My Dark Companions and Their Strange Stories

Original Authors: Henry Morton Stanely and Various African Co-Authors/Co-Creators

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File Description

This file collects plot summaries and relevant keywords for selected stories in *My Dark Companions and Their Strange Stories* (1893) by Henry Morton Stanley and various African coauthors/co-creators. Indu Ohri's students developed these materials for an introductory survey course on literature and the visual arts from Romanticism to the modern day during summer 2022 at Boston University.

As part of a class assignment, students created these materials about the folklore collections on the *One More Voice* (OMV) website. Each student read one folktale and devised a short plot summary of important events and characters and 3-5 keywords indicating the folktale's major concepts, themes, or Indigenous terms. In addition, some students contributed extra materials such as keyword definitions, long plot summaries, and an essay that contextualizes the folktale "How Kimyera Became King of Uganda" more fully in terms of social hierarchy.

These collections were frequently the first vehicles for sharing people of color's voices with western readers because colonial administrators would gather folklore from local coauthors/co-creators who they often failed to acknowledge. The materials are meant to guide a general scholarly audience of educators, graduate students, and college students who may be unfamiliar with these folktales as well as to enrich the public's knowledge about Indigenous folklore.

Cite Original Source (MLA):

Stanley, Henry Morton. *My Dark Companions and Their Strange Stories*. New York: Charles
   Scribner's Sons, 1893. http://archive.org/details/mydarkcompanions00stan.

"The Creation of Man"

Original Narrator: Matazega

Student Developer: Teagan Foulke

Plot Summary: Before all life on Earth, there was Toad and Moon. They decide they want to create people, but disagree on who should make them. In the end, Toad creates people, but they are imperfect and tainted. So, Moon destroys Toad and takes the man, Bateta, and the woman, Hanna, and teaches them how to survive. Moon gives humans fire, teaches them how to cook, and gives them animals. Eventually, Moon creates the sun, and Hanna has children. In the end, she gives birth to twins every nine months for the rest of her life, creating 242 children. When the time comes, Moon explains to the humans that he will take Hanna and Bateta back, but because of the taint of Toad, the rest of the children will die and be left for the earth. The narrator reveals that after Moon destroys Toad, a tadpole emerges from his remnants.

Keywords: Africa, Creation, Moon, Myth, and Toad

Keyword Definitions: There are no definitions for this item.

"The Goat, the Lion, and the Serpent"

Original Narrator: Baruti

Student Developer: Leo Yuan

Plot Summary: The story starts by introducing Baruti, who needs to tell a good story to win a fine handkerchief. After a brief digression, Baruti recalls a story from his childhood and begins narrating by the campfire—as Goat and Lion walk together, Goat provokes Lion into a bet by stating he doubts Lion's power. Goat bets Serpent will take down Lion, with the respective conditions of Goat receiving one hundred bananas if Lion wins and Goat becoming Lion's servant if he loses. Goat sets up another bet with Serpent to guarantee his win by taking advantage of Lion's arrogance, and his plan works almost instantaneously. Because Goat promised to be Serpent's servant in return for Serpent's aid, Serpent sends Goat to the humans so that Goat can promote Serpent's might while living a happy, full life with humans. We learn that this folktale is the origin of domesticating goats.

Keywords: Anthropomorphism, Trickery, Ingenuity, and Inception

Keyword Definitions: There are no definitions for this item.

"The Queen of the Pool"

Original Narrator: Kassim

Student Developer: Madison Roost

Plot Summary: A man named Kassim from Basoko tells a story about Izoka, daughter of an Umané chief who marries Koku, a young warrior. Koku would take Izoka fishing and becomes resentful when she does better than him. He abuses her and one day it becomes too much and she leaves. Izoka lives by a pool in the forest and becomes friends with the animals there. One day, Koku finds where she was residing. When Izoka leaves, he goes in with his friends and hunts her beloved animals. When she finds out, she returns to her father's village and exposes Koku for his abuse. The men of the village kidnap and try him, and her father sentences him to death. Afterwards, Izoka is granted property rights to his items and the pool area, eventually becoming queen of a village where she would be prosperous and never marry again.

Keywords: Justice, Power Dynamics, Abuse, Escape, and Basoko

Keyword Definitions: There are no definitions for this item.

"The Elephant and the Lion"

Original Narrator:Chakanja

Student Developer: Hailee Helfrick

Plot Summary: "The Elephant and The Lion" is told by a man named Chakanja at a camp in Upper Congo. The first elephant is angry and decides to kill a helpless lion cub. While he is gloating about killing a lion, the second elephant comes up to him and tells him that bragging in the way he does is not good. However, the first elephant does not listen and is confronted by the cub's parents. He kills the father, but the mother comes back with her brother and is able to kill him.

  The mother lion is proud of herself and brags when the second elephant comes up to her. He explains that she is lucky; taking offense, she challenges him, but is quickly crushed by his body. The elephant is then attacked by a poacher, but is able to kill the poacher before dying himself. Before his death, the elephant warns the wife of the poacher that there will never be peace between all because everyone holds preconceived ideas of what others are like based on past actions.

Keywords: Elephant, Lion, Laughed, and Killed

Keyword Definitions: There are no definitions for this item.

"The Legend of the Leopardess and Her Two Servants, Dog and Jackal"

Original Narrator: Kadu

Student Developer: Jonathan Lee

Plot Summary: In Leopardess's den live Jackal and Dog, who are her servants, and her two cubs. In return for doing chores, they receive leftover meat. But Leopardess forbids anyone from taking the bones. One day, Dog steals a bone. However, when he tries eating it, the bone flies in the air directly at the den's door. Luckily, Jackal is there to stop it. Dog steals a bone again. The same thing happens. This time, the bone strikes a cub, killing it. Leopardess finds out and chases Dog. However, he managed to escape. Later, Leopardess finds out that Jackal has run away and Dog is living with humans. Many years later, dogs have assimilated with humans, monkeys live in trees, and jackals scavenge on their own. This folklore playfully answers the question of how the animal kingdom was organized and the reason why dogs are so close to humans.

Keywords: Oracle, Bones, and Golden Age of Uganda

Keyword Definitions:

Oracle: An indescribable figure who practices witchcraft. Similar to a sorcerer, the Oracle can reveal the location of certain figures.

Bones: All the catastrophic events that occur in the story are due to the existence of bones. If Dog had not taken the bones of meat, the cub would not have died and Leopardess, along with Dog and Jackal, would have lived in peace. Bones allow for the cause-and-effect relationship of folklore.

Golden Age of Uganda: The Golden Age was known as a time where animals lived in peace. Leopards, jackals, dogs, and monkeys were able to coexist. The animal kingdom was in a prosperous time.

"A Second Version of the Leopard and the Dog Story"

Original Narrator: Sarboko

Student Developer: Aaron Mulligan

Plot Summary: A man named Sarboko tells his version of the Dog and Leopard story around a campfire, a renowned Ugandan tale. Sarboko states that in earlier societies, Dog and Leopard lived "like chums" (Stanley and Sarboka 179), splitting their food and effort equally for survival. However, Leopard was a fiercer hunter than Dog, who became fat from eating Leopard's food. To avoid hunting, Dog tricked Leopard in different ways and stole Leopard's kills. Leopard became apprehensive of his hunting abilities, until an Oracle named Muzimu told Leopard that Dog was responsible. Leopard later caught his friend attempting to steal his kill and chased after Dog, who ran for safety into a man's home. The man took Dog as his pet. Sarboko's tale offers a playful explanation of the companionship of dogs and men and describes the tension between two animals.

Keywords: Friendship, Manipulation, Anthrozoology, Comedy, and Beast

Keyword Definitions: There are no definitions for this item.

"The Legend of the Cunning Terrapin and the Crane"

Original Narrator: Kadu

Student Developer: James Thompson

Plot Summary: The story starts with a Crane and a Terrapin that both desire to have more food, since both are hungry. Both coincidently have mothers that annoy them. They come up with a plan to eat their mothers. So they eat Crane's mother. When it comes time to eat Terrapin's mother, Terrapin insists on bringing his mother to Crane, but instead brings rubber. He then tricks Crane into thinking that the rubber is his mother, resulting in Crane getting hurt. But the Terrapin, being loose-lipped, reveals his trickery as he talks to himself on his walk home. Crane's friend, Parrot, overhears and tells Crane. Crane then goes and kills Terrapin's mother. Terrapin is upset and tries to kill Crane himself, but is unsuccessful. He then enlists the help of Serpent, who successfully kills Crane. Terrapin and Serpent then go on to become friends.

Keywords: Disposing, Trade, Hungry, Agreement, and Unforgiving

Keyword Definitions:

Disposing: Terrapin and Crane dispose of Crane's mother with seemingly no remorse, showing the reader that both are selfish characters.

Trade: What Terrapin and Crane agree to, but a trade never happens in the story. Instead, one character tries to get more than the other, which goes against the point of a trade.

Hungry: Hunger is what drives both characters to act upon their selfish desires.

Agreement: The agreement Terrapin and Crane come to is what launches the characters into their conflict.

Unforgiving: The story could have ended if Terrapin had forgiven the crane, since they were even. But like the trade, Terrapin wants to have more than Crane and does not end up forgiving her. If there was forgiveness in the story, it would have played out much differently.

"The Legend of Kibatti the Little, Who Conquered All the Great Animals"

Original Narrator: Kadu

Student Developer: Rosie Baron

Plot Summary: In a forest in Uganda, a meeting between the most powerful animals of the region takes place. Facilitated by King Elephant, the leaders of the other animal tribes (rhinoceros, buffalo, lion, leopard, and hyena) engage in a discussion of how to deal with their biggest foe: humans. Each animal talks about the atrocities that their species has experienced because of humans, creating a common enemy. They agree that the people of the village close by must pay for their crimes. Soon after, the animal tribes are rallied and they stampede the village, slaughtering everyone in sight. However, three people manage to escape: Kibatti, his mother, and his father. Kibatti devises a plan to win the animals' trust. Then, while they are sleeping, he perpetuates the cycle of revenge by tying up each of the animal kings and strategically slaughtering them. Kibatti and his parents then run away to the next village, where they are praised for their actions.

Keywords: Animals, Revenge, Punishment, King, and Power

Keyword Definitions: There are no definitions for this item.

"The Partnership of Rabbit and Elephant, and What Came of It"

Original Narrator: Sabadu

Student Developer: Timothy Thai

Plot Summary:

In this folktale, the story revolves mainly around two characters, Rabbit and Elephant. The plot starts off with the two animals crossing paths and communicating that they both are on the same trading expedition. Along the way, they encounter a river that Elephant is capable of crossing, but Rabbit could not. Elephant crosses without Rabbit, while Rabbit must work his way around the river, as he is too small to cross it easily. When they reach the Watusi shepherds, Rabbit is able to trade for a larger heifer than Elephant and this embarrasses Elephant. The goal is to bring the heifer back to the god Mugassa and Rabbit successfully does, with larger animals interrupting the trip. He allows them to feast with Mugassa as long as they comply. The main theme of this folktale is: brains over brawns, or work smarter, not harder!

Keywords: Rabbit, Betrayal**,** Mimicry, and Journey

Keyword Definitions: There are no definitions for this item.

"The Boy Kinneneh and the Gorilla"

Original Narrator: Kadu

Student Developer: Rachell Paz

Plot Summary: This is a story centered around the antagonist, a boastful and mighty gorilla, who is extremely hungry. He smells bananas coming from a village and embarks on a search for the bananas while killing numerous people along the way. A young boy named Kinneneh and his mother live in one of the houses on the village's plantation and, as the gorilla comes, they hide in the loft. For the next few days, the boy Kinneneh mocks the gorilla, as he boasts and then steals his stocks of bananas when the gorilla leaves. This theft leaves the gorilla never fully satisfied with his meal, and Kinneneh's mockery only further angers him. Despite his search for the boy, Kinneneh bests him, and the gorilla dies from exhaustion, allowing Kinneneh to move to a nearby village where the villagers praise his cunning.

Keywords: Boast, Cunningness, and Plantation

Keyword Definitions:

Boast: To brag or show off ("Boast").

Cunningness: The ability to deceive or manipulate due to one's wits or skills ("Cunning")

Plantation: An area used for agriculture ("Plantation")

"The City of the Elephants"

Original Narrator: Kassim

Student Developer: Lincoln Liu

Plot Summary: This folktale is a frame story that starts with a narrator, a villager of the Basoko. He recalls a legend about the city of the elephants. Particularly, there was a couple from Bungandu village: a man named Dudu and his wife, Salimba. They get lost in the forest as they look for a decent redwood tree to make a mortar. After being lost for a few days, they meet a talking elephant that becomes the couple's friend because of Salimba's kindness. The elephant protects the couple and guides them to the elephant's village, where everything is well-organized. The king elephant entertains the couple with food and accommodation. However, after living there for a season, these two lovers begin to miss their hometown. Subsequently, the elephants send them back to the village. In the end, Bungandu's people and the elephants form a profound friendship.

Keywords: Supernatural, Personification, Animal Conservation, and Elephant

Keyword Definitions: There are no definitions for this item.

"The Search for the Home of the Sun"

Original Narrator: Kanga

Student Developer: Sophia Rosa

Plot Summary: This folktale is told using a frame narrative from the perspective of an unnamed narrator. A man named Kanga is telling the story of King Masama and Balira, his tribe. After a fire tragically destroys the entirety of the Balira village, a firm law is set in place by the King forbidding fires to be lit inside the home. The prolonged absence of heat begins to affect the tribe negatively, especially the King. So, Masama decides to take his people and leave in search of a place with a warmer climate. Looking to the sky, the Balira people see the sun as the solution, and to the sun they go. Climbing from hills to mountains, the Balira people reach closer and closer to the sun until their skin begins to crack, shrivel up, and fall off. Once bountiful, the Balira tribe is no more.

Keywords: Sun, Karma, Egocentric Sovereignty, and Loyalty

Keyword Definitions: There are no definitions for this item.

"A Hospitable Gorilla"

Original Narrator: Baruti

Student Developer: Jack Wallace

Plot Summary: A fisherman is wandering alone through the jungle when he meets the Father of the Gorillas. The gorilla calmly asks the fisherman if he is a gorilla. The fisherman hides his thumb behind his palm to show the gorilla a four-fingered hand, tricking the gorilla. The gorilla tells him "Tu-Wheli, Tu-Wheli," a code word gorillas use to identify their friends, and leaves.

Later, the human tribe is hunting gorillas, the fisherman among them. As one gorilla charges towards the fisherman, the fisherman yells out "Tu-Wheli, Tu-Wheli," and the gorilla leaves him unharmed.

After the hunt, the fisherman is again wandering alone through the jungle when a gorilla recognizes him and teaches him which plants are edible. When the fisherman returns to his village, he explains everything, including the lessons he has learned from the gorillas. The village agrees that the gorillas are allies and stops hunting them.

Keywords: Kinsmen, Alliance, and Tradition

Keyword Definitions:

Kinsman: After the thumb trick, the Father of the Gorillas calls the Fisherman a "kinsman" and entrusts him with the codeword.

Alliance: The events of the story result in a lasting alliance between the tribe and the gorilla troop.

Tradition: Before telling the story, the narrator explains the importance of the storytelling tradition. His story eventually justifies the tradition of avoiding hunting gorillas.

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