



## Tales from around the World

Curriculum Unit 97.02.10  
by Delci Lev

The Betsy Ross Arts Magnet Schools (BRAMS) is a middle school that draws its population from the entire city through a lottery system. The students attending are not required to be gifted in the arts, but must express an interest in the field. Admittance is not predicated on any specific academic criteria. As a result, students who attend BRAMS are from every part of the city, from various socio-economic backgrounds, and with a wide range of academic abilities.

My current assignment is to teach social studies and language arts to the middle school student. I have many students for both subjects. Therefore, I can overlap both subject areas. This will allow for more effective teaching of the unit which fuses the two subject areas and gives the children, through the reading of stories, an understanding of the similarities and differences among people. These differences can enrich us rather than divide us.

## Philosophy

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The society we live in is multicultural and multilingual. I often see my students struggling to bridge the differences between and among themselves. Differences in ways of thinking, living, believing, and conducting oneself can lead to conflict and friction. Children need to internalize the strength which is deeply imbedded in this pluralism. These differences can serve as a dividing mechanism unless we are taught to embrace them. Understanding the underlying flexibility in these differences will foster tolerance.

To begin the process we need to discuss with children how members of a family can be alike and different. They can live near or apart, have different life styles, share some values and disagree on others. This process of comparison needs to be continued in the classroom. As a class, we will be learning how we are alike and how we are different in the context of a larger extended family. The traditional family as it has historically been defined is changing; families are taking on many different configurations, and children are forming different patterns of relationships. For the purpose of this unit, family will be defined as the people with whom we live and care for and those who care for us. Once these patterns have been established and nurtured, students can begin the process of connecting local, state, national, and international communities. The family level of awareness becomes the foundation for the conceptualization of a community extending beyond our immediate borders.

Basic concepts of community teach children to view the interconnections and interdependence among the cultures of the world today. Youth today need to be prepared with skills and attitudes that will allow them to live productively with other people whose backgrounds are different from theirs. They are growing up in a world of shrinking resources, a world that shares common medical, social, and environmental problems and would all benefit from seeking solutions collaboratively. Before we can communicate, we must learn each other's language.

Literature, reflecting cultural diversity, allows children to understand, cross-cultural concepts and has the additional advantage of teaching a community of learners how to share, reflect, and understand diversity. The classroom becomes a laboratory. Communities of young people can become involved with organizations that deal with issues such as pollution, environment, and peacemaking. The basic concept of community continues beyond the classroom and provides structure for future patterns of life.

## **Mechanics**

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There are several blocks to the learning process that this unit will cover: problem solving, developing writing skills, vocabulary development, appreciating literature, and developing and improving self-esteem.

The reading and studying of literature in the classroom setting provides students with an environment to apply existing knowledge to solve problems. Storytelling is pragmatic: it allows one to think through a series of events and problems, organize thoughts, explore options, and arrive at solutions in a logical and sequential manner. The exercise provides a structure for problem-solving throughout life.

Writing skills and vocabulary development are further enhanced through reading. For years classroom teachers have seen a correlation between increased reading and improved writing skills and vocabulary development. The varied vocabulary and writing styles which the students will come into contact with, will impact their own writing. This enhanced scope of reading will heighten the students appreciation of literature.

Literacy increases one's confidence as a reader and improves self-awareness. Classroom reading material that is issue-based can offer children resolutions to problems they may face in life, and it does so in a structured environment, with adults to guide them through the choices they will explore.

My hope is that reading stories which reflect differences in culture and time will plant the seeds that will start this process. For those in whom those seeds are already planted, literature will further enrich their lives.

## **Social Studies**

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Environment often dictates how people structure their lives, how they live, how they think and in many cases, how they earn a living. While reading each story, we will be looking at the environment, natural resources, climate, and perhaps the religion(s) of its people. When possible, we will review the historical events of the time frame in which the story takes place.

The reading of short stories will allow the class to study more regions of the world over a period of time and

more fully utilize an interdisciplinary approach to achieve the following.

**Objectives:**

- ¥ Increase reading comprehension skills.
  - ¥ Introduce and reinforce research skills through the use of the library media center (LMC).
  - ¥ Increase awareness of other people and other cultures.
  - ¥ Sharpen observational skills.
  - ¥ Develop students' ability to evaluate what they read and experience.
  - ¥ Increase students' awareness of environment, natural resources, and its impact on cultures.
  - ¥ Increase vocabulary through exposure to literature.
  - ¥ Improve problem-solving techniques.
  - ¥ Improve writing skills.
- Each story will be a jumping-off point to achieve the above objectives.

**Strategies:**

- I. As a class we will read a story reflecting another place or another time - or both.
- II. Students will be asked to :
  - a - Describe setting(s), to include time(s) and place(s).
  - b - Describe characters.
  - c - Summarize plot.
  - d - Articulate conflict.
  - e - Use new vocabulary words in sentences and story form.

Information, responses, thoughts in activities a-e will be written in journals.

Initially this task will be teacher directed. It will become an independent activity as students' skills improve.

III. Concurrently vocabulary, definitions, and information related to time, setting, historical frame, environment, and culture will be generated.

IV. As students progress from one region and or time frame, they will be asked to record this information.

V. At every opportunity, the environment and its natural resources, coupled with the prevailing culture, will be discussed as it relates to the culture and time frame in which we live. For items III, IV, V the LMC will be in use by the students.

Art will be part of the unit as students will be asked to draw their favorite scenes or create dioramas.

Introduction of each story begins with vocabulary development. Vocabulary will be defined by students unless it is labeled teacher vocabulary.

As students read, they will be asked to compare and contrast tales and life experiences.

## Stories From Around The World

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Title: *Mazel and Shlimazel or The Milk Of A Lioness*

Vocabulary and Expressions:

wan     intrigue     deftly     fleetest     demons  
boasting     famine     gaunt     coward     tatters  
goblins     drought     pantaloons     miser     miser  
courtier     minstrels     hobgoblins     tunics     plumed  
ascend     rebuked     dignitaries     henchmen

**Teacher Vocabulary:**

mazel shlimazel     knotty-wood cane     diligent  
bards     ne'er-do-well     consumption     locust plague  
imps     thatched roof

**Author :** Isaac Bashevis Singer relates this wonderful tale which was told to him by his mother. He was born in Poland in 1904. The tale he tells were told to many Eastern European Jews of Ashkenazi descent.

**Time / Setting** : Eastern Europe, an early tale.

**Summary:** Tam, a young man who has fallen on hard times, is aided by Mazel, the spirit of good luck. Mazel has made a bet with Shlimazel, the spirit of bad luck, that goodness will overcome evil. This age-old argument takes several twists and turns throughout. In his down-to-earth and practical fashion, Singer ends the tale by explaining, "good luck follows those who are diligent, honest, sincere and helpful to others.

The man who has these qualities is indeed lucky forever." (1)

His message is timeless and can be applied to problems facing people today.

**Questions:**

After reading the descriptions of Mazel and Shlimazel, what impressions are you left with?

What do you think of them?

How does Shlimazel usually destroy lives?

Explain in your own words the bet made between the two characters in the book. What will they win and what will they lose?

What is the first thing Mazel does to turn Tam's circumstances around? What happens next?

How much of what happens next in the story is luck or is it a feeling of confidence? Explain.

The king becomes very ill and Tam is instructed to bring him milk from a lioness as this is the only cure. Why do you think the king makes this request of Tam?

What is it about Tam that makes Nesika love him?

At the end of the story the author tells us that good luck is the result of diligence, honesty, sincerity and being helpful. Do you think the author is correct, or are there are other factors that lead to success? Explain your answer.

Is the message in the tale true today as it was many years ago? Why? And if so, why not?

**Title** : " *No,Boconono!* " from ***Misoso: Once Upon A Time Tales From Africa*** by Verna Aardema.

**Glossary:** (2)

Boconono (BOH-cohNOH-noh): The word means *of the weasel family*.

Zulu (ZOO-loo): The word means *heaven* . The Zulus live in southeastern Africa, between the

western escarpment of the Drakensburg Mountains and the Indian Ocean.

Tlick: A sound made by clicking the tongue.

Hau (HAH-oo): An expression of aversion.

Ugwali (ug-WAH-lee): A simple musical instrument made by attaching a short hollow quill to one end of a bowstring. Humming into the quill vibrates the string, producing a kazoolike sound.

Umdiandiane (um-de-AHN-de-AHN-ay): An edible root that grows wild in South Africa.

Puo (POO-oh): An exclamation of surprise

Impis (IM-peers): Warriors.

**Author :** "No Boconono!" , is a Zulu tale retold by Verna Aardema in a book entitled, **Misoso: Once Upon A Time Tales From Africa** . *Misoso* is a wonderful book that takes the reader on a journey through Africa by the retelling of native tales. It is complete with a glossary of terminology at the beginning of each story to further enrich the reader's experience.

The word Misoso (me-SAW-SAW) comes from the Nbundo tribe of Angola and means, "Once upon a time", meaning tales told mainly for entertainment the author Verna Aardema explains,

"In Angola, they use formulas for their misoso tales. The storyteller begins, 'Let me tell you a story about. . . ' and ends with 'I have told my story. It is finished.'"(3) Each tale in the text was selected to teach a lesson or illuminate a culture. The tales are from very early sources, recorded in the native language and then translated into English. The tales were gathered by settlers in trading posts and settlements. Later, missionaries and anthropologists followed, and it is from their writings that Aardema gathered her material. "No, Boconono!" was first translated in 1868.

**Time /Setting :** The story takes place in South Africa at an unspecified time before 1868.

**Summary:** Boconono is born to the wife of a king in Zululand. His head is too large for his body, and he can walk and talk at birth. He is a curious child and walks around saying, "What's this? What's this?" The queen says, "He's like a curious little weasel. I shall call him Boconono." The king thinks he would be a great deal of trouble. His life is very difficult. Because of his size, he is not allowed to hunt, herd cattle, nor attend the wedding of a neighbor. Through many trials and tribulations, Boconono overcomes many barriers and becomes a member of the tribe.

### Questions:

Describe in your own words some of the difficulties Boconono faces.

How is Boconono different from other children at birth?

How did his size make his life different?

Do you think his size should have made a difference in what he wanted to do?

Why are some people not accepting of people who are different than themselves?

Is there anything about you that makes you feel different from other people?

Does that prevent you from doing anything you want to do?

*Dwarf tales form other cultures*

"Tom Thumb " from **Tales of Mother Goose** , by Charles Perrault, 1697

" Snow White and the Seven Dwarf s" by the Grimm brothers

Pukwudjinnies, old men no larger than papooses are present in North American Indian and Eskimo tales.

**Title:** " Chac " from **The Monkey's Haircut** by John Bierhorst.

Vocabulary:

grindstone

tortillas

windbag

**Teacher Vocabulary :**

Chac

**Author :** This is an old Yucatan tale. Chac is the old rain G-d of the Maya people. Chac has an orchestra of frogs who, when they croak, are thought to be calling the rain.

**Time / Setting:** The tale originated with the Yucatec who migrated northward and settled the Yucatan Peninsula. They were the builders of the great cities of Uxmal and Chichen Itza. It is an early tale.

**Summary:** Chac, the rain G-d has stolen a boy from the earth to be his servant. The young boy, however, cannot seem to follow directions and gets into one difficulty after another. He is told to pick a yam, but not to look under the root. He does so and ends up hanging from the root, swaying in the wind until he is rescued by Chac. He asks for many tortillas instead of one and is showered with so many he is buried! He finally gets himself into so much trouble Chac decides to return him to earth.

**Questions:**

If you were hanging from a root in the sky, what do you think you would see?

How do you think you would feel?

If you were to live with the wind, what do you think life would be like?

Do you think the little boy was getting into difficulty because he wanted to return to earth or was he just mischievous?

How would you behave if you had to live with the wind?

The Mayan classic period lasted from A.D. 200 to 800, during which time they perfected sculpture, architecture and the arts of painting. During the Middle Ages, when Europeans were using Roman numerals, the zero was already in use in the Maya culture. Bark-paper books that survived revealed knowledge of astronomy and the ability to predict the movement of the moon and Venus.

The Mayan language of today is descended from a four thousand-year-old tribe that lived in the western mountains of Guatemala. Their stories fall into two categories: myths and other stories. Myths, which explain how the world as we know it today came into being, are called ejemplos. A folktale or fairy tale is called cuento. Ejemplos and cuento are Spanish terms.

The collecting of Mayan stories began at the turn of the century. In the 1700's, a sixteenth century text was discovered in the Guatemala highlands known as Popol Vuh (Council Book). The book is in novel form and explains the origins of legends of the Mayan people. Some tales are very early while others reflect Christianity after the arrival of the Spanish missionaries in the 1500's. The stories old and new echo the people's closeness to the earth, the dependence on corn, and kinship to the animals or the earth.

**Title :** " *The Magic Boat* " from ***The Magic Boat And Other Chinese Folk Stories*** by M.A. Jagendorf & Virginia Weng.

**Author:** The tale is an ancient one coming from the Han people of China. The Han are referred to as ethnic Chinese. They live in the eastern part of the country, which is less rugged and has more rainfall than other parts of China. The Han occupy forty-six percent of the land mass. They speak Mandarin, the national dialect of the country. Their history dates back about four thousand years and originated in the central plains of the Yellow River, spreading in all directions. For three thousand years they have called themselves the Central Kingdom.

The Han have greatly influenced Chinese civilization. Eighty percent lived in rural areas with their livelihood tied to the land. The remaining twenty percent lived in cities and were administrators, merchants, industrial workers, craftsman and from the beginning of China's history served in all forms of government.

**Summary:** Wang was a hard-working woodcutter who lived in the country with his mother. One day on his way to work he saves the life of a drowning man. He carries him home and is rewarded for his kindness and courage with the gift of a magic boat. It is a small paper boat that he is told will grow and turn into wood in the event of flood. But there is one warning to Wang. He is told to save only animals in case of flood. One day it begins to rain and floods engulfed the land. The woodcutter remembers the boat, he takes it out and it indeed

grows into a large wooden vessel. With this boat he saves many animals, but he forgets the warning and saves the son of a wealthy merchant.

The flood subsided and life returns to what it had been. A friend of the woodcutter suggests he give the boat to the Emperor. His friend offers to bring the boat to the Imperial City on behalf of the woodcutter who is very busy. The friend promises to return with the Emperor's reward. His friend did not return, and the animals whom he had saved return the favor by helping him secure his reward.

### **Questions:**

Does this story, or any part of it remind you of any other stories you have read?

If so, which ones?

Why do you think the woodcutter saves the old man?

Describe how you think the woodcutter feels as the magic boat changes from a small paper boat to a large wooden vessel that saves many.

Why do you think the woodcutter was warned not to save the lives of man?

In this story the animals have a great deal of value, with human-like qualities. Why do you think they are thought of in this way?

Do we in this society treat animals with the same kind of respect?

### **Title: *Salt Is Sweeter Than Gold***

#### **Vocabulary :**

ceremony insulted banishment precious nobleman courtiers

rashly realm cavernous boudoir frantically disgust

unready hovel courtesy remedies shriveled

**Author:** The tale is retold by Andrew Peters whose family left Czechoslovakia during the uprising in 1948.

**Time / Setting:** Eastern Europe, early tale.

**Summary:** An old king is about to die and must decide which of his three daughters he should leave his kingdom to. His two eldest daughters profess great love for him, greater than gold and jewels, but his youngest child says, "Father, I love you more than salt." She is immediately banished from the castle. She finds a home with Babichka, a wise old woman who teaches her resourcefulness and the destructiveness of greed. In time the young princess returns to her father's castle and provides for him.

### **Questions:**

If you were asked to prove how much you loved a parent, what would you say?

Through a series of events you became separated from your family in a strange place, what would you do?

In this story the young princess has to decide what is really important in life. If you were asked that question, how would you answer it?

*Salt Is Sweeter Than Gold* is published by Barefoot Books. They publish tales old and new that demonstrate to children how to navigate the difficult passages of life. The stories present a wide range of cultures and show the importance of reflecting before one takes action.

**Title: *The Rainbow Serpent***

**Glossary : (4)**

**Barramundi** (bar rah MOON dee): a primitive freshwater fish of Australia.

**bil-bil** (BILL bill): a Rainbow Lorikeet, which is a brightly colored Australian parrot.

**bora** (BO rah): a sacred initiation ceremony.

**Bora-bunaru** (BO rah BUN ah roo): a mountain in northeastern Australia.

**broлга** (BROL gah): a large silver-gray bird which performs an exotic courtship dance.

**Dreamtime** : the time long ago in Aboriginal mythology when supernatural ancestors created the world.

**emu** (E myu): a three-toed, flightless bird related to the ostrich.

**flying fox**: a large Australian bat.

**fury**: fierce or violent anger or motion.

**goanna** (go AHN nah): an Australian lizard.

**Goorialla** (goo ree AHL lah) : the great rainbow serpent.

**Gormungan** (gor MUNG gun): a mountain in northeaster Australia with five caves and five peaks.

**humpy**: an Aboriginal hut used for temporary shelter.

**lorikeet**: (LOR ih keet): a brightly colored Australian parrot.

**Minalinka** (min ah LINK ah): a lily lagoon in northeastern Australia.

**Naradunga** (nahr ah DUNG gun): a granite mountain in northeastern Australia;

**Narabullgan** (nahr ah BOOL gun): a large mountain in northeastern Australia

**pandanus** (pan DAN us): an Australian tree with palmlike leaves.

**Wangoo** (wan GOO): an Aboriginal people named after the tree goanna.

**Author :** The tale is retold by Dick Roughsey.

**Time / Setting:** A very long time ago at the creation of Dreamtime.

**Summary:** This is the Aboriginal mythological explanation for how the world was created. According to myth the Earth was once flat and formless. When the giant Rainbow Serpent Goorialla became angry, he slithered around the earth creating lagoons, rivers, gorges and mountains. Goorialla disappeared into the sea, but his eye can be seen shooting across the night skies. The author interprets this legend to be the story explaining Halley's Comet.

The aboriginal people believe they lived a long time ago when human beings were the only creatures on Earth. The first human beings had supernatural powers and created the land and sea. They brought the world law, morality, and knowledge. Life was good until a great upheaval caused floods, droughts, earthquakes, and volcanoes. Fear caused the human beings to protect themselves in many interesting ways. They became the animals of the earth. It was during this time of change that Dreamtime began, and the Earth, as we know it today, became populated with many different creatures.

**Questions:**

What do you think of this explanation of the creation of the earth?

How does it compare to other explanations you have heard of how the the world began?

If you were living during this great upheaval what animal do you think you would have become?

Can you compare The Great Serpent Goorialla, to any creatures you have read about or imagined?

What do you think the world was like before Dreamtime?

**Title:** "*The Golden Lamb*" from *Apples From Heaven* by Naomi Batluck.

**Vocabulary:**

Caliph   rarity   fetch                debated   avail

exploits   wares   bewilderment   morn    dispute

**Author:** The tale is an old one and originates in Iraq.

**Time / Setting:** The tale takes place in the countryside in the city of Baghdad.

**Summary:** Three young men spend the winter tending the sheep of an old widow. She cannot afford to pay them in coin, but promises to pay them each with a lamb of their choice if they stay until lambing season is over. The young men will seek their fortunes with the profits from the sale of the lamb each receives.

They all agree and spend the winter telling tales and tending sheep. Spring comes, and the lambs are born,

one with a golden fleece. The widow keeps her word, but left it up to the three young men to decide amongst themselves who would get the lamb with the golden fleece. The three friends could not decide who would keep the prized lamb. One of them suggests going to Baghdad and asking the Caliph to resolve the dispute. They are each asked by the Caliph to tell a tale, and the best one will win the lamb. All the tales were equally good, and the Caliph decides to divide the value of the lamb equally.

The Caliph provides them each with sandals, a cloak and a loaf of bread, rather than money. He gives them advice that enriches them for the rest of their lives and sends them off to make their way in the world.

### **Questions:**

What do you think the purpose of the cloak, sandals, and loaf of bread are?

How do you think the three young men will use the cloak, sandals, and the loaf of bread?

If you had the gift of telling tales, how would you use it?

The young men were expecting money, but instead receive advice about enjoying what one has and not mourning over what one does not possess. What do you think this means? And what do you think of his advice?

**Title :** "*The Storytelling Stone*" from ***Apples From Heaven*** by Naomi Baltuck.

**Author:** Native American Seneca tale.

**Summary:** A young boy of the Seneca tribe has lost both of his parents and is being raised by a foster mother who is a member of the tribe. He reaches an age when it is time to learn to hunt. He is very successful as a hunter, each day increasing his kill. One day, as he goes deep into the forest, he finds a very large stone, climbs on and begins to eat his lunch. He hears a voice that asks him if he wants to hear a story.

At first he is bewildered; he cannot figure out where the voice is coming from, and he has never heard the word story. He finally realizes the stone is talking.

Being a brave hunter he does not fear the stone talking but does not know what a story is. The stone explains, "It is to tell of the things that happened a long time ago." The young hunter decides to listen to the stories the stone has to tell, but he must give the stone his day's killings. He agrees and listens to the tales until the shadows in the forest grow long and the stone says he must stop for the day. "May I come tomorrow?" asks the boy. "Yes," replies the stone, "but tell no one of our meeting."

On the way home, he kills several more birds to bring to his foster mother. She is surprised his days kill is so small. When asked, the boy explains the birds are afraid of him. This goes on for several more days and the foster mother is suspicious and asks another young member of the tribe to follow her son. He too becomes involved with the story-telling stone as do several members of the tribe.

The Seneca tribe believe that all stories of the world came from this stone. Each member of the tribe is asked to tell the tales of the stone to their children. They believe, when days become shorter and colder, people

have their stories to keep them warm.

**Questions:**

Make believe you are this very large stone deep in the forest. Give me an example of a tale you would tell.

If you were to meet a stone that spoke what would your reaction be?

Would you tell your parents or your friends?

Do you think this is the origin of all stories? Why? And if so, why not?

Do you think you would like to have a stone like this? Why?

Why does this culture put such a high value on stories?

Are they really that important?

**Title:** " *The Sage's Gift* " from ***Apples From Heaven*** by Naomi Baltuck.

**Vocabulary:**

compassionateinvisibletapestrieserected

**Author:** This tale originated in the Middle East.

In the city of Baghdad a caliph's first son is born. In celebration, the caliph invites all the great and well-known people of the land. Each brought a gift except Meheled Abi. When questioned as to why he has come empty handed, he explains that his is an invisible gift, the gift of stories. Each day he promises to come to the castle and tell the newborn a story, and, when the child grows up, he will be wise and compassionate.

True to his word each day he comes to the palace and tells the young boy stories. Many years later the caliph dies. The young boy has grown into a young man. He in turn rules his people in a wise and compassionate manner.

When he dies his tomb stone reads:

*If I am wise, it is because of the seed sown by the tales.* **Questions:**

We have read many tales together as a class. Do you believe the engraving on the tomb stone of the caliph to be true? Please explain your answer.

Can you think of a story that has made you wiser or more compassionate?

## Epilogue

When a day passes it is no longer there. What remains of it?  
Nothing more than a story. If stories weren't told or  
books weren't written, man would live like the beasts—only for the day.  
Today we live, but by tomorrow today will be a story.  
The whole world, all human life, is one long story.

- Isaac Bashevis Singer

## Social Studies Worksheet

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**Name:**

Date:

Title of story:

Each story you will read takes place in a different part of the world. You will be asked to answer this worksheet with each story read. Use of the LMC is encouraged to complete the sheet.

Find the region/country of the world in which the story takes place. Please list the continent \_\_\_\_\_, region \_\_\_\_\_, country \_\_\_\_\_.

List major rivers \_\_\_\_\_, lakes ocean(s) \_\_\_\_\_, and mountain range(s) \_\_\_\_\_ in the area where the story takes place.

What natural resources are found in this region?

Describe the climate of the region. Include the following:

Temperature ranges \_\_\_\_\_ . Rainfall per year \_\_\_\_\_ . Snow fall per year \_\_\_\_\_ .  
Land in relation to sea level.

Describe interesting facts about this part of the world.

Describe housing.

What do the children in this area do for fun?

What religion(s) do they practice?

What types of food do they eat?

What is their clothing like?

Describe what they study in school.

## Notes

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(1) Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *Mazel And Shlimazel of The Milk Of A Lioness*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, An Ariel Book, 1967. Pictures by Margot Zemach. p.42.

(2) Aardema, Verna. *Misoso Once Upon A Time Tales From Africa*. New York: An Apple Soup Book, An Imprint of Alfred A. Knopf, 1994. Illustrated by Reynold Ruffins. p. 50.

(3 ) *Ibid.*, p. IV.

(4 ) Roughsey, Dick. *The Rainbow Serpent*. Milwaukee: Gareth Stevens Publishing, 1988. p.32.

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