

“How Kimyera Became King of Uganda”: The Story of the Young Hunter Who Grew up to Become King

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File Description

This file collects Macie Parker's essay, long plot summary, and relevant keywords for the story "How Kimyera Became King of Uganda" from *My Dark Companions and Their Strange Stories* (1893) by Henry Morton Stanley and his Ugandan coauthor, Kadu. Macie developed these materials for Indu Ohri's 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 like Macie contributed extra materials such as keyword definitions, long plot summaries, and the following 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.

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Stanley, Henry Morton, and Kadu. "How Kimyera Became King of Uganda." In *My Dark Companions and Their Strange Stories*, 120–52. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893. <http://archive.org/details/mydarkcompanions00stan>.

“How Kimyera Became King of Uganda”:

The Story of the Young Hunter Who Grew up to Become King

Macie Parker

This is the story of Kimyera, a young child who is abandoned by his mother and taken in by a Mugema, a potter, and his wife. Months later, Kimyera’s birth mother by the name of Wanyana finds her son in the potter’s studio and befriends Mugema’s wife. She reveals herself as the true mother of Kimyera and is allowed to maintain a relationship with her son as he grows up. Years pass and Kimyera becomes a strong and passionate hunter. After all, his name does mean “the mighty one.” On one of his hunting adventures, he journeys into the town his father is from, Ganda, and learns about his life. In search of Wanyana’s lover and Kimyera’s father, Kimyera, Mugema, his wife, and their companions go to Ganda, but eventually become separated. Only Kimyera and Mugema arrive at Ganda and meet the Queen, Naku, who falls madly in love with Kimyera. The two get married, making Kimyera king of Ganda. As his first order, he makes a search party to look for Wanyana and Mugema’s wife. They are found in a cave, but his mother had passed away from wounds from a leopard attack. Years pass, and Kimyera lives a long and full life beside Naku until she passes away while giving birth to their children. As a result of his inspirational life, Kimyera’s legacy is still upheld with a cultural significance that is passed down through generations.

In the story, there is an illustration and description of the ceremony when Kimyera is crowned king. He dresses in a traditional costume, holding spears and a shield. On top of Kimyera’s extravagant ceremony, a drum beats loudly in the background. As soon as he is announced king, the people of the town clash their spears and shields together to “signify

allegiance” to Kimyera (Beattie 136). Anthropologist J. H. M. Beattie analyzes the rituals of a tribe in Uganda called the Nyoro when a king is chosen in his essay “Rituals of the Nyoro Kingship.” He describes the four “categories” of a ritual. Firstly, he discusses “the body of the myth and the ‘traditional history’” that describes the story of the state and the kingship. “How Kimyera Became King of Uganda” would be considered one of the myths that are told at a kingship ceremony. Secondly, he describes the “rights” and “authorities” of the kingship; these are the powers the king has as a leader. Thirdly, Beattie explains the “formal procedures” of formality for the king, noting his rulership and powers. Finally, there are rituals that are specific to the king himself, as they differ from ruler to ruler, meaning that each person may have different thoughts and ideas that were not precedent for other rulers in the past. These rituals all have a spiritual aspect that incorporates the history of the people of Uganda (Beattie 136). They also place emphasis on the importance of hierarchy and status in Ugandan society. Once someone is appointed king, they are at the top of the pyramid and gain the utmost respect and power out of everyone in the community. This status shows how significant it is for Kimyera to be chosen as king in the story, and how the social hierarchy of Uganda impacted its society before colonization.

Throughout the story, there are words and phrases that are not thoroughly explained that provide insight into Ugandan culture. An example of this is the “soothsayer,” who is mentioned in the beginning of the story. According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, a soothsayer is “a person who predicts the future by magical, intuitive, or more rational means.” Another example of Ugandan culture are the titles and names of the characters in the story. Kimyera’s name means “the mighty one,” his dogs are named Msigissa, which means “darkness,” and Selma-gimbi, which means “wood-burr.” Although these two names do not have much significance in the

scheme of the story, it is important to uplift the cultural terms and phrases of the original people who told these stories. Of course, Henry Stanley Morton did not know the true depth of these names, so by using traditional language, these stories capture their true and original meanings.

Long Plot Summary: “How Kimerya Became King of Uganda” is a simple story that describes the life of an untraditional family. It begins as a frame narrative of a story a Zanzibari tells. The story starts out with the king of Unyoro, Uni, and his wife, Wanyana. Wanyana does not love Uni, but instead falls in love with a cattle dealer named Kalimera and has a passionate affair with him. As Uni could sense Wanyana drifting away, he thinks he can win her over by becoming more intimate, but he decides to get her a separate apartment and bring her gifts with each visit. At that time, Wanyana finds she is pregnant, and fearing Uni’s anger, she makes an agreement that he would not visit her that month and she will repay him with love. Wanyana tries to tell Kalimera the news of their son but learns that he has disappeared. Wanyana soon gives birth to a beautiful baby boy, but she is in fear that Uni will find out, so she runs away in the middle of the night to a “soothsayer.” The soothsayer plans to give the child to a trustworthy couple; Wanyana agrees, leaves her child, and returns home.

The next day, the village potter, Mugema, gets called in by the “great witch-finder” (the soothsayer), and is told that there is a living thing waiting for him in his clay pit. Curious, Mugema goes to his pit and looks to find something wrapped in cloth; afraid to scare it, he calls to his wife for help. When they got back to the clay pit, they heard a cry. It is a baby. They decide to take in the child as their own, naming him “Kimyera—the mighty one.” So, Mugema and his wife are now in possession of Wanyana’s child, but a few months later, when Wanyana stops by the potter’s house, she hears a baby and asks if they had a child. Mugema tells her the story of how they found this child, and Wanyana tells him that it is her child he and his wife

found and of her love of Kalimera, King of Uganda in the Elephant clan. Of course, they vow to keep this a secret, and they allow Wanyana to visit Kimyera as he grows to secure their bond as mother and son.

As Kimyera grows, he becomes a strong and adventurous hunter. People respect him and he provides for the village. At this time, Uni becomes more distant from Wanyana, causing her visits to Kimyera to stop, yet she still provides gifts for her son. Because of these gifts, Kimyera could buy his own dogs, one of whom he named Msigissa (darkness) and Selma-gimbi (wood-burr). With the companionship of these two dogs, Kimyera goes on longer explorations and leaves to hunt more frequently. Over time, Mugema and his wife became worried about how far he had gone. He fibs and tells them he does not go long distances. When the two return this information to Wanyana, she too asks Kimyera of his journeys to make sure he does not travel too far. He says that he travels “in the direction whence the sun rises,” and Wanyana remarks that that is where his father lives, in Ganda. Determined to find his father, Kimyera sets off towards Ganda. He spends the night with a herdsman of Kalimera who tells Kimyera about his father. When Kimyera relays this information to his mother, she remarks that she still loves Kalimera from a distance.

Wanyana decides to find Kalimera, so Mugema, his wife, a slave named Sebarija, Kimyera, and his dogs follow her. On their journey, Mugema and Kimyera go out to get a buffalo, and when they return, there is no sign of Wanyana, Sebarija, or Mugema’s wife. After days of searching, they decide they have to continue on their journey without them. They finally come across a woman from Ganda who works for Queen Naku, who has a reputation of being welcoming and kind. They make their way to Ganda to meet the queen. When Queen Naku finally meets Kimyera, it is love at first sight. Queen Naku sees Kimyera’s flute and asks him to

play. A few days later, Mugema and Kimyera feel abandoned by Naku because of a command she gives her servants. Naku and Kimyera exchange gifts, and Naku makes an important announcement. She has the power to choose her king, and she chooses Kimyera, whom she has been in love with since they first met. Kimyera accepts and honors his father.

Because of the excitement of the marriage, Naku neglects the people in her village, and appoints her maid, Swbwana, to attempt to apologize to the people for her. When Swbwana finally leaves, Kimyera reminds Naku that he has been worried about what happened to his mom and nurse on their journey there. Naku agrees to send out a search party in a few days. In the meantime, Kimyera is crowned king. When the search party goes out, they find Sebarija and Mugema's wife, but Wanyana had passed away a few days earlier from fatal wounds sustained during a leopard attack. After a period of mourning, Wanyana is buried, creating a future tradition for the burials of the "queen-mothers." Finally, there is an overview of the rest of Kimyera's life. He has children with Queen Naku, who sadly dies after giving birth. After a long life, King Kimyera dies, leaving only his legacy to the people of Uganda.

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