloud was drawn an actual cloud and had a faint outline of a human face, but Thunder was not drawn and the way in which he was described was human-like. Only in *Meet Tricky Coyote!* did a weather event affect the story. A flood strands Coyote in a tree where he was then forced to interact with a crane.

Animals Are Not Always Lunch

A large variety of animals are depicted in both the written text and the illustrations of the Coyote stories. Most of the kinds of animals that are found in North America can be found in the stories. The majority of animals encountered in the stories are friends or bystanders to Coyotes antics. The animals presented the most were eagles, mountain lions, prairie dogs, rabbits, and deer. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, all these animals, as well as the others, can be found in North American biomes that they were presented.

In all the examples of animals, they were drawn realistically and without clothing. Most of them behave as animals and do not have human features or affectations. The exception is in *Coyote Sings to the Moon*, which shows animals and inanimate objects, like the moon, exhibiting human behaviors. In *Coyote and the Fire Stick: a Pacific Northwest Indian Tale*, Squirrel and Frog are drawn with atypical tails, but by the end of the story their tails looked normal due to their encounters with the evil spirits.

The Role of Plants

Like the animals, the vegetation described in the stories is diverse. Specific plants mentioned in the written text are red clover, pine trees, jicaro tree (a common gourd producing tree of Central America), wheat, milkweed and chili peppers. The vegetation in the stories is often referred to in an agricultural sense, for example the chili peppers were crops in a farmer's garden and the clover was for a lamb to graze. The milkweed however was used by Coyote to make him appear sickly to another character. In *The Tale of Rabbit and Coyote*, Rabbit uses the fruit of the jicaro tree as weapons to throw at Coyote. The jicaro tree grows in inhospitable areas and survives where other plants and trees cannot. The jicaro is remarkable in that it has multiple uses besides the obvious its bark is used for charcoal and its seeds are used to make vegetable oil.

In the illustrations, the vegetation shown is basically the same types of vegetation that is mentioned in the written narrative. It is primarily the types of vegetation found in forests and desert environments. Since many of the Coyote stories are set in American Southwest, a variety of cacti are common in the illustrations, but a cactus is only mentioned once in the written stories. A cactus is included as one of the many items that Coyote swallows in the story *There Was a Coyote Who Swallowed a Flea*.

I listed all the plants that were included in the stories and illustrations that I examined (pine, oak, jicara, zapote trees and blackberries, wildflowers, wheat, grass, red clover, milkweed, chili pepper, and cactus). I then checked with the *Encyclopedia Britannica* to see if all that vegetation was true to location. I found that all are present in the North American biomes. For example, evergreen trees are in abundance in the Pacific Northwest and cacti are common in the American Southwest.

Coyote's Culture

Since the range of the Coyote stories are so broad, there is not a single, typical culture depicted in his stories. Several broad categories emerged concerning the depiction of the cultural setting of the Coyote stories. These categories were descriptions of the human inhabitants, technology, food, clothing and adornments, language, and religion. As with the physical environment, the accuracies of the cultural settings as depicted in the text and illustrations will also be discussed.

Native Americans, Cowboys, and Hispanic Farmers

It is common for authors of the Coyote stories to include a description of the story's cultural origins. The actual humans that the stories were attributed to were mostly Native Americans. Native Americans are often featured as characters in the stories in addition to being credited with Coyote's origins. They are sometimes broadly identified as simply "Native American" or as "Pacific Northwest Indian," but more often they are specifically identified by their tribal names, like Achumawi, Comanche, Hopi, Kiowa, Papago, Salishan, White Mountain Apache, and Zuni.

Besides Native Americans, two other cultural groups are also featured as characters in the stories, Hispanics and Western cowboys. The stories *The Tale of Rabbit and Coyote* and *Borreguita and the Coyote* both feature male Hispanics farmers and both stories were specifically identified as being in Mexico. Two cowboys of undisclosed origins are characters in *There Was a Coyote Who Swallowed a Flea* and *Meet Tricky Coyote!* Both cowboys in the two stories are victims of Coyote's trickery. In the stories that feature Native Americans, they are always helped by Coyote, and the Hispanic

farmers are neutral with no actual contact with Coyote. This is an appropriate interaction pattern since Coyote is a Native American character and cowboys would be intruders to their cultures.

The illustrations show the Native Americans in traditional pre-European contact clothing and technology. Figure 3.8 shows Native Americans from the Pacific Northwest. They are depicted with Native American racial features and in varying ages and genders. They were never portrayed as stereotypical plains Indians with war-paint, feathered headdresses, and living in teepees. The cowboys are both white and blonde and are drawn as traditional “Wild West” cowboys complete with horses and lassos. Figure 3.9 depicts the fancy cowboy who challenged Coyote to a test of wits. The Hispanic farmers are



Fig. 3.8. People of the Pacific Northwest.

Source: Goldwin, B.D. (1996). *Coyote and the Fire Stick: A Pacific Northwest Indian Tale*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace & Company.

illustrated with Hispanic racial features, and one is illustrated with pre-industrial technology (outside cooking pot, no tractor) and the other is portrayed with industrial level technology (trucks, cars, and tractors).

Tools Not Mail Ordered from ACME

The level of technology in the stories is predominantly pre-industrial, but there is one exception which is the industrial level technology used by one of the Hispanic farmers that was just mentioned in the preceding section. There were also several anachronisms in the illustrations of one story. Three typologies emerged in the types of technology that are portrayed; shelter, implements, and transportation. Shelter being defined as huts or houses, implements being any other device used to help perform some task, and transportation being any mode to travel besides walking.

The types of shelters are varied by geographic region and the era that the stories are set. The industrial level Hispanic farmer in *Borreguita and the Coyote* has a modern house and barn, and in the background of several of the illustrations were other kinds of buildings, such as a church, storage buildings, and other homes. The other Hispanic farmer in *The Tale of Rabbit and Coyote* has an adobe style house with a red tiled roof. The Native American shelters are of two varieties, a lodge house and adobe pueblo. Figure 3.10 depicts the lodge house which is illustrated in *Coyote and the Fire Stick: a Pacific Northwest Indian Tale* as a long hut made with a wood frame and hide panels. Figure 3.11 is an illustration of an adobe pueblo style house from *Coyote & Little Turtle*.



Fig. 3.9. Cowboy and Coyote.

Source: Mayo, G. W. (1993). *Meet Tricky Coyote!* New York, NY: Walker and Company.

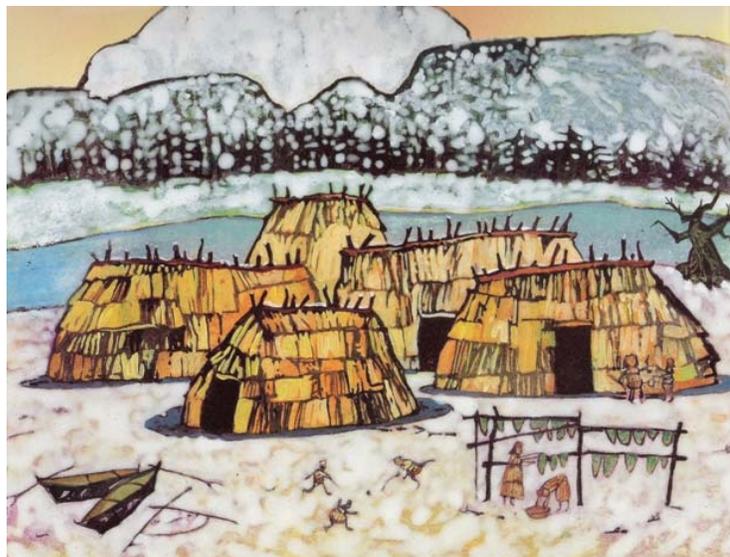


Fig. 3.10. Lodge Houses.

Source: Goldwin, B.D. (1996). *Coyote and the Fire Stick: A Pacific Northwest Indian Tale*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace & Company.

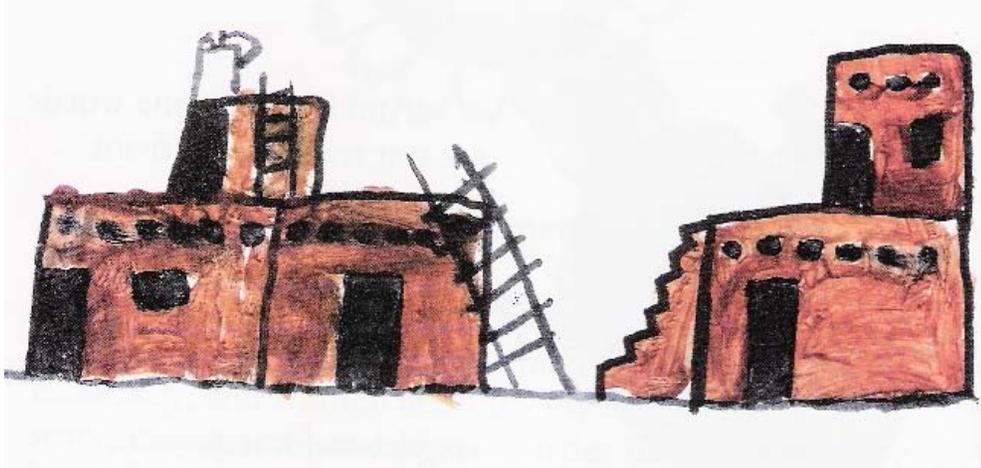


Fig. 3.11. Adobe Pueblo.

Source: Talashoema, H. (1994). *Coyote & Little Turtle*. Santa Fe, NM: Clear Light Publishers.

Both Native American structures in the two stories are accurately portrayed. The adobe pueblo houses are very similar in design to northern New Mexico's Taos Pueblo, which Kantner (2004) stated was the classic apartment style pueblo. The architecture of the lodge house is based on the illustrator's research of Pacific Northwest Native American lodgings conducted at Burke Museum in Seattle, Washington.

Implements in the stories were placed in the following categories domestic (broom, ladder, and clothes line); hunting (fish trap, spear, and bow and arrow); and containers (sack, bucket, and box). The most commonly found items in the stories were the domestic ones. *Coyote Sings to the Moon* is the only story that has technology anachronisms. In the introductory paragraph it states that the story set a long time ago and a Native American character was drawn wearing traditional clothing. However, the illustrations show characters with modern items such as a black plastic comb, bottle of sunscreen labeled "LUNA," a beach blanket and umbrella, an orchestra wand, sunglasses, and a chess set. All of those items are not of course available during the described setting.

The items are all used in a comedic fashion by the illustrator and were not incorporated in the written text or affect the story.

Transportation in the written narrative of the stories is limited to a raft and domesticated horses used by the cowboy characters. Depictions of transportation technology are more evident in the illustrations. There are canoes in one of the stories set in the Pacific northwest as well as rafts in other stories. The story with the industrial level farmer mentioned earlier shows cars, trucks, and a sail boat in the illustrations. Since the Coyote stories are still told today, it was appropriate for these higher levels of technology to be included.

Food of a Hungry Coyote

Since Coyote is a predator he is obsessed with finding his next meal. In the stories I examined, food is a common motivator for Coyote and other characters as well. Coyote himself is usually introduced as being hungry and hunting for food. He is sometimes described as being on a never-ending search of food. The food that is portrayed in the stories can be categorized as processed (cheese and chocolate), game (prairie dog stew, fish, and rabbit), and vegetables (green chili peppers, berries, and corn). The most common food is game. As a predatory animal, it is appropriate for Coyote to hunt for food, and his prey in the stories mirror the diet of an actual coyote, such as locusts, prairie dogs, and rabbits. The human foods presented are also appropriate for the cultures in which they were described. For example, the fish depicted in the story set in the Pacific Northwest is salmon which was a common staple for Native Americans of the region. Cheese appears a couple of times in the stories. Coyote is first introduced to cheese by

Fox in *Meet Tricky Coyote!*, and is tricked into thinking the moon's reflection is a wheel of cheese by Rabbit in *The Tale of Rabbit and Coyote*.

In the written narratives and illustrations it is common to show the methods of how the food was prepared. *Coyote and the Fire Stick: a Pacific Northwest Indian Tale* mentions that Coyote had shown people how to dry salmon on fish racks for preserving food. The racks are also shown in the illustrations. One illustration shows fish racks between the village and river, and even shows the villagers placing the fish upon them (as earlier seen in Fig. 3.8). Muckle (2007) stated that the Native Americans of the Pacific Northwest were very efficient at preserving salmon which allowed them to survive in their semi-permanent winter villages. There were also many references to cooking the food over a fire on a spit or in a pot. *Coyote Sings to the Moon*, the story with the anachronisms, shows squirrels roasting marshmallows over a fire as well.

Western Clothing

The illustrations in the Coyote stories that I examined portray human characters in a variety of clothing and adornments which all fall in the three following categories: Native American, Hispanic, and cowboy. The Native Americans are depicted wearing different clothes based on their geographic area. In the Pacific Northwest story; they are illustrated wearing hide clothing. One is illustrated wearing a deer hunting disguise which consists of a costume with a deer head. While in the southwest stories, like *Coyote: A trickster tale from the American Southwest* and *Coyote & Little Turtle*, Native Americans are shown with headbands, multicolored pendants decorated with geometric patterns and a kachina mask. The Native American clothing was appropriate for the societies that they

represented, and this is probably because the authors of the stories researched the cultures.

There are two examples of Hispanic farmers illustrated in the stories set in Mexico. The farmers are dressed in a straw hat with white shirt and pants and in a cowboy hat, blue jeans, and a white shirt. This style of clothing could be seen as traditional Mexican farmer outfits and are not exaggerated or over the top. I do not believe they promote any negative stereotypes or appear in an offensive manner.

The cowboy or “Old West” style of clothing is in several stories, including both male and female characters. The cowboys are always illustrated with hats, boots and vests. One is shown later in his red long john underwear, and the female is drawn wearing a red dress with polka dots, a white apron, and big work boots. The clothing depicted is indicative of western clothing found in historic photographs. There is an absence of firearms which is to be expected in children’s literature.

In the written text I examined, only two characters are mentioned as having any type of clothing. One was a cowboy in *Meet Tricky Coyote!* who challenged Coyote to a test of wits and the other was a rabbit named “Cottontail” who wore moccasins in *Trickster Tales: Forty Folk Stories from around the World*. Coyote obtains all of the cowboy’s fancy clothes in the contest of wits. Coyote tells the cowboy that he could not start the contest until he retrieved his bag of tricks. Coyote convinces the cowboy that he needs the cowboy’s clothes in order to ride the cowboy’s horse, in order to get home quickly to retrieve the bag of tricks. In the end, Coyote rides off with all the cowboy’s possessions. In the stories’ illustrations, Coyote is only drawn once wearing other clothes

and that is a red kerchief around his neck, cowboy-style. This western affectation is probably included because the story is set in modern Arizona.

As I discussed early in *Coyote Sings to the Moon*, several technological anachronisms are in the illustrations, and anachronisms in clothing and adornments are also evident. For example, the moon character is illustrated lounging in modern red flip-flop sandals, sun glasses, and beach hat while at the same time the human character in the story is shown wearing a deerskin dress and moccasins. As I mentioned earlier this is the same story that showed Coyote with a modern plastic comb and animals roasting marshmallows. This is a similar phenomenon to the Anansi the spider stories where the animals had a higher level of technology than the humans and will be addressed later in Chapter VI.

Native American Languages and Spanish

There are numerous languages that exist in the geographic areas covered in the stories; however, only three are actually used in the stories: Spanish, Kiowa, and Hopi. None of Coyote's Native American names, like Mica, Sinkalip, and Yenaldlooshi, are utilized in the stories. Only two characters in all the stories have given names, the little lamb, Borreguita, and the Kiowa trickster, Saynday. Since Coyote has so many different names, authors probably chose the common "Coyote" to make the character more universal.

Coyote & Little Turtle is written in both Hopi and English, with one side of the book in one language and the other side in the other. This is the same story mentioned earlier that was illustrated by Hopi children. The Kiowa language is included in the story

with Saynday from *Trickster Tales: Forty Folk Stories from Around the World*. Saynday sings a song to trick prairie dogs into sleeping, which is “Sa-a-to sa-a-to to-on va-a-tok-ti, prairie dog, prairie dog wag your tail. Sa-a-to sa-a-to Oye you po-lo-si, prairie dog wag your tail till you’re tired and sleepy.” Spanish is used throughout *The Tale of Rabbit and Coyote*, both in the written narrative, a glossary, and it is also incorporated into the backgrounds of the illustrations. Figure 3.12 shows how Spanish is written in the illustrations. Spanish is primarily phrases that the characters say to each other, like “*Me siento un poco raro*” (I feel a bit strange) and “*Conejo malvado*” (wicked rabbit).

Animistic Spirits and Roman Catholicism

There are three types of religious or supernatural depictions in the Coyote stories: evil spirits, animistic spirits, and in the illustrations of two Mexican stories, Roman



Fig. 3.12. Conejo Malvado.

Source: Johnson, T. (1994). *The Tale of Rabbit and Coyote*. New York, NY: Scholastic, Inc.

Catholicism. The evil spirits are the keepers of fire and are illustrated as skinny green creatures, some bald and others with long black hair. The animistic spirits are the moon, the cloud, and thunder spirits, all of whom were tricked by Coyote. The moon is anthropomorphized in the illustrations, which is to say it is given physical human affectations and characteristics such as facial features, arms, and legs. Thunder was portrayed as a violent greedy spirit and Cloud was portrayed as a lazy one. Coyote races Cloud in a story similar to Rabbit versus Turtle, the version where Rabbit was over confident in his speed and the slow but steady Turtle won the race. Roman Catholicism is depicted in the stories with the illustrations of a Catholic church in the background of a picture and an icon of the Virgin Mary. The icon of the Virgin Mary is displayed on the side of the farmer's house in *The Tale of Rabbit and Coyote* and is seen in Fig. 3.13.

An additional mythological character featured in the stories is Saynday. As mentioned previously, he is a Kiowa Native American trickster character. Saynday is accredited in the Kiowa myths as being the one who gave the sun and the buffalo to the world. Like most tricksters, Saynday has several character flaws, his being vanity and sloppiness. All his stories traditionally start out the same way, "Saynday was coming along. . ." In *Trickster Tales: Forty Folk Stories from Around the World*, Saynday tricks the prairie dogs into becoming his supper, but then in turn is tricked out of the food by Coyote.

Although there is no mention of it in the stories I examined, Coyote himself has been a deity figure in several Native American cultures. For example, Christen (1998) stated that the Chinook portrayed Coyote as the co-creator of their civilization and the

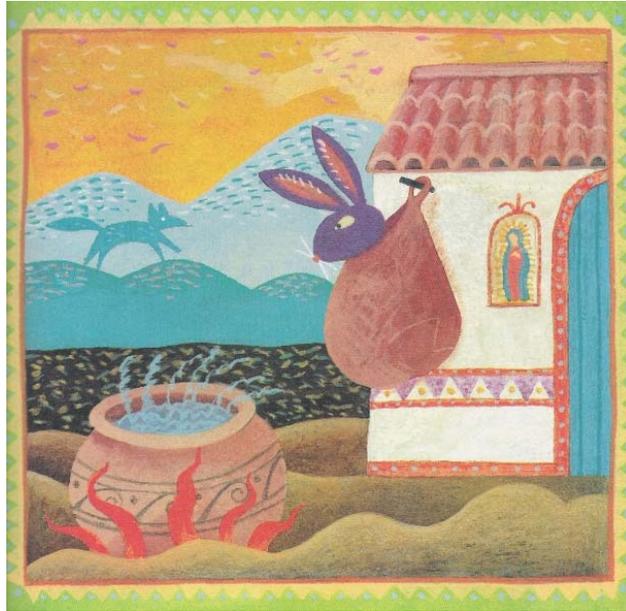


Fig. 3.13. Icon of the Virgin Mary.

Source: Johnson, T. (1994). *The Tale of Rabbit and Coyote*. New York, NY: Scholastic, Inc.

Crow believed that Coyote established their social systems. Despite this, Coyote's god status and importance is greatly reduced in the stories. In the stories he does not exhibit many god-like or magical powers aside from placing the stars, which he did by using a bow and arrow in *Coyote Places the Stars*. Another supernatural aspect of Coyote is included in *Coyote and the Fire Stick: a Pacific Northwest Indian Tale*. In this story, Coyote is given the idea to use other animals to steal fire in a relay race from his sisters who lived in his stomach in the shape of berries. Dove (1990) stated that Coyote's siblings shape changed into berries so that Coyote would eat them so that could obtain free transportation from him as they dwelled in his stomach. Dove also stated that Coyote's sisters often gave him advice or sometimes chided him for his behavior which is also depicted in *Coyote and the Fire Stick: a Pacific Northwest Indian*. Coyote's god status will be further discussed in Chapter V.

Conclusions

In the children's literature I examined, there is a balance between Coyote's portrayal as a hero and fool. He was not presented more as one or the other. Coyote's large regional range was evident in the variety of environments included in the stories. Since stories about Coyote are based on folklore and are commonly told by contemporary storytellers, his stories can also be set in a variety of time periods. When compared to the cultural customs of the broad groups of people in Coyote's region, his stories were true to location. However, there was the one story with technological anachronisms, and several stories that appeared to be influenced by modern cartoon characters. These discrepancies were still set in authentic locations and environments.

In the next chapter, Rabbit's portrayal in children stories will be discussed.

CHAPTER IV: RABBIT

Both Leopard and Rabbit unwittingly built the same house on the same site, each working independently. Unaware of the other's activity, they credited their ancestors for helping them. Once they realized that both claimed ownership of the house, they tried cohabiting, which tried on both of their nerves. Rabbit and his wife conspired to intimidate Leopard by talking loudly of their family's fierce hunger for Leopard meat. The aggravation and fear proved too much for Leopard, who fled, leaving the house to Rabbit (Kraus 1999, p 72).

Introduction

Stories about Rabbit are often humorous tales of cunning and mischief that are told to instruct as well as to entertain. Like tricksters of other folktale traditions, the fleet-footed Rabbit outsmarts larger enemies through his intelligence. Rabbit is both an African and North American character. Most of his stories originated in the oral traditions throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Stories featuring Rabbit traveled from Africa to North America on slave ships, and were soon combined with the rabbit tales of various Native American cultures. Weaver (1997) stated that there was a "melding of the Cherokee rabbit-trickster . . . into the culture of African slaves" (p. 4). For example, *How Rabbit Stole the Fire: A North American Indian Folk Tale* is essentially the same story told in *Coyote and the Fire Stick: A Pacific Northwest Indian Tale* which was discussed in the previous chapter. The only difference is that Rabbit steals fire using a relay race instead

of Coyote. Another story, *The Tale of Rabbit and Coyote*, is set in Mexico and is a combination of several African trickster tales. It features Rabbit continually outsmarting Coyote, and concludes with a common Native American story where Rabbit hides in the moon.

Folktales about Rabbit also evolved into the famous Brer Rabbit stories of the American South becoming a part of the slave oral tradition. To many slaves, the crafty Brer Rabbit became a cultural hero who outsmarted villainous characters who represented their oppressors. In the stories about Brer Rabbit, the renditions of the African animal were adapted using familiar North American animals. For example, Elephant, Lion, Hyena, and Leopard became characters like Brer Fox, Brer Wolf, and Brer Bear. Subsequently, in a folktale where Brer Rabbit tricks Brer Fox in becoming his horse, it is an adaptation of the African story of Rabbit doing the same trick to Hyena. The outcome is demonstrated in illustrations in Figs. 4.1 and 4.2.

Brer Rabbit has metamorphosed into many modern trickster rabbit characters. Since Bugs Bunny is also a trickster rabbit, I looked into the background of the Warner Brothers Loony Tunes' cartoon character to see if the story versions were based on the cartoon character. Figure 4.3 is a video capture from a 1943 Bugs Bunny cartoon. The rabbit characters in the children's stories do not appear to be influenced by Bugs Bunny, even though he is a major trickster character in contemporary popular culture. Bugs Bunny has a distinctive shape and gray coloring that was not emulated by the rabbit characters of the stories. In the stories, Rabbit is drawn more realistically and less abstract

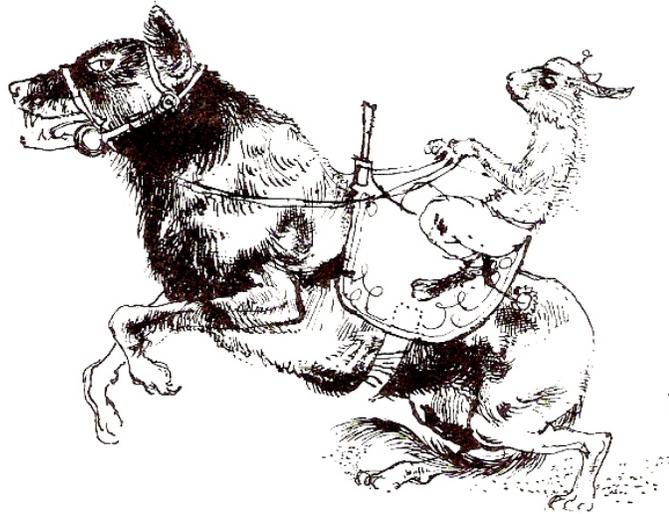


Fig. 4.1. Zomo Riding Hyena.

Source: Sturton, H. (1966). *Zomo the Rabbit*. New York, NY: Atheneum.



Fig. 4.2. Brer Rabbit Riding Brer Fox.

Source: Amin, K. (1999). *The Adventures of Brer Rabbit and Friends: From stories collected by Joel Chandler Harris*. London, UK: Dorling Kindersley Limited.



Fig. 4.3. Bugs Bunny in *Falling Hare* (1943).

Source: Bugs Bunny. (2007). In *Wikipedia.org*. Retrieved December 10, 2007, from Bugs Bunny: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1a/Falling_hare_bugs.jpg

and humanoid. Bugs Bunny's carrot prop and catch phrases were not incorporated into the stories either.

Incredibly, like Wile E. Coyote and Coyote, Bugs Bunny was not based necessarily on the Rabbit of folktales. However, I am sure that Brer Rabbit or other rabbit tricksters had some influence on Bugs Bunny's creators. According to Barrier (2003), Bugs Bunny was instead based more on Groucho Marx. This can be seen in Bugs Bunny's imitation of Groucho Marx's personality of amused detachment. Additionally, Bugs Bunny holds his carrot in the same fashion that Groucho Marx held a cigar, and one of his catch phrases, "Of course you realize, this means war!" was originally said by Groucho in the movie *Duck Soup* (1933). Other rabbit characters in modern culture seem more based on Bugs Bunny than on Rabbit folktales. One example, as seen in Fig. 4.4, is the Trix rabbit from the General Mills cereal box and advertisements.

In this chapter, I will discuss how Rabbit looks and acts as well as where he lived as portrayed in the written narrative and illustrations of the children’s books.

What Does Rabbit Look Like?

Rabbit is typically portrayed in the books I read as appearing as a simple rabbit. Although he is rarely described in the written narratives, occasionally other characters occasionally talk about him descriptively. For example, in the Brer Rabbit stories, Brer Fox describes him as “the fattest rabbit I ever did see” and Brer Fox also calls him a “bob-tailed rascal.” Rabbit’s actual fur is mentioned in both the African and North American stories, and in the Brer Rabbit version his clothes and hat are mentioned. It is

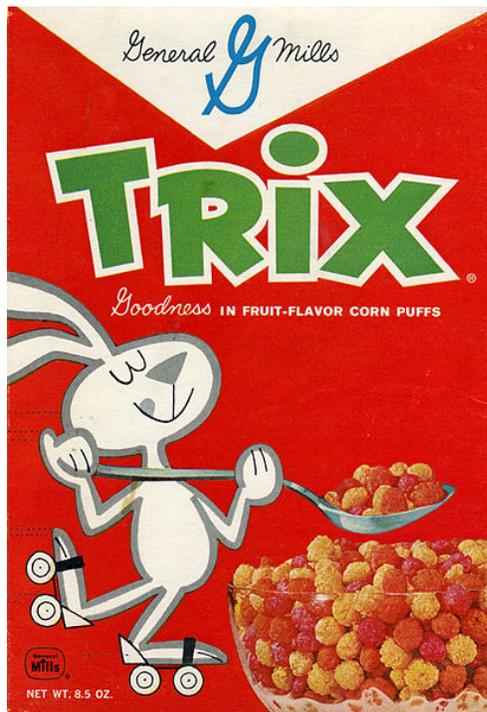


Fig. 4.4. General Mills (1969) Trix Rabbit.

Source: Trix. (2007). In *Wikipedia.org*. Retrieved December 10, 2007, from Trix (cereal): http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/thumb/9/9b/Old_Trix_Box.jpg/415px-Old_Trix_Box.jpg

interesting that in the stories in which Rabbit does wear clothes, when he removes them he is easily mistaken for an ordinary, non-talking rabbit.

In the illustrations Rabbit is portrayed as either an animalistic rabbit with no human attributes and affectations as portrayed in Fig. 4.5, or as a rabbit with human clothes that walks on his hind legs and uses his front paws as hands. Rabbit is usually drawn as having brown fur, but in *The Tale of Rabbit and Coyote* he is an unrealistic purple as Fig. 4.6 demonstrates. As far as clothing is concerned, the African versions illustrate Rabbit wearing either West African kente print clothing, like in *Zomo the Rabbit: A trickster tale from West Africa*, or baggy pants and a fez as in *Zomo the Rabbit*. In the North American Brer Rabbit stories, he is shown dressed in 19th century farm clothes which consist of pants, suspenders, and a shirt. In the Native American story, *How Rabbit Tricked Otter and Other Cherokee Trickster Stories*, Rabbit was drawn wearing armbands and a loincloth. Rabbit is usually drawn with a very expressive face, using his eyes and mouth to depict a smug or smiling expression.

How Does Rabbit Behave?

Rabbit is essentially a lazy character whose intelligence and speed allow him to overcome his adversaries or to avoid work. In the Rabbit stories that I examined, he is victorious in all but one encounter. He is only defeated in the story that features his race with Turtle. Even in the classic tar baby story, after Rabbit was tricked into being trapped in the tar, he is still able to use his wit to escape capture. When Rabbit is the victor in the stories I read, he is described as smart, very clever, tricky, wise, brave, and very fast. In those same victorious stories, he is also credited as being lazy and having some sense, but



Fig. 4.5. Sungura.

Source: Knutson, B. (1993). *Sungura and Leopard*. Minneapolis, MN: First Avenue Editions.



Fig. 4.6. Purple Rabbit.

Source: Johnson, T. (1994). *The Tale of Rabbit and Coyote*. New York, NY: Scholastic, Inc.

not caution. When Rabbit is beaten by Turtle, he was only given negative characteristics such as he is known to brag and exaggerate and that he makes a mockery of the law. This suggests that tales in which a completely misbehaving Rabbit is defeated were designed to teach the audience how to act properly. In Rabbit's case the behaviors that are being discouraged are overconfidence and bragging.

With his overwhelming number of victories in the stories, Rabbit is clearly a successful trickster. He shows that quick thinking not only gets you out of work, but can also get you out of trouble. Several times, Rabbit's laziness has a positive outcome because he is motivated to find an easier or smarter way to do the work. In the classic tar baby scenario, Rabbit's quick thinking convinces his foe that he was afraid of the briar patch and counts on his enemy to do something horrible. Rabbit does not always use verbal lies to trick his enemies; instead he more often uses misdirection. For example, in a tug of war competition in *Trickster Hare: A play based on an East African tale*, Rabbit defeats the stronger Elephant and Hippopotamus by positioning the rope over a large rock hiding them from each other. Rabbit was then able to make them think they were competing against him instead of each other. In the opening story of this chapter, Rabbit made sure Leopard overheard him talking about how hungry his family was for Leopard meat. Rabbit counts on Leopard's own imagination to fill in how Rabbit would actually be able to kill him. Brer Rabbit uses Brer Fox's impatience to humiliate him in front of the other animals to get Brer Fox to agree to carry him on his back. Brer Rabbit then convinces Brer Fox that a saddle would make the trip even easier. In the end, the situation was completely turned around with Brer Rabbit humiliating Brer Fox in front of the other animals.

Archetypal trickster characters are usually smaller creatures that are physically weaker than other animals and thus have to rely on their wits for survival. Rabbit is small compared to most of his adversaries, but has a superior physical attribute that the other animals do not, his speed. In the stories, Rabbit's physical speed and agility is greater than other animals, but it may be a metaphor for his quick thinking. Rabbit is able to come up with plans and schemes and implement them instantly. Despite his physical advantage, Rabbit's speed is negated in his race with Turtle. Even though Rabbit has physical prowess, Turtle's ability to out plot him is his downfall. Although Rabbit is not physically harmed in the race, he does lose bragging rights which are important in the animal community where every animal has its own specialty.

Rabbit may also be such a victorious trickster since he is based on a rabbit. Both spiders and coyotes are actually predators and rabbits are exclusively herbivores, which may give Rabbit the edge as an underdog hero. Rabbit is also the only animal out of the three that is hunted by humans as a food source, and therefore his cunning may have been encountered first hand by the original storytellers. Also, there are far more rabbit trickster characters in which storytellers can adapt the successful antics of a familiar rabbit character into their own cultures.

Despite his animal appearance, Rabbit still has human-like problems, such how to build an actual house, not a rabbit warren, for his family. Several times in the stories other animals come to Rabbit for him to solve their problems due to his reputation of being wise and crafty. In *Zomo the Rabbit*, the other animals could not determine who was stealing from their collective grain stores, and they ask Rabbit to take on the role of a detective to solve the crime. To catch the thief, Rabbit first instructs the animals cut

wooden sticks the same length to represent each animal. Rabbit tells the animals that in the following morning the stick that grows a foot longer will belong to the thief. Hyena, the actual thief, is afraid his stick would grow, so he cut the stick down a foot to compensate and in doing so revealed that he was the thief. Similarly, in *The Adventures of Brer Rabbit and Friends: From stories collected by Joel Chandler Harris*, Brer Weasel stole butter from the communal springhouse and Brer Rabbit is called in by the other animals to find a way to stop the thief. Brer Weasel single handedly defeated all of the other animals when they challenged him individually in an assortment of games. Brer Rabbit challenges Brer Weasel to a tug-of-war contest, and used the excuse of the game to tie Brer Weasel to a tree.

As mentioned earlier, the only time Rabbit is defeated is in his race with Turtle, who is also known as Tortoise or Brer Terrapin. Figure 4.7 shows an illustration of the Brer Rabbit version of this race. The story of the tortoise and the hare in which the two race to see which is faster is also attributed to *Aesop's Fables*, but the Aesop's fable differs in that the overconfident hare falls asleep and the slow and steady tortoise continues on to win the race. The African version is different. In the African version Turtle cheats by recruiting his family to pose as him and hide at key points in the race and wins despite Rabbit running as fast as he can. The African moral is not slow and steady wins the day, but just when you think you are the smartest, someone smarter comes along.

There are other behaviors besides tricking in the stories about Rabbit that I read. The most common two activities are playing games and farming. Playing games is a common behavior depicted in both the written text and illustrations, but primarily in the



Fig. 4.7. Rabbit Racing Turtle.

Source: Amin, K. (1999). *The Adventures of Brer Rabbit and Friends: From stories collected by Joel Chandler Harris*. London, UK: Dorling Kindersley Limited.

Brer Rabbit versions. He is shown playing checkers, horseshoes, hide-and-go-seek, and competing in foot races. In all versions of the stories featuring Rabbit, agricultural activities are present. In the Mexican story, *The Tale of Rabbit and Coyote*, a farmer is shown with a field of chili peppers. In *The Adventures of Brer Rabbit and Friends: From stories collected by Joel Chandler Harris*, a large diagram of a plantation is shown and labeled in a two page illustration. In several of the stories set in Africa, specific agricultural activities are described in the written narratives. Rabbit usually excludes himself from the work. He would explain that he did not really need the extra food or water. When the work was finished, he would try and trick or steal the fruits of the other animals' labors. Examples of the agricultural activities are clearing forests for farming, sowing and planting seeds, harvesting, and storing grain in grain bins. Several times, water wells were also dug for communal use. Based on comparing these agricultural

activities to Caplan and Topan's (2004) cultural material on the Swahili, these activities are appropriate.

Where Does Rabbit Live?

Rabbit is typically shown in a rural environment in a community of other animals, and in the books I read this could be located in southern North America or in Africa. Several broad categories emerged concerning the depiction of the physical environment of the Rabbit stories. These categories are the descriptions of the terrain and climate as well as the flora and fauna of the region. When it is relevant, each section distinguishes between the African and North American versions of the portrayal of Rabbit's environment.

Africa and North America

Physical geography, both terrain and environmental features, are important aspects of the story settings. Rabbit often takes advantage of his surroundings to outwit his opponents. The example of using rocks to conceal Hippopotamus and Elephant in the tug-of-war contest mentioned earlier is a good example. In *The Tale of Rabbit and Coyote*, Rabbit uses a number of features such as a mountain, forest, and pond to trick Coyote.

The stories about Rabbit take place in several geographic regions and this is evident in the variety of cultural place names listed in the stories. The stories are set in Mexico, the southern United States, Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, West Africa, and East Africa. In East Africa, the story was specifically set in the highlands of East Africa, near the Tanya River and Mount Kenya.

A variety of geographic features are included in the written text of the stories. This variation is because the stories have both African and North American settings. Forests are the most common setting in the stories, rivers and water holes are also common. In the African versions, the water hole is the central location of most of the stories. Also, in the African versions, the dry season is used as a plot device for the animals to go their separate ways and to represent the passing of time. According to African geographic materials, these geographic features are true to location.

The illustrations of the geographic settings in the stories are not distinctively African or North American. For both broad regions the illustrations show primarily rolling green hills and mountains in the backgrounds. However, the vegetation is more jungle-like in the African stories and the North American stories feature more evergreen forests. Since the illustrators used generic geographic features, they are also true to location. In *Sungura and Leopard*, the setting is a savanna. Since the story was set near Mount Kenya, the savanna is also true to location.

The Role of Plants

Specific local vegetation is often named in the written narratives of the stories about Rabbit. The specific examples are the kofia, jicara, zapote, palm, and whistling thorn trees. They are all included in stories for their particular attributes, for example the jicara and whistling thorn are used as weapons in *The Tale of Rabbit and Coyote* and *Trickster Hare*, respectfully. In *Zomo the Rabbit: A trickster tale from West Africa*, Rabbit uses a palm tree to trap a wild cow's horns. The trees were also used for their fruits or a place for Rabbit to hide.

All the specific trees are listed in African and Mexican stories and not the stories set in the southern United States. These exotic plants may have been included in the stories to give them an authentic feel. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* stated that jicara and zapote trees are common in Mexico and the palm tree is common throughout Africa. According to *The Global Compendium of Weeds*, the whistling thorn tree (also known as the Black Acacia) is another common African plant. However, I could not find a listing for the kofia tree in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* or other botanical references. In the *English-Swahili Dictionary*; “kofia” was defined as a hat. Either the kofia tree does not exist, or it is a local name for another type of tree.

Other general vegetation is also mentioned in the written text of the stories. The stories include grass, trees, and briar patch or thorny bush. The briar patch is most mentioned and is often Rabbit’s home or refuge. Likewise, the illustrations depict a variety of generic vegetation, flowers, trees, and tall grass. All the general foliage can be found in the multiple regional settings of the stories.

The Role of Animals

There is a multitude of animals in the written text as well as the illustrations of the stories featuring Rabbit and can be divided into North American and African animals. The animals’ roles are that of characters who Rabbit helps, tricks, or are witnesses of his antics. The animals are usually drawn realistically as opposed to abstract, but are often drawn with human clothing.

The African animals that are featured in the stories include elephant, baboon, lion, leopard, camel, giraffe, bush-cow, hyena, roan-antelope, warthog, jackal, and gazelle.

Elephant and Lion are the most commonly encountered. Lion's role is that of a dim witted chief or leader and Elephant is portrayed as a strong bully.

The American animals in the stories can be placed in two separate categories, domesticated and wild. The domesticated animals are horse, cow, pig, lamb, chickens and are portrayed as actual animals that cannot speak and do not wear clothes. The wild animals in the stories are weasel, turtle, cranes, mink, raccoon, fox, wolf, and bear. The fox and turtle are the most commonly featured animals in the North American versions and both are adversaries of Rabbit.

For both regions, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* supports that these animals are appropriate for their individual settings. The African stories are primarily set in East Africa and the animals presented can be found in East Africa. Similarly, all of the animals depicted as being North American are commonly found in North America.

Rabbit's Culture

How does Rabbit live on a day to day basis? Rabbit's cultural settings are basically divided into African and North American settings. In these settings, several broad categories were evident in the depiction of the cultural setting of the stories featuring Rabbit. They were descriptions of the people, technology, food, clothing and adornments, language, and religion. When it is relevant, each section distinguishes between the African and North American versions of Rabbit's portrayal.

Swahili and Others

The authors of the Rabbit stories occasionally included a description of the cultural origins in the stories' introductions. In these introductions, the African stories of

Rabbit are credited to the Swahili of East Africa, the Thonga people of Mozambique, the Wolof people of Senegal. Some of the North American stories credit the origins of the stories to the Native American tribes of the Cherokee and Biloxi. *The Adventures of Brer Rabbit and Friends: from stories collected by Joel Chandler Harris* includes a six page section at the end of the book that provides detailed cultural material on the origins of Rabbit stories as well as biological information on the actual animals.

The human characters in the stories set in Africa are illustrated as having African racial features and were dressed in archaic costumes as seen in Fig. 4.8. There were no depictions of Native Americans or any people on the plantations in the North American stories, but in *The Tale of Rabbit and Coyote* which is a Mexican adaptation, the farmer was portrayed as having Hispanic racial features as seen in Fig. 4.9.



Fig. 4.8. Archaic Costumes.

Source: Winther, B. (1981). *Trickster Hare: A play based on an East African tale*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.

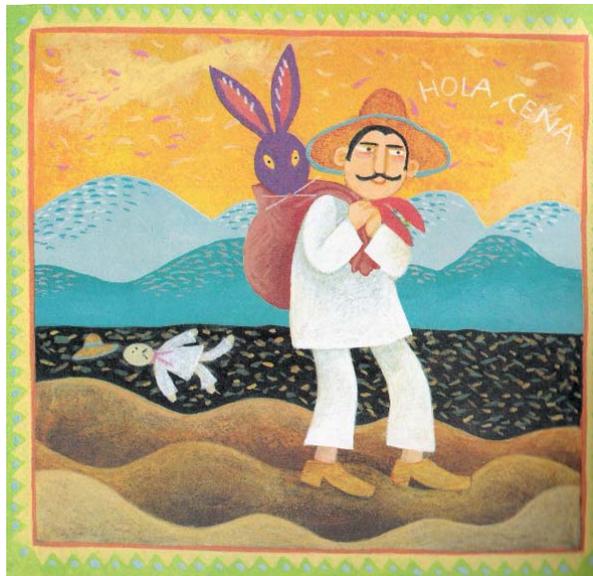


Fig. 4.9. Latino Farmer.

Source: Johnson, T. (1994). *The Tale of Rabbit and Coyote*. New York, NY: Scholastic, Inc.

Tools of the Trade

There are two broad types of technology portrayed in stories about Rabbit; shelter and implements, with shelter being defined as huts or houses and implements being any other device used to help perform some task. The level of technology in the stories also varies based on which continent the story is set. If the story is set in Africa, it is entirely Pre-industrial, and the stories set in North America have some indications of industrial level technology. Regardless of the level of technology, all the stories were set in agrarian societies.

The shelters in the written text are rarely mentioned. Rabbit usually lives outside, but in the occasion where he and Leopard co-built a house it is a hut with clay walls and a thatched roof. In illustrations from *Sungura and Leopard*, it shows the two characters building the hut step by step. The final construction is that of a common mud hut of West Africa that is conical shaped as depicted in Fig. 4.10. The wattle and daub step by step

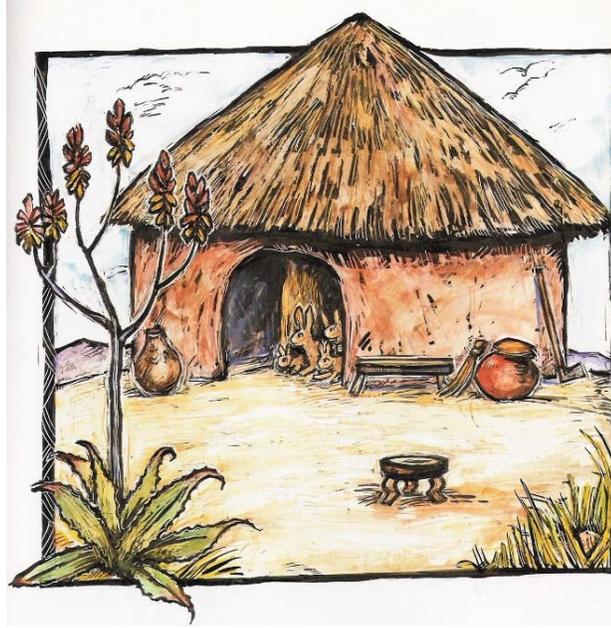


Fig. 4.10. Rabbit's Hut.

Source: Knutson, B. (1993). *Sungura and Leopard*. Minneapolis, MN: First Avenue Editions.

construction is a style of construction that is a woven latticework of wood poles, known as the wattles, that is then daubed with a mixture of clay and sand. *Trickster Hare: A play based on an East African tale* shows human villagers living in similar huts that have oval topped doors, circular walls, and conical thatched roofs. Rabbit's wattle and daub house and the village are both described as being Swahili in the stories, but according to Nurse and Spear (1985) wattle and daub houses were only common in East Africa 1000 years ago. Caplan and Topan (2004) stated that for the past few hundred years, the Swahili have instead been building houses with square walls made of stone. The issue of depicting West African housing in East Africa will be discussed in both Chapters V and VI.

In the North American adaptations of the stories, there are many examples in the written text and illustrations of houses and other buildings such as a springhouse, a

school, slave quarters, a plantation manor, a mill house, and barns. Most of the buildings are unpainted wood boards, but the springhouse is a bricked building. When compared to Phillips' (2007) photographs of actual slave quarters and cabins, the illustrations of the buildings are very similar to the architecture in *The Adventures of Brer Rabbit and Friends: from stories collected by Joel Chandler Harris*. Brer Rabbit's own cabin is identical to a photograph of a double frame cabin shown in Phillips' *Life and Labor in the Old South*.

Implements found in the written narrative and the illustrations of the stories can be categorized as musical (bell, drums, and rattle), hunting (traps, gun, and bow and arrow), containers (sack, water jar, and bag), and agricultural (scarecrow, hoe, and water well). The most common depicted in the stories are the agricultural implements due to the prevalence of agricultural references and activities. The agricultural tools, like the hoe, were often used by Rabbit in farming, but more often they were used by Rabbit's adversaries or neighbors because Rabbit did not want to work. In *Trickster Tales: Forty Folk Stories from Around the World* Rabbit misuses a garden hoe to pin down and trap other characters. Rabbit uses the variety of the musical instruments to distract his adversaries or trick them into thinking he is something else, but did not usually play the musical instruments for the purpose of making music. The containers are always used by Rabbit in the stories to take away his ill gotten goods.

Based on my research of secondary cultural references, the implements depicted in the stories are set in the appropriate eras with no occurrences of anachronisms. Examples of tool usage in *The Adventures of Brer Rabbit and Friends: From stories*

collected by Joel Chandler Harris can be found in period photographs from Phillips' (2007) Life and Labor in the Old South.

Rabbit Food

Water and food acquisition are sometimes motivators or targets for Rabbit's plots. A variety of food is presented in both the written text and the illustrations of the stories, again, due to the stories being set in two different geographical and cultural regions. There are three categories of food presented in the stories; meat (eggs, ants, and rabbit), vegetable (melon, grain, and sweet potatoes) and processed foods (chocolate, cheese, and butter). The processed foods are only found in the North American stories and are very common. Rabbit himself is a common food item, and is the target of most of the stories' predators. Water was also a common item of necessity that Rabbit tries to acquire. In several stories, Rabbit tries to sneak past other animals that were guarding a water hole or well. They were guarding the water from Rabbit since he did not help in its upkeep.

Based on my research in other cultural reference materials, the foods were generalized and available to all of the cultures depicted.

African and North American Clothing

As mentioned earlier, the clothing of the characters in the stories were rarely described in the written text. Rabbit's portrayal as primarily an animal prevents clothing from being commonly found in the stories. However, clothing is shown in the illustrations of some of the stories. Brer Rabbit, who represented the slaves who told his stories, were more likely to have clothing incorporated into the stories. Wild animal

characters in the Brer Rabbit stories are fully dressed in a style of clothing from the historic period of the stories setting, but domesticated animals were always drawn as animals without any clothes or human characteristics. In the African stories that had Rabbit in clothing, the clothing was always token items like hats and shirts and never full outfits.

The distinctions between North American and African versions of the stories are evident in the style of the characters' clothing. The East African clothing in the illustrations is often drawn as being archaic and the West African clothing is more modern in appearance. *Zomo the Rabbit: A trickster tale from West Africa* has Rabbit wearing modern African clothing in the illustrations as seen in Fig. 4.11, and includes multicolored dresses, robes, and shirts with geometric patterns. The modern clothing is associated with the kente print clothing of West Africa. The archaic style includes a head dress with white feather plumes, a scepter with white feathery plumes, animal skin shirts, and loincloths (as seen earlier in Fig. 4.8). The archaic clothing slightly resembles that of the Maasai, but did not include the Maasai's traditional robes. The issues associated with this inaccurate portrayal of the characters' clothing will be discussed in Chapter VI.

The illustrations in the stories set in North America also show two styles of clothing, Native American (breechcloth, armbands, and ankle bracelets) and 1800s agricultural clothing (straw hats, overalls, and jackets). The Native American clothing appears to be token costumes and was minimal. The clothing depicted in the Brer Rabbit stories strongly resembled the clothing of slaves and sharecroppers depicted in photographs from Phillips (2007) *Life and Labor in the Old South*. They are primarily work clothes and often include suspenders. The animal characters of the Brer Rabbit

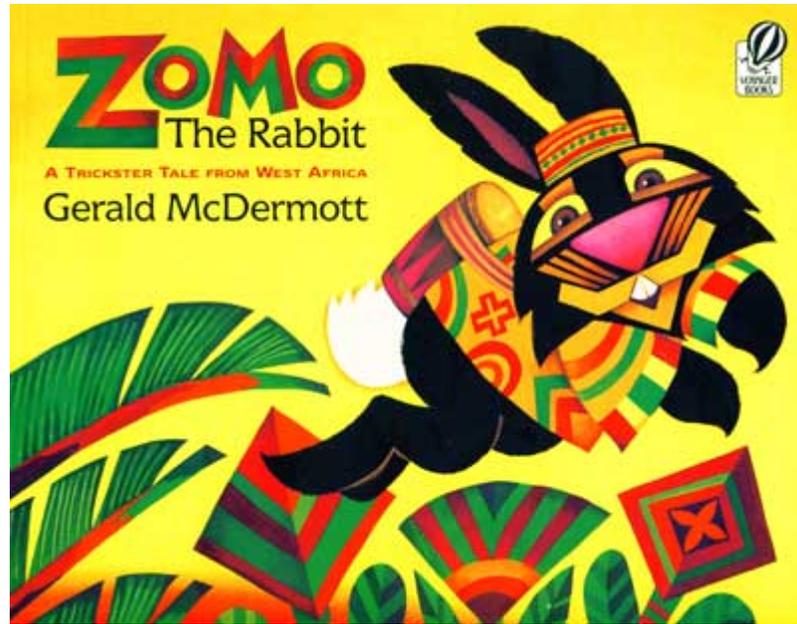


Fig. 4.11. McDermott's Zomo.

Source: McDermott, G. (1992). *Zomo the Rabbit: A trickster tale from West Africa*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace & Company.

stories are not depicted wearing shoes. Phillips stated that slaves were only issued shoes in the winter, and in Phillips' photographs, the people were shown barefooted as well.

Does Rabbit Speak Swahili?

The most common cultural language used in the stories was Swahili. As with Anansi the spider, there are many examples of Swahili names and words in the stories. Again, some of them may, or may not, have been invented to simulate African names. Throughout the African stories, characters were predominantly referred to by their African names. For example, Rabbit is usually called Zomo or Sungura (which is hare in Swahili), and only twice was he referred to as merely Rabbit. The other African names are *Kibu Lano* and *Buka* for two villagers in *Trickster Hare: A play based on an East African tale*. In *Zomo the Rabbit*, other animals are called by actual names, and they are

Giwa the elephant, *Kusu* the field mouse, *Rakumi* the camel, *Dila* the jackal, and *Kura* the Hyena. *Trickster Hare: A play based on an East African tale* also includes other Swahili words and phrases like *Habari Gani?* meaning “What’s the News?” and *Jambo* meaning “hello.” In *Trickster Tales: Forty Folk Stories from Around the World*, an additional African language, Wolof, is featured. It uses the Wolof word *Bouki*, which means hyena, for the name of Rabbit’s hyena adversary. Rabbit was known as *Lapin* in *American Indian Trickster Tales*, specifically in the story featuring the Biloxi Native American version of the tar baby story. *Lapin* is French for rabbit. This, along with the character known as the Frenchman, reflects the contact that the Biloxi had with Europeans.

In the Brer Rabbit versions of the stories, the word "Brer" in his and other characters’ names reflects the habit of people of the time period addressing another man as brother. The written narratives of the Brer Rabbit stories try to generally or specifically incorporate the speech patterns of the era in them in as well.

Ancestors and Spirits

Unlike the other two previously mentioned folktale traditions, religious or supernatural characters were visibly absent from the Rabbit stories. There were only a couple of exceptions and they were exclusively found in the African versions of Rabbit folktales, not the North American stories.

Furthermore, the only mention of any deity in the African stories is from *Zomo the Rabbit: A trickster tale from West Africa* which appears to be an adaptation of an Anansi folktale. The story has Rabbit winning wisdom from an unnamed sky god just as

Anansi did from the sky god, Nyame. The second exception is in the full version of the opening Rabbit versus Leopard tale, and it stresses the importance of ancestors to the Swahili people. This importance of ancestors is reflected in the animals' belief that ghostly ancestors were guiding them not only in building the house, but also in the selection of the house's location. Knutson (2007) stated that the Swahili did honor their ancestors many years after they had died and continued to feel connected to them. Middleton (2000) reported that the importance of ancestors and even ancestor worship with the Swahili was more common in the archaic Swahili hinterland, which was the inland region removed from the populated coastal areas. Caplan and Topan (2004) explained that with the influx of foreign religions such as Islam and Christianity, the spiritual importance of ancestors was no longer prevalent in Swahili society. I was unable to find any reference to a generic Swahili sky god, but he may be an adaptation of the West African god, Nyame, since the story was an adaptation of the West African Anansi story.

Benton-Banai (1988) explained that several gods and spirits had rabbit forms in many Native American cultures. Some examples are *Nanabozho*, who is an Ojibwe rabbit trickster character and cultural hero, and *Michabo*, which means the Great Hare. Michabo is an Algonquin creator god as well as a trickster and shape-shifter. There is no mention in the Native American versions of the Rabbit stories I examined of Rabbit's past god status or of any magical abilities.

Conclusions

Rabbit's multiple cultural regions and adaptations were evident in his depictions in the stories as well as their settings. When the cultural customs of the people presented

in the stories are compared to the different people of the regions, some of the East African stories were inaccurate. The East African portrayals of clothing and houses were more archaic or more similar to West African culture, and the depiction of the spiritual importance of ancestors was exaggerated. There was not any evidence of anachronisms in the stories set in North America.

In the next chapter the three trickster characters will be compared. Common themes such as reoccurring plots and overlapping story devices, the nature of punishment and rewards, the perpetuation of African stereotypes, and the minimized spiritual aspects will also be discussed.

CHAPTER V: CROSS CASE ANALYSIS

Introduction

After examining 34 American children's books which draw from the three folktale traditions of Anansi the spider, Coyote, and Rabbit, I found a few patterns. I am defining patterns here as events that occur over and over again in many of the stories. From these patterns I was able to discern some themes which are defined as generalizations that I make about the patterns. These themes and patterns are all associated with my original research questions: How are the three folktale tricksters portrayed in the text and illustrations of children's literature? And are the trickster folktales that are portrayed in children stories culturally authentic?

All the books I read were from children's literature written predominantly by English speaking westerners and were published between 1964 and 2007. One of the themes is that authors who do prior research about the cultures of origin produce more culturally authentic children's' books. Perhaps due to the nature of the oral traditions, there were also reoccurring plots and overlapping story devices. For example, the tar baby style trap was found in every tradition. The stories of all three tricksters had a common moral thread in which misbehavior is punished and intelligence is rewarded. This often contradicts earlier versions of the folktales. Additionally, the stories set in Africa usually perpetuated African stereotypes and all three tricksters had their spiritual and supernatural aspects minimized to perhaps fit with the Christian beliefs of the dominant culture.

Here are my themes and I will discuss each in turn:

Themes

The children's books that included authors' research notes were more authentic than the books that did not include any: The research notes would include background information as well as research the author and illustrator conducted in order to insure that they accurately portrayed the culture in question. For example in Berry's (1997) *First Palm Trees: An Anancy Spiderman Story* the design of the characters' clothing was based specifically on Ghana's kente prints and in Goldwin's (1996) *Coyote and the Fire Stick: A Pacific Northwest Indian Tale* the clothing, technology, and lodge houses in the illustrations were all based on research conducted at the Burke Museum of Seattle, Washington. More than half of the stories about Coyote included authors' notes on their research and all the Rabbit stories set in North America did as well. Only a four of the Anansi stories included such a section. This results in the books with North American settings being researched significantly more often than African settings, making the North American stories featuring Coyote and Rabbit stories potentially more authentic than the stories about Anansi and Rabbit set in Africa. This was despite there being more books about Anansi in the libraries than the other two tricksters.

The significance of this is discussed in both Chapter VI which deals with educational implications and in the section about the perpetuation of African stereotypes which follows later in this chapter.

There were overlapping story devices and plots due to the nature of storytelling. It is interesting that certain story devices were common since all three of the folktale traditions originated in different regions of the world. This is an issue of

authenticity, for example, how could both Coyote and Anansi have the same encounter with birds where they try to learn how to fly and are defeated in the same way? How could Rabbit and Anansi both win all the stories through accomplishing three amazing feats? And how could both Rabbit and Coyote organize a relay race to steal fire from evil spirits to give to humanity? There are a couple of reasons why these three tricksters share these story devices and sometimes even plots. One reason may be because of the nature of storytelling. These folktales are based on stories from the oral tradition, and storytellers of each tradition could have all met in North America and shared and adapted new stories into their traditions. There is evidence to support this, especially with Brer Rabbit.

Getting stuck in a sticky, man-shaped trap happens more often in tales than you would think. All three trickster traditions utilized some form of the tar baby style trap. Sometimes the adhesive tar was substituted with other sticky substances, like beeswax, honey, and tree sap, but it was always applied to or constructed in the shape of a human. In all cases the victim of the trap slaps or attacks the tar baby because of a perceived insult due to the tar baby's silence to the character's questions and comments. A few times the tar baby was attacked because it was perceived as a trespasser. Predominantly, the trickster character is caught by the tar baby trap, but in the case of Anansi, it is sometimes the trickster who builds the trap.

The notion that storytellers adapt stories and concepts from other cultures into their own is supported by all three tricksters having reoccurring plots and common story devices like the tar baby style trap. Kraus (1999) stated that the environment of oral tradition in which all these stories were conceived in include "listening, sharing, and

retelling the tale” and that “the act of retelling implies a constant evolutionary process” (p. xv).

Another reason why there are common story devices and plots in the three traditions may be due to westernization. Except for a few exceptions, like Badoe and Diakite (2001) and Talashoema (1994), the books were written by authors not native to culture being portrayed. Authors from a similar culture are going to be influenced by similar biases. For example, the way Coyote was illustrated by different illustrators to resemble the cartoon character, Wile E. Coyote, is understandable since the illustrators could have easily been exposed to the popular character. Instead of adapting material gained from an oral tradition, they may be doing it based on a literary tradition which includes various forms of media.

A third possible explanation of common story devices and plots in the three traditions is the anthropological and sociological concept of cultural universals. Cultural universals are elements or institutions that are shared by all groups of people. When different humans encounter similar situations or problems, it is possible that they may come up with similar, if not identical, ways to deal with them. The Promethean-like tales of how mankind obtained fire as well as catastrophic flood tales are both commonly found in many cultures that are isolated from each other. It is feasible that isolated societies with trickster characters will develop tales of trickery that are similar.

Cultural borrowing, adapting, and universal solutions and experiences are all possible reasons that certain plots are found in all three traditions. Therefore, these reoccurring story devices and plots are not necessarily inauthentic.

Misbehavior is punished and intelligence is rewarded: This generalization answers the question of how the characters were portrayed and also becomes an authenticity issue. As indicated in each trickster's section in the description of their behavioral representation, characters that were described with only negative attributes were punished, and when they were assigned more positive attributes they were more likely to be victorious. Reasonably it can be assumed that since folktales often teach values that this may be the case. When characters exhibit negative behaviors they were punished or defeated and when they exhibited positive behaviors they were rewarded or succeeded. This could explain the rarity of children stories depicting the tricksters as being both malicious and successful despite the fact that it is a common occurrence in the original folktales. When the tricksters were given negative attributes but still won, the negative attribute was primarily laziness. The tricksters were shown using their cunning to make a job easier or to get someone else to do the work for them. For example, it was common for Rabbit to convince others to do the work and then enjoy the fruits of their labor.

In Rabbit's only defeat by Turtle, he was not given any positive attributes, but only negative ones. When Turtle defeated him in the race, Rabbit's bragging and overconfidence were amplified. I say amplified, because other stories portrayed Rabbit as confident, yet still cautious. On the contrary, Rabbit was more often self deprecating to encourage his adversaries to underestimate him. So, in the sole story that has Rabbit as an overconfident braggart, he is defeated. This cautions the reader on the dangers of those negative behaviors in even the cleverest.

The children stories are teaching values about right and wrong, however, when they are compared to other versions of the folktales, the values are changed or altered. In these other versions, Anansi the spider has negative attributes but always wins. This is in direct opposition to the children's literature which has Anansi's misbehavior always resulting in punishment or failure. Specifically, the misbehaviors are gluttony, greed, laziness, and treachery. Christen (1998) explained that Anansi not only shows the negative aspects of antisocial behavior he also alerts the listener to "the presence of greed, trickery, and disruptiveness in the world" (p. 10).

The problem is that a perceived western value system is replacing the values of the original culture, but the stories are still being labeled Ashanti or West African. The motive for authors doing this may be their own bias, the desire to make the stories more relatable for a western audience, or lack of research of the folktale tradition that they are adapting to children's literature.

The stories set in Africa often perpetuate African stereotypes: The stories featuring Rabbit and Anansi set in Africa predominantly portray Africa as having jungles, a proliferation of classic African wild animals as well as the Maasai culture, and people living by archaic standards. While it is possible to find all of those aspects in Africa, they are rare or nonexistent in West Africa and disproportionably represented in the children's books.

In the stories' illustrations, and to a lesser extent in the written narratives, Africa is most commonly depicted as a jungle environment. While Ghana does have some rain forests, they are not large and the Ashanti do not live in them. The jungles appear to be used in the backgrounds of illustrations to give the stories an exotic African feel.

In the stories that are set in Africa, the culture of the people is consistently portrayed as being archaic or primitive. In the written narratives and illustrations, archaic concepts, such as building techniques and ancestor worship, are included. Villages are always small and remote despite the historical evidence that ancient Ghana was complex and had large cities. These constant lower levels of technology perpetuate the stereotype that all of Africa is underdeveloped. Unlike the North American stories of Coyote and Rabbit, the stories about Anansi only showed a low level of technology. Taking into consideration authors of Anansi stories may have been attempting to portray the characters in the time period of the original storytellers, they still did not take into account the technological and political advancements of the early Ashanti Empire. Similarly, in the Swahili stories about Rabbit, the portrayals of clothing and houses were more archaic and at a much lower level of technology than the Swahili of two hundred years ago.

Almost all of the stories located in West Africa include exotic animals, such as lions, zebras, elephants, giraffes, etc. In reality most of these animals are rare or nonexistent in this part of Africa. Not only do these depictions add to the misconceptions about the range of certain classic African animals, it also perpetuates the stereotype of Africa being overrun with wild animals. Also, by placing East African animals in West Africa, it reinforces the misconception that Africa is one place. It should be noted that in *The Pot of Wisdom: Ananse Stories* which was written by a West African author, only mundane animals (pigs, birds, lizards, etc.) were included in the stories.

Another misrepresentation in the African stories of Anansi and Rabbit was the frequent inclusion of Maasai elements. The Maasai are not West African, but are an East

Africa culture which lives in Kenya and Tanzania. The Swahili in *Trickster Hare: A play based on an East African tale* were dressed in the traditional Maasai lion mane garb and in *Ananse's Feast: An Ashanti Tale* a character spoke the Maasai language saying, "Oyei-yaai oyei-yaai," which means "Oh, my mother!" As with the misplaced animals, including East African cultures in West Africa again reinforces the image that Africa has one pervasive culture.

The reasons behind these African misconceptions and stereotypes in children's literature may be because of the lack of research by authors or their false assumptions as well as their own beliefs that these stereotypes are actually facts. The implications are that children's impressions of Africa will not be based on reality and they will continue to perpetuate these stereotypes.

Spiritual aspects were minimized in all three folktale traditions: All three characters originally had supernatural abilities and even minor god status in some of the cultures in which they originated. Their portrayals instead were of common animal characters or in the case of Anansi sometimes a mere farmer.

Even though Anansi won the stories from the sky god, Nyame, he treated the god as more of a chief than an actual god. According to Christen (1998) Anansi himself was the son of Nyame and once had human form. He was a creator and inventor of weaving and agriculture and showed people how to live in societies. He was also mischievous and he finally angered Nyame enough so that he turned Anansi permanently into a spider. There is no reference of Anansi's god nature or supernatural powers in any of the children's stories. Sometimes Anansi would acquire a magical item, but his greed usually

caused any magical powers to backfire on him and resulted in failure. In several stories that feature magic pots, Anansi either misuses or loses them.

Coyote was also seen as a god in many Native American cultures. Sometimes he was a creator god, for example in one story Coyote creates the first humans by kicking a ball of mud until it transformed into the first man. The Aztecs saw him as god of music and dance who played tricks on the other gods. Just as the Coyote character in the children's stories, the Aztec Coyote's tricks frequently backfire and cause him more trouble than his victims. There were no references of this in the stories even the story written by a Hopi storyteller. In many Native American stories Coyote has transformative powers and often shape changes to confound and trick his friends and foes, but these powers were not utilized in the stories, either.

Rabbit had the least amount of supernatural elements in his stories. As mentioned earlier, there is the reference in *Sungura and Leopard* to the importance of ancestors to the Swahili and how they guided people's actions. This depiction is not entirely accurate for the Swahili. Additionally, a sky-god character is included in *Zomo the Rabbit: A trickster tale from West Africa* that resembled both Nyame's role and appearance from the Anansi stories. The stories about Rabbit set in North America were influenced by stories of Native American rabbit gods, but there were no reference to this in the stories examined.

The loss of their god status could possibly be because of the westernization of their stories and the inevitable conflict of the existence of indigenous gods with Christianity. They are all categorized as folktales and not mythology, although a few of

the pourquoi stories of Coyote have mythological elements to them. Pourquoi stories being stories that explain why things are the way they are and are usually nature oriented.

Conclusions

The themes described above are all associated with my original research questions about the portrayal and cultural authenticity of the three trickster characters. The stories that were researched were more authentic. Common story telling devices and plots are also authentic due to the nature of the oral traditions. However, the altered values, the perpetuation of stereotypes, and the minimized spiritual aspects all threaten the authenticity of the stories.

The next chapter will discuss the educational implications of these themes in the portrayal of the three tricksters.

CHAPTER VI: EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

I examined children's books which draw from the three folktale traditions of Anansi the spider, Coyote, and Rabbit. I did this to see how these three tricksters are portrayed in children's literature and to see if the books were culturally authentic. Folktales are often designed to pass on cultural information to listeners as well as to entertain them. Therefore, it is no surprise that such tales can still function today for the same purposes. Folktales are most often included in school curriculum to showcase the genre. Sometimes, they inadvertently teach not only cultural information, but misinformation as well. Since folktales are present in the classroom, the question is what moral lessons are being taught and how is cultural material being presented?

This study has several major educational implications. One implication is that teachers should be encouraged to examine the moral lessons in folktales. Implicit in this implication is that teachers should also examine the role of trickster. A second implication is that folktales can be used for a variety instructional uses. They are not just a model for teaching about the genre. A third implication is that teachers need to be alert to the dangers of inauthentic cultural material. First among these dangers is the perpetuation of African stereotypes. Taken together, all of the implications that I describe here provide as case for educators to research cultural materials for accuracy, and hopefully incorporate the concept of critical literacy as a tool to critique cultural materials. I will further discuss each of the implications in the following pages.

Moral Lessons

It is obvious from the 34 books that I have examined that educators need to be aware of the moral lessons in folktales. There has been a resurgence of interest in value education in public schools. There are proponents for its inclusion in the curriculum. For example, Hoge (1996) stated that value education should begin early and then continue throughout a student's education. Trickster folktales would have a greater chance of communicating moral lessons if the tales were used in conjunction with discussion. Ratner and Olver (1998) maintained that discussing trickster tales helps young children develop an understanding of representation. The follow-up discussions about the actions of the tricksters help students to "explore their feelings, causality, and the exploration of the effects of beliefs on behavior" (p. 235). When the trickster is the winner, teachers should ask, why? How did the trickster win? What were the ramifications of the trickster's victory?

In the stories I read for this study, tricksters took on several roles. Of course, they were most often the hero. However, tricksters also acted as cautionary examples of what are unacceptable behaviors. They also served as a warning to listeners and readers to be wary of the trickster. Even when the trickster is the hero, he often lies or cheats to accomplish his goals. This raises the moral question of whether or not tricksters are good or bad role models. The answer may be found in how educators and students use the stories as well as the quality of the discussion which accompanies the folktale. For example, discussions of trickster folktales can help students realize that people everywhere are trying to find the best ways to live with one another (Darling, 1996).

Students will find that trickster folktales may contain both world views that are different from students and those that are familiar.

Most of the trickster folktales that I read for this study definitely included moral lessons. They were evident in the consequences for characters behaviors. Negative actions usually resulted in punishment and intelligence and sharing were rewarded. This raises the questions: Whose values are being taught in these books? And are the values being taught those of the cultures from which the folktales originated? Or have these values been changed to reflect current American values? Another possible question might be are the values being taught universal values? As mentioned in Chapters II, III, and IV, Anansi, Coyote, and Rabbit were punished for misbehavior and were rewarded for being intelligent in their stories. The values and moral lessons that are taught in the children's literature I read are primarily sharing, intelligence, teamwork, and being both productive and socially respectful. There are many lists of what sociologists and social science educators think are traditional American values, and they usually include "patriotism, love of freedom, public service, self-improvement, self-reliance, industry and physical fitness" (Hayes, 2003, p. 57). The closest matches that I found to the values in the stories are industry and public service, but I believe the values being expressed in the folktales are more fundamental morals and definitely are not opposed to American values.

The stories featuring Coyote that I read were more likely to be for entertainment purposes than to teach moral lessons. As I mentioned Chapter III, Coyote does not seem to mind when he fails and he often laughs about his failures, showing no remorse. His tales also included more *pourquoi* tales than the other two tricksters, which focus on explaining natural phenomenon versus morality lessons.

However, the stories with Anansi the spider and Rabbit are filled with lessons about what is right or wrong. As mentioned earlier, Rabbit's tales focus on the importance of intelligence and not being overconfident. Both of which would be authentic values of the slave population who told Brer Rabbit stories, for example. Anansi's stories primarily express misbehavior resulting in punishment or failure. Specifically, the misbehaviors are gluttony, greed, and laziness. In folktales not specifically written for children, Anansi usually wins even though he is gluttonous and greedy. Christen (1998) explained that Anansi not only shows the negative aspects of antisocial behavior he also alerts the listener to "the presence of greed, trickery, and disruptiveness in the world" (p. 10). The problem is these two values systems, the one reflected in children's literature and the other more typical of general folktales, do not match. In one case the lesson is that evil gets punished and good triumphs, but the other case acts as cautionary tales in which evil can also triumph.

This discrepancy raises questions related to why were the values changed. There are at least two possible answers. One could be the stories about Anansi were changed to fit the values of the authors or at least the values they wish to teach their target audience. Since we do not live in cultural vacuums, it is easy for our own biases and values to creep into our writing. Just as storytellers of the oral tradition incorporate and adapt new stories to their repertoires, so do authors in the literary tradition. The other explanation could be that the authors did not thoroughly research the folktales and loosely based their writings on the folktales of Anansi. Either way, stories that are identified as being from a certain culture are not authentic if their cultural values and beliefs are altered.

Instructional Purposes

Children's stories based on folktales can be used for a variety of instructional purposes. In analyzing the content of the children's books based on broad categories such as physical environment and culture setting, it is evident that authors and illustrators include a great deal of content information. This information can be incorporated into a variety of lessons, often cross curricular lessons. The two most noticeable educational uses pertain to geography and language arts.

In folktale books that present authentic materials, students can learn about physical geography of the area where the folktales take place. For example, a variety of biomes are represented including savannahs, evergreen forests, and deserts. Folktales can add to students' geographical knowledge base. To do this, the folktale should provide students with factual information about the particular area's climate, topography, and history of the place in which the story is set. This can easily be done by authors and illustrators including accurate representations of the natural environment.

Cultural components that are commonly associated with geography curriculum are also prevalent in the trickster folktales. For example, the ways other cultures dress, eat, and live are demonstrated in a variety of settings. The authentic books are more reflective of the cultural values of the people from which the tales originate from and the tales can tell students a great deal about what is important or valued by these other cultures. Folktales can help to enhance students' appreciation and respect for a culture, and this can be achieved if there are authentic cultural details evident.

Similarly, folktales can be used in language arts for more than as a model of a genre. In the stories that I read for this study there were many examples of literary

concepts such as personification and pourquoi stories. Every story included personification, which is when animals are portrayed with human emotions and reactions. To a lesser extent, there were examples of anthropomorphism in several of the stories about Coyote. Anthropomorphism is personification taken to another level. Human characteristics are given to other nonhuman beings such as inanimate objects or natural or supernatural phenomena. In the stories about Coyote, the moon, thunder, and clouds were all given human attributes. Pourquoi stories, which are stories that explain why things are the way they are, were also common in the stories about Coyote. For example, one story explains how Coyote went from being blue colored to brown, and another explained why frogs do not have tails. Folktales in children's books also usually contain simple story structures. This format allows students to easily identify key elements of a story, such as characters, settings, problem, and solution. Folktales can also help to familiarize students with the language of a culture. Hopefully, authors include the rhythms and sounds of a language in the written narrative. This was evident in many of the stories that I read, and some also included glossaries and authentic names with pronunciation guides. These are just a few of the literary examples that can be found in trickster folktales.

Dangers of Inauthentic Cultural Material

Educators need to be alerted to the dangers of inauthentic cultural material in folktales, trickster tales are no exception. Despite folktales being a valuable tool in teaching about cultural themes and literature, some researchers (Virtue, 2007; Reese, 2007; and Yenika-Agbaw, 1998) contend that folktales may also be inadvertently presenting misinformation about cultural practices and may even perpetuate stereotypes. This is the overlying justification for using only culturally authentic folktales when

teaching about specific cultures. This position is also supported by Noll (2003), who encourages authors and illustrators to portray different cultures accurately and authentically since "children's identities, attitudes, and understandings are negatively influenced" when "literature ... contains misinformation and warped images" (p. 182). If educators are not sure about the authenticity of materials used in the classroom, then they should research the folktale or cultural material in question.

The most prevalent negative aspect of the collection of children books I read was the perpetuation of African stereotypes.

African Stereotypes

As I mentioned previously, non-authentic cultural materials can perpetuate stereotypes. In the children's stories I read, misconceptions and stereotypes about Africa were the most prevalent. They are primarily the African stories about Anansi the spider, but are also present in a couple of the stories about Rabbit that were also set in Africa.

Generally folktales, as well as other children's materials depicting Africa, have focused on the more exotic aspects of Africa, "such as the safari, the wildlife, the Bushmen of the Kalahari, the pygmies, and the Massai" (Osunde, Tlou, & Brown, 1996, p. 119). These concepts are basically stereotypes that could hinder learning about Africa. Students and teachers alike often stereotype African as being primitive, economically underdeveloped, and with its peoples living in jungle huts. These perceptions have persisted in the educational materials used in public schools and are reinforced by the media and television. This lack of understanding of the different nations and cultures of

Africa by children and adults in the United States could undermine people's decision making in important global issues or how they treat Africans.

Some common beliefs that Osunde, Tlou, and Brown (1996) discussed in their research was that students and teachers often believed that Africa's inhabitants were primitive tribal natives that struggled with famine and that wild animals wander everywhere. These two misconceptions are also present in most of the folktales set in Africa that I examined. Most of these perceptions are incorrect and do not portray life in most of Africa. Many of those surveyed in the research of Osunde et al., which included pre-service teachers, indicated that they thought Africa was a single country. Africa has a great diversity of cultures, but is still generalized as if it were one nation or cultural unit. The same misconceptions and stereotypes that Osunde et al. encountered were also evident in most of the stories set in Africa that I read.

The African versions of the Anansi and Rabbit stories also paint bleak picture of subsistence living in Africa. The scarcity of food, famines, droughts, starvation, and the dangers of the dry season were commonly portrayed in the stories I read. These occurrences were only in the African versions of the folktales, not the stories in a North American setting. While these events certainly occur throughout Africa, Osunde, Tlou, and Brown (1996) contend that they do not happen frequently enough to be continually included in children's literature.

Why does children's literature add to these misconceptions and stereotypes regarding Africa? One idea is that the African stories are not as researched as they should be. When looking for traditional folktales to adapt into children's literature, authors and illustrators usually just find the basic story. Cultural material such as clothing, housing,

and language and so on are rarely included. Another explanation is that the authors could also be subscribing to false assumptions as well as the belief that common stereotypes are actually facts.

Importance of Researching Cultural Materials

The previous educational implications urge educators to research cultural materials for accuracy. Additionally, there is a trend in current educational literature on folktales that folktales need to be culturally authentic (Hearn, 1993; Yokota, 1993; Mo & Shen, 1997; Dana & Bishop, 2003; Guevara, 2003; Noll, 2003; Rochman, 2003; Reese, 2007; and Virtue, 2007). Scholars also agree that such a need becomes more important when the folktales are marketed for children. Authors and illustrators along with educators and parents should take the time to research the accuracy of the content of stories that present a depiction of a culture. Hearn (1993) argued for standards in publishers evaluating the folktales written for children, and also that authors should note when and why a tale is altered. She also proposed that when a folktale is adapted by someone outside the original culture, there should be a balance between the two cultures. Hearn warned against “*fakelore*,” where the illustrations in folktales are not researched, but merely imitate other cultures in superficial, or stereotypical, ways. As discussed in the previous section, this was the case with most of the stories with an African setting that I read for this study. Environment, clothing, animals and so on were apparently portrayed in a manner to simulate a perceived African feel.

Several authors and illustrators of the children stories I read noted that they researched the culture of the trickster they were portraying. They sometimes told how and where they did the research. Out of all the authors, those who wrote about Coyote

indicated the most that they had researched Coyote's cultural setting. As mentioned in Chapter V, more than half of the Coyote authors included a section that explained what research they had conducted prior to writing or illustrating their stories. Authors who wrote the North American versions of the stories about Rabbit also included research information. *The Adventures of Brer Rabbit and Friends: From stories collected by Joel Chandler Harris* includes four pages of research and background information. Stories featuring Anansi the spider, however, were the least likely to include research notes. Only four authors of the Anansi stories included background or research information, which was significantly lower than the other two trickster tales since books with Anansi stories were far more numerous. The authors of the Anansi stories that indicated they did research the West African culture presented the Ashanti in an authentic manner. This authenticity was determined after comparing the written text and illustrations to a variety of cultural material written about the Ashanti.

With inauthentic cultural materials being relatively common, educators should take time to research the material for accuracy. When they are presenting material as being culturally representative of specific people, research is even more imperative. Since children's books about folktales usually state that the story is from a particular culture and not merely original fantasy, then educators should check and see that the story is true to location to prevent the perpetuation of misconceptions as well as stereotypes. Research can be easily conducted by using internet reference sites or a trip to the library. Educators can also read reviews of new children's literature and take note of any authenticity issues. Also, educators need to be aware of books that have given awards such as the Mildred L. Batchelder Award. This award is a citation given to children's books that are considered

to be the most outstanding of those books originally published in a foreign country, and is then translated into English.

The Role of Critical Literacy

The concept of critical literacy as a tool to critique cultural materials is a way educators can address some of the previous educational implications. When teachers incorporate folktales in their lessons, they often assume that the material they select contain authentic cultural representations. McNair (2008) stated that most teachers assume children's literature is politically or socially neutral, but contends that often they are not. There are several questions that educators should pose when they are examining cultural materials they plan on using in the classroom: Does this material accurately represent the culture? Does this material perpetuate stereotypes? If so, then what can educators do about it? Educators can also work toward social action by requesting publishers to produce books with authentic cultural material.

Educators can also alert students to inaccuracies in materials, and turn them into lessons on multiple perspectives. Darling (1996) encouraged students to explore and compare trickster tales, and this comparison should also apply to students' own lives. Questions pertaining to the trickster tales could facilitate discussions on multiple perspectives including their own. For example, are the trickster's behavior found in our classroom or your neighborhood? What do you have in common with the trickster's situation?

Students should also be encouraged to critically analyze and evaluate texts from various points of view; this process has been described as "critical literacy." Comber (1993) stated that it is possible for young students to "become aware that texts are

socially constructed artifacts and vehicles for different kinds of reality presentation” (p. 73). Comber also stated that if children were given the opportunity and encouragement they can reach beyond their initial enjoyment of reading a story and then construct critically social texts.

All children’s stories carry messages, not necessarily just value or moral messages. These messages can be obvious or subtle, and they originate in biases and cultures of the authors and illustrators. This is expected since they do not exist in a cultural vacuum. According to Hanzl (2001), young students are learning that there is not just one interpretation of a story, and that readers will have varying opinions on what was the author’s real intent. Hanzl, also stated that children are learning to recognize bias and stereotyping in children’s literature, “especially in relation to gender, race, age, mental or physical impairment, and cultural values in general” (p. 84). Therefore, even inaccurate cultural material can be used as examples for students.

There are pressures on publishers to ensure that children’s literature is politically correct. However, there are different definitions of what it actually means to be politically correct, and that depends on whom you ask. Regardless of your definition, political correctness does not necessarily mean that the material is culturally authentic. For example, the historically inaccurate Disney film *Song of the South* (1946) has inadvertently labeled Brer Rabbit as being politically incorrect. Because of this, children’s books featuring Brer Rabbit are rarely found. Only one was located for this study. The stories about Brer Rabbit are still valuable culturally, but because of opinions on political correctness they are no longer seen as ideologically appropriate. The opposite holds true as well, just because a story is deemed politically correct it does not mean that

it is necessarily a good story. Educators should encourage students to explore these issues. Educators should also encourage students to develop an awareness of the cultural attitudes and biasness found in the written narratives and illustrations of children's literature.

Conclusions

The findings and implications definitely apply to educators. Since cultural representations are important and have an impact on learning, then these findings appear to have application for educators who present cultural materials to students. Implications from this study include: moral lessons and the role of trickster; a variety instructional uses for folktales; the dangers of inauthentic cultural material; and a need for educators to research cultural materials for accuracy as well as look at text from a critical perspective.

In the presentation of cultural materials, educators may present information that has a positive or negative influence. Since educators usually select their own materials for their students, they should be knowledgeable about cultural materials they utilize and what consequences may result from their choices. Because educators are presenters of cultural material their roles should be taken seriously. Educators should consider that any material that portrays cultures may include stereotypes and some of which may be subtle. Educators should supplement cultural material with secondary sources to help provide an accurate portrayal in order to provide a non-biased portrayal of other cultures. Educators should be aware that there are authentic materials available that contain accurate multicultural information. Unfortunately, there are also inaccurate books so educators should be wary. Inaccuracies, as long as they are known as such, can still be valuable.

Questionable content and images should be discussed with students and presented by educators as the views of only one author's perspective.

Further areas of related research in this area would include the response of students to literature with cultural themes as well as research to determine the influence subtle stereotyping has on students. Other mediums besides children's literature could also be analyzed as well.

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APPENDIX

METHODOLOGY

Methodological Approach and Rationale

My research questions were how are folktale tricksters portrayed in the text and illustrations of children's literature? And are the trickster folktales that appear in children stories culturally authentic? To answer these questions I used a comparative case study approach. This case study differed from most case studies in that each case was a complex fictional character found in children's books: Anansi the spider, Coyote, and Rabbit.

This study was grounded in the constructivist paradigm. The constructivist paradigm was chosen because of how constructivists define reality. It describes our surroundings as "a world in which universal, absolute realities are unknowable, and the objects of inquiry are individual perspectives or constructions of reality" (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). Therefore, truth exists in multiple realities and is individually constructed. When a case study with the data obtained from stories written by different authors, multiple realities are constructed by the tellers of the original stories, the authors of the modern adaptations, the illustrators, the researcher, and also by the readers of the research. I chose a constructivist qualitative design because, as the researcher, I construct meaning along with the authors and illustrators of the texts. They both interpret the original culture to construct meaning while I construct a new reality from their interpretations. Therefore, constructivist qualitative research was the appropriate choice to investigate folktales from other cultures and how they were presented.

As my strategy of inquiry, as well as a way to answer my research questions, I conducted a qualitative case study. I looked at three cases of tricksters in the context of their cultures. According to Creswell (2003), the strategy of inquiry provides the direction for procedures in a research design. A qualitative case study was an appropriate strategy of inquiry since my study explored how trickster folktales were portrayed. I used Creswell's definition of a case study, an in-depth exploration of a particular event, activity, subject, or one or more individual. Creswell (1998) also states that the case or cases are bound by time and activity. In this study, the time will be from fall 2007 to spring 2008, and the books used will be limited by their availability in East Tennessee. Since trade books are not required to be current, educators may use older books so they will not be restricted to current. Creswell also states that a case study researcher provides a picture that informs the reader about a little researched practice or program. This description of a case study is appropriate for my study because I will describe how three trickster characters are portrayed in text and illustrations to children.

The case study was collective since I focused on multiple individual cases (Stake, 1995). This method was chosen because I was investigating the portrayal of multiple trickster characters, each represented as an individual case. The three tricksters will represent members of the collective case study, but will also be considered individual cases as they are individual characters chosen from separate cultures. Together, the tricksters will represent a collective case depicting trickster characters within folktales. These individual cases will allow for a cross analysis of the portrayal of each trickster character in order to create a more detailed investigation. Merriam (1998) cites two applicable strengths to using multiple cases. The first of these strengths is that it creates a

more compelling interpretation because variation occurs across the multiple cases. Merriam's other strength states the external validity of the findings will be enhanced when multiple cases are included.

Selection of Tricksters

Since the purpose of my study is to see how trickster characters are portrayed in a variety of children's literature, I chose three trickster characters commonly found in children's literature and are from three different cultural and geographic locations. Popularity was established by reviewing children's books in a precursory online investigation using Amazon.com. Each of the three cases had to be considered "tricksters" and had to originate from different geographical and cultural locations. I chose tricksters from a variety of archetypes found in folktales because there are multiple examples, they are popular with teachers and students, and they usually teach moral lessons from their cultures (Brookes, 1995; Young & Ferguson, 1995; Darling, 1996; and Fuhler, Farris & Hatch, 1998). In the cases of Coyote and Rabbit, the characters are an amalgam of many similar tricksters from interconnected cultures.

Choosing the cases in this manner would be considered "purposeful sampling," as opposed to random sampling, since specific cases were investigated. Merriam (1998) states that, "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p.61). Merriam discussed different types of purposeful sampling. In relation to tricksters, I have included unique sampling, which is defined as a sample that "is based on unique, atypical, perhaps rare attributes or occurrences of the

phenomenon of interest” (p.62). The three characters fit into this category because each is a unique cultural icon that fit into the criteria of the trickster. Because I intentionally chose tricksters from three different geographic and cultural groups, the sampling is also one of “maximum variation,” which Creswell (1998) describes as sampling that exhibits “diverse variations and identifies important common patterns” (p. 119). My sampling also possesses aspects of “criterion sampling,” which Creswell defines as one in which “all cases meet some criterion,” and my cases are the trickster characters (p. 119).

Data Collection Techniques

The data was taken from the illustrations and written narratives from children’s literature. According to Hatch (2002) using documents as data is unobtrusive, but may be piecemeal. I collected books during the fall of 2006 and spring 2007. The books that I read were selected from the University of Tennessee’s John C. Hodges Library, local bookstores, and three local East Tennessee K-8 school libraries (Fountain City Elementary School, Halls Elementary School, and Halls Middle School) all of which are part of the University of Tennessee’s Neighborhood Schools program. Each of the books was readily available to educators and students. I obtained thirteen books about Anansi, nine on Coyote, and eight featuring Rabbit. I also included stories about each trickster from five books that were collections of folktales, often written by different authors.

Data Analysis

Lecompte and Priessle (1993) explained that a typological analysis involves “dividing everything into groups of categories on the basis of some canon for disaggregating the whole phenomenon under study” (p. 257). I created broad typological

categories and then applied those to the written stories and illustrations. A modified typological model was used to analyze them as described by Hatch (2002). Hatch stated that a typological analysis is appropriate for data obtained from documents only if they are collected with a specific purpose. He also stated that this method is time efficient because “starting with predetermined typologies takes much less time than ‘discovering’ categories inductively” (p.161). I did not find my broad categories during the analysis, rather they were pre-set categories: physical description, physical behavior, environment, and culture.

I also used a variant of the authenticating technique of Smith and Wiese (2006). My broad typological categories were taken from Smith and Wiese’s definition of authenticity that requires the values and beliefs of the cultural group as well as the geographical, historical, and cultural details to be accurate. For example, Coyote’s specific typological category for geography included components of the North American Southwest. I then analyzed each book and story for evidence relating them to my typological categories. Afterwards, I compared them to the culture and setting of the society that they were attributed. I also paid particular interest to deviations from the culture of origin. Authors understandably often make minor changes to the story to make it more appropriate for a young audience, but major cultural changes will be clearly identified. Smith and Wiese stressed that it is important that the children’s adaptation meets the criteria of being reasonably true to the original story while at the same time treating the depicted cultural group in a respectful manner.

My next step was to list each item found in the stories and description of the illustrations under broad subject headings. From selected secondary resources, I looked

for information about the typological details found. I looked for patterns among the broad categories and organized the entries into sub-categories. For example, under culture I had shelter, tools, people, clothing, religion, etc. I used a modified method of analyzing qualitative data as described by Hatch (2002). In this method after listing examples of the typologies, I wrote summaries related to the predetermined typologies. I recorded the main ideas of the typologies and then looked for patterns. According to Hatch, patterns can be a “similarity, difference, frequency, sequence, correspondence, and causation” (p.155). I checked for patterns supported by the data and also atypical examples. I consolidated the major patterns into themes and include supporting data for each theme. I also looked for patterns and themes in the comparisons between the text and the culture of origin. I studied the identified patterns in order to discover if any relationships exist. Finally, I wrote write my patterns as one-sentence generalizations and selected data excerpts to support them in Chapter V.

To help verify my findings, I used data source triangulation to increase internal validity. According to Stake (1995) this method is an effective way to verify the findings. In my study I used a variety of trade books as well as cultural information obtained from encyclopedias and cultural texts from the Hodges Library to facilitate the triangulation. I hoped to construct an accurate portrayal of the three cases by using multiple data sources, and each case was represented by more than ten stories.

Limitations of the Study

The methodological limitations of my study included the small sample size, the limited number of materials, and my personal assumptions and biases as a researcher. Since I only looked at three tricksters out of hundreds of available tricksters, concerns

may be raised about the quality of this study. However, a small sample size is appropriate for a methodological approach like the case study. Stake (1995) stated that it is more important to maximize what we learn by carefully choosing particular cases, than to have a large number of cases that are not in-depth. He further states that “Case study research is not sampling research. We do not study a case primarily to understand other cases. Our first obligation is to understand this one case” (p. 4). The justification for choosing purposeful sampling was so I could attempt to understand the portrayal of the three tricksters.

My investigation of the three cases showed a large number of materials on Anansi versus the other two tricksters. The least amount was found on Rabbit and the study may be limited by this. However, when incorporating stories from the books that were collections of folktales, there were still sixteen stories featuring Rabbit.

My bias as a researcher should be considered a limitation. I have my own beliefs about how folktales should be utilized in multicultural education. My viewpoints are shaped by my anthropological background and my support for multicultural education as a teacher. I am concerned about the alteration of folktales to fit the dominant culture, of which I am also a member. Some scholars state that people who work with multicultural literature must be members of the cultural, ethnic or racial group depicted in the story in order for their work to be truly authentic (Italiano, 1993; Jones & Moomaw, 2002; Seto, 2003; and Slapin & Seale, 1998). However, others (Guevera, 2003; Lasky, 2003; Moreillon, 2003; Noll, 2003; Mo & Shen, 1997; and Bruchac, 1995) have maintained that a lack of cultural membership can be overcome by combining extensive research with the use of reliable sources.

I minimized the effects of my bias on my analysis in a couple of ways. I kept my biases in check by initially admitting to them and by verifying the adapted stories and illustrations by comparing them to culture materials. By admitting my biases as a researcher, I recognized the ways that my biases might have affected my interpretation of the data as filtered through my own assumptions and worldview. Merriam (1998) stated, “The researcher thus brings a construction of reality to the research situation, which interacts with other people’s constructions or interpretations of the phenomenon being studied” (p. 22-23). I let the reader know that my research was influenced by my own interpretations of reality as well as those of the authors and illustrators. However, I have confidence in my chosen research design because I have established appropriate evaluative criteria and a strong rationale for my methodological choices. These precautions should have prevented my personal beliefs and assumptions from tainting the study.

VITA

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