Clever English First Additional Language Grade 9 Core Reader

Compiler: Sharon Quinn
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Folklore

Long ago, even before there were computers or other technological marvels, there were folktales. Our ancestors told and retold their tales of heroes, gods, animals and ordinary people, passing them from one generation to the next. In Africa and all over the world, folktales and songs were for recording and celebrating the past. These types of folktales often provide us with knowledge that is indigenous, or native, to our own country and our various origins and cultures. Sometimes folktales are all we have left of lost communities.

Stories about great leaders, warriors and thinkers helped to uphold the respect and pride their people felt for them. This kind of story is called a legend, which is a type of folktale. Over many centuries, the actions of these mighty heroes would be exaggerated, until they were seen as superhuman beings who performed amazing deeds.

Human beings have always wanted to know why the world is the way it is. Previous generations may have lacked modern scientific knowledge, but they lived closer to nature and they were keen observers. To explain the changing seasons, the plants and animals, and even why the world exists at all, they created the beautiful stories that we call myths. Myths are also a type of folktale. Myths show us how our ancestors explained the habits of birds and animals.

Our ancestors used another type of folktale, called a fable, or moral tale, to educate children about correct behaviour and to pass on the wisdom of centuries. But, of course, one of the main purposes of folktales was simply to provide entertainment when people gathered round the fire at night. Many of these old folktales are still fresh and fun. We should know them and enjoy them, because they are such an important part of our diverse heritage.
Pre-reading activities

Grandpa Cogan and the leprechaun (Unit 4)
1. In your group, discuss what you know about leprechauns.
2. In which country is this folktale set?

The seal maiden (Unit 6)
What would you expect the setting of this folktale to be?

Simba’s kill (Unit 7)
Based on the title, would you expect the mood of this tale to be peaceful, fearful, happy, sad or tragic? Give reasons for your answer.

The envious lions (Unit 8)
Have you heard the expression, ‘Jealousy makes you nasty’? Tell your partner about a time when you were envious of someone and wanted to do something nasty.

Why the bat flies at night (Unit 9)
1. Work in groups. Each group member should take a turn to say the first word that pops into their mind when they think of the word ‘bat’. One member of your group must make a list of all the words.
2. Write a paragraph describing how bats are viewed by humans.

The clever frog (Unit 12)
Tell your partner what you know about frogs. Perhaps you know a story about a frog? If you don’t, make up your own story.

Zeus, Hera and little Io (Unit 13)
Look at the illustration accompanying this story. What kind of folktale do you expect to read, based on the title and the illustration?

Tortoise and Baboon (Unit 15)
Copy the following table into your book. Then complete it by comparing the characteristics of a tortoise and a baboon. (The first pair has been done for you.)

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Warthog’s walk (Unit 17)
Look at the illustration of the warthogs running across the veld. Describe what you see. How do they run?

Sheikh Yussuf (Unit 18)
1. Where would you expect this folktale to be set? Why?
2. What kind of folktale do you expect to read? Justify your answer.
Grandpa Cogan walked slowly towards the horse stables. He was an old man who had been farming for many years. His back was now stooped from all the years of hard work. But he loved the work on the farm; he had been doing it ever since he was a boy. Perhaps it was a family trait; his family had owned this piece of land in Ireland for three generations, and each of the Cogan men had worked on the farm until their very last days. Grandpa Cogan loved the lush green of the Irish hills and the peace of the valley. He loved the old stone farmhouse in which he (and his father and grandfather before him) had been born. He felt that there was something mystical about the land that surrounded the farm. If the myths of the leprechauns and clurichauns were true, then Grandpa Cogan believed that the little creatures would be living on his farm.

Grandpa Cogan was on his way to the stable to check on his old mare, who hadn’t been well of late. The sun had long since set, and the lamp he carried in his hand cast long shadows that danced off the wood of the stable doors. As he entered the stable, he breathed in deeply, taking in the smell of freshly cut straw and a horsiness that was particular to his stable. The smell of the stable always made him feel nostalgic and he fondly remembered all the mischief he had got up to as a boy. He sighed.

His old mare had been born in this stable, the foal of his wife’s favourite horse. He remembered the night. It had been a difficult labour for the horse, and he and his wife had spent many long hours at her side, awaiting the arrival of the newest addition to their farm family. At one point, sometime in the early hours of the morning, he had been convinced that the mother would not be able to give birth to the little foal without help. He told his wife that he should probably ride out to fetch the vet. But his wife just knelt down at the mother’s head and cradled the horse’s muzzle in her lap. Then she began to sing the lullaby that she had sung to their children when they were babies. The song had the desired effect, and the mother soon calmed down. Shortly thereafter, the foal was born, a beautiful dappled grey mare who was all legs and who took her first wobbly steps straight towards him. He named her Lullaby. That was many years ago now. Both he and his wife were now as grey as the mare and they all had many long hours of work on the farm behind them.
He entered Lullaby’s pen and she whinnied softly as he did so. She still looked listless, but he was glad to see that her feed buckets were empty. If she was eating, perhaps she would return to health soon enough. He went to fill up her water trough and gave her the medicine that the vet had prescribed. Then Grandpa Cogan retired to his tiny makeshift office in the stables to review his accounts.

Sometime later, Grandpa Cogan woke up with a start. He must have fallen asleep at the desk. He chuckled softly. He hated doing the accounts, and it was a standing joke with his wife that accounts sent him to sleep faster than a bottle of Irish whiskey would. He rubbed his eyes and then realised that there was a strange sound coming from the mare’s pen. It sounded like someone was hammering something. This was certainly not unusual on a farm. What was unusual was that someone was doing this in the middle of the night while whistling the prettiest tune Grandpa Cogan had ever heard. As he wondered what was happening, a distant memory surfaced in his mind.

He was a young boy. He was sitting at his grandfather’s feet in front of a roaring fire. It was winter and they were snowed in on the farm. He remembered the warmth of the roaring fire and his grandfather’s words came to him as if in a dream.

‘They are known to play tin whistles, the fiddle, the harp and various other musical instruments. They can even whistle at a perfect pitch without an instrument. Oh, they have wild music sessions at night, where hundreds of them gather to dance, sing and drink.’

Grandpa Cogan snapped out of his reverie. Surely not? Was it possible that the magical tune was being whistled by a leprechaun?

He had always nagged his grandfather to tell him more about the leprechauns and the clurichauns. He didn’t really like the stories of the clurichauns. They were drunken creatures who would cause chaos for humans and were often destructive. Grandpa Cogan had preferred the stories of the leprechauns, who were always playing tricks on farmers. He had dreamed about getting a leprechaun to lead him to a pot of gold.

Grandpa Cogan stood up quietly. If it really was a leprechaun in Lullaby’s pen, now would be his only chance to fulfil his childhood dream of seeing one in real life.

He found himself creeping silently towards the mare’s pen, filled with a childish excitement, his heart beating wildly in his chest. He was trying to be as quiet as possible, which was not easy for an old man who was not as nimble as he once had been. He reached the door and carefully peered into the pen. What he saw amazed him.
On the floor, right beneath Lullaby’s stomach, was a little man with a shock of red hair. He was dressed smartly in a suit with a waistcoat and he wore shiny black shoes with golden buckles. He appeared to be working very hard at making a new pair of shoes. One finished shoe lay next to him on the floor while he worked on the other one. Lullaby seemed to be calmed by the whistling. She stood very still, as if absorbed by the music.

Grandpa Cogan was thrilled. A real leprechaun, right in his stable, on his farm, just as he had always believed! He was worried that the leprechaun might notice him, but the little man seemed to be very focused on the shoe in front of him. So Grandpa Cogan sat and watched the leprechaun work as he remembered all the stories his grandfather had told him.

His favourite stories had always been about the pot of gold. It is believed that every leprechaun has a pot of gold hidden somewhere in the Irish countryside. If you caught a leprechaun, you could try to convince it to lead you to the gold. But because leprechauns value their gold more than anything, they would usually offer to grant three wishes instead.

Grandpa Cogan watched the leprechaun carefully. If only his wife could see this! She had often teased him about his belief in the mythical Irish creatures. He thought that perhaps he should try to catch the little creature so he could show his wife. Would he even dare to try though? Surely the leprechaun would be too quick for his old hands? But the leprechaun hadn’t noticed him yet, so he decided to give it a try.
As Grandpa Cogan crept closer to the leprechaun, he forgot about the ache in his knees and the pain in his back. Soon he was close enough to see each hair on the back of the leprechaun’s head. He reached his hand out carefully and, in one quick movement, grabbed the little man.

The leprechaun was both surprised and angry. His face was red from the exertion of trying to escape. Grandpa Cogan laughed with the joy of a child and said to the leprechaun, ‘There’s no need to wriggle, I will not let you go until you lead me to your pot of gold.’

The leprechaun stopped wriggling and looked at the old man closely, his green eyes searching the old man’s face, but he said nothing.

‘All right then, I’ll accept three wishes in exchange for your freedom instead,’ said Grandpa Cogan. ‘Perhaps running all over the Irish countryside at my age isn’t the wisest of ideas anyway. I will treat you well and I will let you go as soon as my wishes are granted.’

Finally the leprechaun spoke, his Irish accent thicker than any the farmer had ever heard.

‘All right then, I will grant your three wishes. What is it that you wish for?’

Grandpa Cogan hadn’t thought that far ahead. The wishes he had thought of when he was a young boy seemed rather silly now. He wasn’t sure what to wish for. He and his wife were both in good health, and his children were successful and happy. All was well on the farm and he wouldn’t want to change his simple way of life for a grander one. He was too old to want lots of money or an unlimited supply of sweets, which is what he had thought of most often as a young boy. Then he cast his eyes towards the old mare and thought that perhaps he had an idea for his first wish.

The leprechaun saw him glance towards the old mare, but said nothing, though a sudden mischievous glint had appeared in his eyes. He was absolutely still in the old man’s hand.

‘So what is your first wish then?’ asked the leprechaun.

‘Well,’ said Grandpa Cogan, trying to work out how he would phrase his wish. He knew that leprechauns were very good at twisting words, so he wanted to make sure he phrased his wish as clearly as possible.

‘I thought maybe you could help my mare,’ said the old man carefully.

‘That mare over there?’ asked the leprechaun innocently.

‘Yes,’ said Grandpa Cogan, ‘she has been suffering from …’

But as soon as he began his sentence, the leprechaun called out in a strange voice to Lullaby, who suddenly stamped her foot. Grandpa Cogan got such a fright that he loosened his grip ever so slightly.
With that, the leprechaun lept away and vanished into thin air right in front of Grandpa Cogan’s eyes! After the initial shock, Grandpa Cogan began to laugh. He laughed and laughed until even Lullaby came closer to see if he was all right. He could not believe that, at his ripe old age, his childhood dream had come true.

The tiny completed shoe still lay on the floor of the pen. Grandpa Cogan picked it up and examined it carefully. It was the most perfect little shoe he had ever seen! He left the stable to go and tell his wife the story of the leprechaun.

She didn’t believe him at first, but that was probably because he woke her up in the middle of the night, gabbling with excitement about a leprechaun and a tiny shoe. Once she had calmed him down, and had settled him at the kitchen table with a cup of coffee, he told her the whole story, showing her the tiny shoe as proof. The old lady was charmed by the perfection of the little shoe and was amazed that her husband’s beloved stories of leprechauns turned out to be true.

The next morning they both went to the stable to look for more evidence of the leprechaun. This was when they got the biggest surprise of all. Grandpa Cogan’s wish had been granted! They found Lullaby looking healthier and younger than ever.
Very late one evening, a fisherman, tired after the day's catch, was walking along the shore. His back ached from another hard day's work, but it didn't bother him much, as this was his favourite time of the day. He loved the peace of the empty beach and the feel of the cool sand between his toes. The full moon had just climbed above the mountain and was reflecting off the waves as they crashed onto the shore.

Suddenly the fisherman saw something moving in the water. This was strange. He had never seen anyone swimming at this time of night before. Just as he stopped to get a better look, seven seals jumped out of the waves and wriggled up onto the sand. He had never seen seals on the beach, before so he quickly ducked out of sight so as not to disturb them.

He watched as the seals wriggled their way up the beach and away from the water. What he saw next amazed him. The seals removed their skins, and seven beautiful young maidens emerged. The fisherman was completely taken aback; he could not believe what he was seeing! The maidens began to dance and the moonlight made their skins shimmer magically. Their movements were fluid like water and their beauty wild and exotic. The fisherman was completely bewitched by the beautiful maidens. He forgot his surroundings and dropped his catch on the sand at his feet.

Then the village clock struck 12 and the fisherman woke up from his daze. At the sound of the clock, the maidens picked up their skins and disappeared into the waves. Their magical laughter lingered in the mind of the fisherman long after they were gone.

After that night, the fisherman was desperate to see the maidens again. He had seen them once and he could not forget them. Every night he searched for them without success. Only at full moon did they appear again. This time he moved a little closer. Their long, wet hair hung like tendrils of seaweed down their backs – slick and wavy. He could also hear their song. It was wild and deep, like a storm at sea, then light and clear, like a ripple in a rock pool. Although he could not understand a word of the song, their voices took him on a journey. He felt as if he was travelling the seven seas with the maidens. All too soon, the clock struck 12 and once again the maidens disappeared into the waves.
The fisherman watched the calendar carefully as he waited for the next full moon. He could not stop thinking about the maidens. Their song echoed within him and he longed to hear their voices once more. When the third full moon arrived, he dared to move even closer to the maidens. He could now see their shining eyes, as clear as water. He desperately wanted to be with them, but he knew that if they ever saw him watching, they would never come back. This thought almost drove him to despair and he realised he would have to find a way to make them stay. So he waited for his chance, crept up to the heap of seal skins, stole one and buried it in the sand.

As the clock struck, the dance ended. Six sisters snatched their skins and ran across the sand, but the seventh searched for hers in vain.

‘Sisters! Sisters!’ she called. ‘My skin has gone!’

‘Sister, sister!’ they answered. ‘Make haste, we cannot stay longer!’

The seal maiden stumbled among the sand dunes, desperately looking for her skin. ‘Sisters, sisters!’ she pleaded.

‘Sister, sister!’ their voices called from the waves, more faintly this time. The seal maiden fell down, sobbing. ‘Sisters, sisters!’ she wept.

‘Sister, sister …’ came the faraway reply.

The fisherman could not stand to see the maiden so upset. He stood up and walked towards her. ‘Can I help you?’ he asked.

‘I am looking for a seal skin,’ she said through her tears. ‘Have you seen it?’

‘No,’ he answered, ‘but come with me. I have a house and I can give you all you need. I will care for you and make you happy.’

‘I shall never be happy again,’ answered the seal maiden, but she followed him.
And so the seal maiden settled into life with the fisherman. It was difficult at first, but she appreciated his help and he did try to fulfil her every need. Eventually they were married, and in time they had two children, two little girls. They had their mother’s sea-green eyes and wavy golden hair. The seal maiden seemed happy enough and loved her children dearly, but the fisherman was very careful nevertheless. Shortly after the maiden had begun her life with him, the fisherman had dug up the skin he had stolen and hid it in the cellar. He kept the key with him always, even after years of marriage.

The seal maiden was a good mother. No one guessed that she was not human, in spite of her extraordinary beauty. The fisherman believed that no one would guess his secret. It was only in the evenings, when she put the girls to bed, that he felt uneasy. She would sing the girls a lullaby and in her voice he would hear the sound of the waves and the journeys of the sea – the same sounds he had heard when he first saw her. She sang:

‘Far is the land where the sisters dwell,
Where they turn and twist in the waters’ swell,
Where the coils of weed twine legs and hands,
While they linger all day on golden sands.
Oh, far is the land for which I long.
Where to the wind and the waters’ song.
They nightly dance on the silver strand.
Oh, far, so far is the Faraway Land.’

As the years passed and the children grew up, their mother stopped singing lullabies. Her golden hair was touched with grey and her sea-green eyes were dimmed. The fisherman believed that his wife had forgotten about her magical past, but he still carried the key to the cellar with him every day. He did this more out of habit than fear that she would discover his secret.

And so it happened that one night the fisherman forgot the key at home. A fierce storm was brewing. He was so worried about the possible damage to his boat that he did not even notice what he had done.

The seal maiden found the key and felt as if something was speaking to her soul. She could feel the faint sensation of moonlight on her skin, taste the salty tang of seawater on her tongue and hear the echo of her sisters’ songs in her heart. Without even having to search, she went straight to the cellar and unlocked the door. She walked into the gloom. There, in the corner of the cellar, covered in a fine layer of golden dust, was her skin. She gathered it up in her arms, holding it
close to her, and she felt her heart soar. She remembered what it felt like to jump in and out of the waves, with the cool sea waters flowing over her sleek seal skin. She could feel her sisters calling to her from the waves. She thought of the life she had, of the children she had raised, but she knew what she had to do. She headed straight to the beach. Her children saw her rushing out and followed curiously.

As soon as her feet hit the sand, the wind from the gathering storm blew the grey from her hair and it shone gold once more. The light of the moon shone deep in her eyes and the years fell from her body like clothing. Her children drew back in fear at what they saw.

‘Mother! Mother!’ they called.

‘Farewell, my children,’ said the seal maiden, and she moved gracefully towards the sea.

‘Do not leave us, Mother!’ begged the girls.

‘I cannot stay,’ answered the seal maiden, and she moved even faster.

‘Mother! Mother!’ sobbed the girls.

But she continued towards the waves. The gleam of the white sand reflected off her skin as she changed into her seal skin. The last her children saw of her was the quick movement of her body slipping through the waves. The last they heard of her was the comforting familiarity of a song from their childhood. Her voice echoed off the waves:

‘Far is my Land of Faraway,
Where on the silvery sand they play
To the sound of the wind and the waters’ song.
I come, oh land for which I long.’

When the fisherman returned, he saw that his wife had gone. His children told him what had happened and his heart was filled with despair. He knew, as he had known all those years ago, that she would never return to the beach. He knew that it would be useless to look for her.

But when the full moon shone at night and his heart wanted to break, the fisherman would go down to the beach to see if the seal maidens had returned to dance and sing. But the seal maiden had found her sisters and they had found other shores on which to spend the silvery hours, dancing and singing. They were happy where they were, far from prying eyes and the grasping hands of fishermen, there in the Land of Faraway.
Simba’s kill by Credo Mutwa

Simba the lion was old. Simba the lion was weak. He was mad with hunger and frustration. There is nothing more terrible for a once-strong beast than to succumb to the ravages of old age.

Simba the lion was lying under the young musharagi tree, not far from a sluggish river bordered by rustling reeds. A herd of water beasts bathed lazily in the river, their enormous bodies sticking out of the water like smooth, glistening rocks. One of the water beasts raised its ugly head and yawned, exposing blunt tusks. The lazy breeze played softly in the tall grass, through which Simba’s head was barely visible.

Aieee! Simba the lion would have given his very life for just a mouthful of meat from the side of a wildebeest three days dead! Surely anything, no matter how rotten and vile, was better than the slow death of starvation. In vain the old lion wished that just one thin antelope would pass within reach of his age-numbed claws. He had not eaten for three whole days.

With a cautiousness born of years of bitter experience, Simba lowered his scarred head until he was looking through the long grass, rather than over it. He breathed a deep breath. Eyah! There was no doubt about it, the strange scent was there and it was getting stronger. Whatever was coming was taking its time, but of one thing the old lion was now sure – it was some kind of food that was coming his way! Fresh, vibrant strength poured like liquid fire along his spine. His tail slowly stiffened and a low growl of satisfaction involuntarily pushed itself from the depths of his ancient chest. It was quickly stilled by the voice of experience. Nothing must give the approaching prey a hint of his presence. Silence now … absolute silence …

It seemed as if the very stream of Time had come to a standstill as the lion waited. The veld, the river and everything about his environment suddenly seemed oddly unreal. That was when they came into view … strolling slowly through the long grass … human beings!

There were two of the creatures – male and female. Simba the lion narrowed his yellow eyes as he contemplated their approach. The human beings were walking as if they owned the veld – as if all the trees and the mighty ageless river belonged to them. They were walking as if they were the chief and chieftainness of Creation. Simba the lion watched them coldly, and his animal mind took in each detail of their
features and clothing. As they drew nearer and nearer their scent grew stronger.

The female was the Spirit of Beauty personified. She was Perfection. She was not only beautiful, but she radiated beauty as a hot stone radiates heat. Simba could see her great beauty and sense the great goodness in her soul. He stared at the sensitive beauty of her face, the oval face with its round, prominent forehead, the clear eyes that scanned the world with an expression of deep wonder. He noticed the small flat nose and the tiny nostrils, well placed above a smiling mouth. A mischievous goddess had placed that mouth there as a trap with which to catch the lips of men. Some Goddess of Skill must have spent days of precious time moulding each bulge and curve of her body. This woman was living beauty, carved in living ebony.

Her clothing was simple. She wore a skirt of tanned cheetah skin, heavily trimmed with cowrie shells around the hems. Copper and ivory bracelets flourished on her arms. A necklace of bright copper oblongs engraved with signs of secret wisdom blazed around her neck. Her hair was combed up into two lobes, a hairstyle known as the ‘ears of the caracal’ – the oldest hairstyle in the Land of the Tribes. Sacred cowrie shells and a beautifully carved ivory comb decorated her soft hair.

Simba the lion did not know it, of course, but he was looking at the most famous and most beautiful woman that ever lived. She was Marimba, the daughter of Odu and Amarava, Mother of Nations. Marimba was the woman who gave the tribes some of the oldest and most beautiful songs on earth. She invented countless musical instruments, each destined to carry her name in some form or other. Marimba, the Mother of Music.

The male was tall and slender, but strongly built. His face was not handsome, but it was determined and manly, like the rest of his body. Whereas the woman beside him was beauty incarnate, he was the personification of strength and royalty. He wore a crude loin skin around his hips and a band of python skin around his head. A necklace of hyena teeth hung around his strong neck, and a copper bracelet shone on his right forearm. He held a crude shield of buffalo skin in his left hand and a heavy harpoon of wood in his right hand. The harpoon was tipped with a flake from the shin-bone of a giraffe. He carried this strange weapon because the tribes had not yet learnt the secret of extracting iron from the ironstone. That knowledge was brought to this continent by the Strange Ones, many generations after the events in this story took place. Our ancestors only knew of copper and that was too soft for use in weapons. It was only good for making ornaments.
Simba the lion waited quietly while the two human beings drew closer. The veld and the river seemed to vanish. Only the two humans had substance in the lion’s eyes.

He saw how the man’s eyes never left the bewitching face of the woman by his side. He looked like an impala helplessly caught in the hypnotic spell of a glittering python. Simba could see how the man smiled at her reassuringly and spoke softly to her. It was as if he was trying to banish the great sadness that clouded her gentle eyes.

Then it dawned on the old lion that the human female was urging the male to go back with her to where they had come from. She did not want to go any further into the veld. She had a premonition of danger. Just then, something happened that left both humans paralysed with fear. Old Simba got the golden opportunity he had been waiting for! A bird of thunder – an eagle – had been circling high in the heavens for some time. Now he suddenly dived from the blue expanse of the sunset sky. He dived with wings partly spread and cruel talons fully at the ready to grab what his keen eyes had spotted. He passed directly over the heads of the startled humans and dived into the tall grass to their left. When he shot up again, back into the glowing heavens, a young steenbuck was struggling in terror in his pitiless grip.

While the shocked humans stood rooted to the ground, numbed by this awful and rare omen of violent death, old Simba gathered every ounce of strength he had and launched himself at Marimba!
Marimba felt a heavy blow that struck her on the side of her head, sending her reeling to the ground. She fell straight into the dark valleys of unconsciousness. She did not see her fearless husband hurl himself upon the lion that had brought her down. She did not see how his bone harpoon harmlessly glanced the beast’s shaggy flank.

Neither did she see how her husband, with strength above the strength of an ordinary man, threw himself barehanded upon the snarling lion and dragged it off her. She did not see her husband locked in mortal battle with the lion, whose claws tore his strong body to shreds. And she did not see the shaggy-maned savage beast drag the limp form away through the tall grass.

Simba the lion had found a meal at last.
Lion and his two brothers often disagreed; they had done so ever since they were cubs. Lion’s mother had said that they were brothers, and that therefore they should love each other all the time. What his mother did not understand though, was that they did love each other all the time. But, because they were close in age, they were competitive, and arguing was a wonderful way to pass the time when they were cubs. Especially when the argument concerned who of the three of them was the better hunter!

Now Lion and his brothers were no longer cubs, and now they all agreed on one topic: They were all equally upset about the same thing, and it concerned their young wives.

If you were to listen to the lionesses, you would soon realise that they did not think much of their husbands. According to the lionesses, everyone was stronger and cleverer and better than their young husbands. In fact, they seemed to argue over whose husband was the weakest and took much pleasure in trying to prove to one another that their husband was the most useless. Every time their husbands attempted to prove them wrong, they just laughed.

Lion told his wife that he was better than Monkey.
‘Monkey! Look how nimble he is,’ said Lion’s wife. ‘You could not possibly be more nimble than he is!’

Lion’s younger brother told his wife that he was better than Gemsbuck.
‘Gemsbuck! See how fast he runs?’ asked the young lioness. ‘You could never outrun him!’

Lion’s older brother told his wife that he was better than Ostrich.
‘Ostrich!’ said the older brother’s wife. ‘When he is around you might as well keep quiet. His song far outdoes your roar. In fact, Ostrich’s song far outdoes all of your roars combined!’

Lion and his brothers were very angry. They had been raised to be strong, tough lions and they did not take well to being told they were useless by a group of lionesses, even if the lionesses were their wives.

‘We’ve got to do something,’ said Lion, and his brothers agreed. They just weren’t sure what, exactly, they were to do. As usual, the brothers ended up arguing about what to do. Eventually, they agreed to invite all the animals to a big party. If everyone was there, then they could show their young wives just who the real kings were.
Lion and his brothers were excited about their plan. When their wives saw them next to the other animals, surely they would see the truth about who really held the power. They did not even consider the possibility of their plan backfiring.

The big day arrived, and Lion and his brothers were ready to welcome the crowd. At midday, the guests started to arrive, one by one. Monkey was first, swinging through the trees, somersaulting through the air and landing light-footed on the ground.

‘Just look at him,’ said the lions’ wives loudly and with admiration. ‘Monkey is definitely the most nimble animal!’

‘Come, let’s dance,’ said Lion sulkily to Monkey.

They began to dance, but when the lions swung their great hindquarters and lumbered around in a circle, trying desperately to dance to the rhythm, their wives shrieked with laughter. Monkey floated over the ground – front leg, hind leg, front leg, hind leg, whipping around. He was graceful and kept perfect pace with the music. He danced Lion and his brothers into the ground.

‘Monkey has won!’ shouted the wives. ‘When Monkey starts dancing, our husbands might as well go to sleep.’

Lion and his brothers were upset, but they hoped that the arrival of the next guest would give them the chance to prove their wives wrong. Gemsbuck arrived, proudly parading his long, thin legs and holding his long, thin horns high.
'What a beauty!' said the wives, and they only had eyes for him. Lion and his brothers were jealous of Gemsbuck's long, lined face and the effect that he seemed to be having on their wives. They needed to steal attention away from his looks.

Lion had no more desire to dance. 'Come, let's have a race,' he said, and they stood in a line to begin.

The wives took great pleasure in deciding who would do what in the important race. It was decided that the youngest wife would check that everyone was standing behind the starting line. The oldest wife would drop the flag for the start of the race, and Lion's wife would wait at the finish line to see who won.

At the drop of the flag, the race began. The lions kept up for the first few bounds but then Gemsbuck started to pull ahead. Eventually he was so far ahead that the brothers stopped running. They could only stand and stare.

'Good for you, Gemsbuck!' called the lionesses wives. 'You're too fast for our husbands.'

The party was not going well for the brothers. They had begun to argue again. The oldest brother accused Lion of making the wrong decision to try to race against Gemsbuck, while the younger brother maintained that they could have beaten Gemsbuck if they had not given up so easily.

The arrival of Ostrich cut the argument short. He came striding over the hill, bellowing. Lion did not even try to open his mouth, because he could see that the wives were so besotted with Ostrich's voice that they heard nothing else.

Lion felt defeated.

'We'd better be off, brothers,' said Lion, expecting them to argue. 'There's nothing we can do here.'

Lion saw that his brothers looked just as defeated as he felt. They slunk away through the bushes, leaving their wives to enjoy Ostrich's voice. But they did not go too far. Once they had settled in a cave in the side of the mountain, the lions decided that they should learn from the animals that had beaten them at the party. They hunted monkeys to become more nimble and gemsbuck to become faster runners. They practised their roars so that they could compete with the voices of ostriches.

They spent days away from their families, hunting and honing their skills, from the moment they decided on the idea.
For the first two days, their wives thought that the lions’ departure was a big joke, and did not pay too much attention to the absence of their husbands. However, on the third day, the lionesses had difficulty in finding food. They found hunting difficult without the imposing figures of their husbands and did not catch anything at all. By the fourth day, their cubs had become uncontrollable, as the lionesses often relied on the authority of their husbands to keep their cubs in check.

By the fifth day, the lionesses were sad at heart, for they truly did love their husbands, and they missed the companionship of living with them.

Lion’s wife said to her sisters, ‘We must go and get our husbands back. They really are the best of all the animals.’ And so the wives set out to find their husbands.

When the wives found their husbands, they saw that their husbands had been honing their skills while they had been away. The lions were now the most nimble and the fastest, and had the deepest roars of all the animals.

The lionesses told their husbands what they had come to realise. They were very apologetic, and begged their husbands to return to their homes and cubs.

From that time on, no lion’s wife praised another animal over her husband, whom she will praise to anyone who will listen. And this is why a lion’s family is called his pride.
Bush Rat and Bat were friends, or at least that’s what Bush Rat thought. Bush Rat was an all-round nice guy. He always saw the best in others and, because he was always honest with everyone, he assumed that everyone was always honest with him. In many ways, Bush Rat was naive. Bat was an altogether different creature: he always put himself first and was very good at deceiving others. Bat pretended to be Bush Rat’s friend because Bush Rat was very generous. Bat always got more from Bush Rat than he gave. Bush Rat’s wife didn’t trust Bat one bit, but she knew that her husband enjoyed Bat’s company, so she tried not to complain when Bat came to visit.

One day, Bush Rat told his wife that he had invited Bat for dinner that evening. Her heart sank. Bat always criticised her cooking. He also always found fault with something, whether it was the new carpet she had bought or the amount of pepper that Bush Rat liked with his food. Bat came to dinner at least once a week, but he never invited them to his house for dinner. Bush Rat’s wife was not looking forward to the evening, and wasn’t sure how she would handle Bat’s constant criticism. Then she had an idea: if Bat criticised her cooking again, she would insist that he invite them for dinner and prove that he was a better cook. Then she would find an excuse not to go to the dinner. She could have a peaceful evening at home while her husband enjoyed Bat’s hospitality. Her mind was made up, and she settled into making a cricket lasagne for the evening’s meal.

Bush Rat’s wife’s predictions came true that evening at dinner. Bat complained that the crickets weren’t crispy enough. He said that the lasagne’s white sauce had made them soggy. He went on to say that, if he had made the lasagne, he would only have added the crickets later so that they stayed crispy. Bush Rat’s wife bit her tongue when Bush Rat promised that the next time they would try to make it the way that Bat had suggested. When she served the dessert of mixed fruit, Bat insisted that the strawberries he grew at home were sweeter than the ones he was being served. The final straw for Bush Rat’s wife was when he criticised the antique tea set from which she served the coffee. The tea set had belonged to her grandmother and was made of solid silver. She watched suspiciously as Bat’s eyes kept flicking greedily towards the glittering tea set. She knew Bat was lying, but her husband simply agreed that it probably was a bit dated, as it was indeed very old.
It was then that Bush Rat’s wife launched her plan. She politely suggested that Bat invite them to dinner, so that they could learn from his cooking and hosting skills. Bat glanced at her suspiciously, but she gave him a pretty smile as she waited for his response. Her husband did not notice the tension between his friend and his wife, and said he thought it was a wonderful idea. He asked Bat when it would suit him for them to visit. Bat begrudgingly suggested one evening of the following week and Bush Rat beamed with enthusiasm.

As Bat left the house, his anger grew. He knew that Bush Rat’s wife was up to something, but he couldn’t say no to her suggestion. If he did, he might lose out on a free meal with the Bush Rats each week, as well as all the other perks he got from being Bush Rat’s friend. Bush Rat always picked up the bill and never noticed when things went missing. Bat could not allow a nosy wife to ruin such a beneficial relationship. So Bat came up with a plan for the following week that he hoped would ensure that Bush Rat’s wife would never again suggest that they eat dinner at his house.

Bat went about finding a saucepan that was big enough to carry out his plan. Then he stole a soup recipe from Mother Hen, who made the most delicious soup he’d ever tasted. He had to be very careful about getting the recipe, as Mother Hen had chased him out of her house before, when she realised he was stealing from her children. Luckily, he had perfected the art of breaking and entering. He just had to wait for the right time to slip into her house and steal the recipe. Finally, he crept into Rabbit’s garden at night and stole all the vegetables he needed to make the soup. He was ready to carry out his big plan.

The big night arrived. Bat followed the recipe with care so that the soup would taste just like Mother Hen’s did. Then he made sure that he had a large jug of ice water ready for when he heard Bush Rat coming up the lane. He planned to pour the ice-cold water into the soup to cool it just enough so that he could jump into the pot. It would give him enough time to fool Bush Rat before the soup heated up again. Bush Rat would be fascinated with his explanation and Bush Rat’s wife would be horrified at having to eat soup in which Bat had been swimming. But because she had suggested the dinner, she would be far too polite to complain. He rubbed his claws together in delight: it was going to be a good evening.

Bush Rat was making his way to Bat’s house. He was sorry that his wife would not be able to join them. Rabbit had dropped in and was most upset because someone had stolen vegetables from her garden. Bush Rat’s wife had thought it best to stay at home and console Rabbit.
Bush Rat was looking forward to the evening nevertheless. He arrived at Bat’s door and knocked loudly. Bat shouted for him to come in. When Bush Rat entered, he was completely taken aback by what he saw. Bat was sitting in a massive saucepan and the house was filled with the most delicious soup smell. Bat told Bush Rat that he would just be a minute, and then he hopped out of the saucepan and dried himself off. When Bush Rat asked why Bat had been bathing in the soup, Bat explained that it was an important part of the recipe. Bush Rat believed this lie, and sat down at the table as Bat served him the soup. It was the most delicious soup Bush Rat had ever tasted! He asked Bat how he managed to make such delicious soup. Bat explained that the soup was so good because he had bathed in it. The soup tasted so good because Bat himself tasted so good. Bush Rat was thoroughly impressed. After dinner he rushed home to tell his wife about Bat’s recipe.

When Bush Rat had left, Bat chuckled to himself. Bush Rat was so gullible, he had believed Bat without a second thought. Even though he had not brought his wife with him, Bush Rat was certain to tell her the story of the unique soup flavouring. He thought the evening was a great success, as he was certain that he would not have to entertain Bush Rat or his wife again anytime soon.

When Bush Rat got home, his wife was nowhere to be found. He went into the kitchen and realised that nothing had been touched. His poor wife must have seen Rabbit home and not had any dinner yet. Bush Rat decided that he would make her some soup after her long day. He would try out Bat’s trick. Bat had been in the soup just before it was about to be served, so Bush Rat decided that he would do the same thing. Just as the soup started boiling, Bush Rat hopped into the pot. Bush Rat realised too late that the soup was entirely too hot! He jumped out quickly, yowling; he had burnt his tail very badly. At that moment, his wife burst into the room together with Rabbit and Mother Hen and asked what on earth was wrong. Bush Rat’s tail hurt so much that he started to sob. He was not able to tell his story until his wife had placed his tail in an ice bath and rubbed in a soothing balm.

Bush Rat sat down gently, trying his best not to bump his damaged tail. He started to explain what had happened and why he had jumped into the soup pot in the first place. Bush Rat’s wife looked at her friends knowingly. Rabbit had told to her earlier that evening that someone had stolen vegetables from her garden and Mother Hen, who had overheard them talking, had mentioned that her soup recipe had also been stolen. Bush Rat’s wife quickly put two and two together and explained to Bush Rat that Bat had played an awful trick on him.
Bush Rat was very embarrassed that he had not realised that it was a trick, but he felt even worse because his friend had betrayed him. Bush Rat’s wife was furious at seeing her kind and loving husband being so abused. She went into the village to tell the chief what had happened. The chief was very angry when he heard what Bat had done. Bush Rat was one of the kindest villagers and had done so much to help others. The chief was horrified to learn that he had been treated so badly. He immediately ordered that Bat be punished for his actions, and instructed everyone to look for him. But he was nowhere to be found.

Bat had heard the commotion coming from the village and crept into the chief’s kraal to hear what was going on. When he heard that he was to be punished, he realised that his plan had backfired. He immediately fled the village. There were many complaints against him, and Bat did not want to face the chief’s anger when he realised just how dishonest Bat had been. Bat hid in the darkest, most remote places, and was too scared to come out in case someone spotted him and reported him to the chief.

Bat is still in hiding today. But he has to come out to look for food sometimes, so he only comes out when it is dark and no one will see him.
Frog sat very still on his lily pad. He was trying desperately to ignore the itch that had developed in his right toe and he was trying very hard not to breathe too loudly. His eyes were watering from trying not to blink too often, and he thought that, perhaps, the fact that he couldn’t feel his back leg any more might not be a very good thing. But he was desperate to catch Fly and he thought that if he sat very still, then perhaps Fly might forget about him and would come close enough for him to have Fly for lunch.

But Fly was very clever. He had been watching Frog sit very still for the longest of times and he wondered how long Frog would be able to keep it up. Fly pretended not to notice him and slowly – very, very slowly – began to move closer to the lily pad. Fly was trying very hard to contain his laughter. He could see that Frog’s eyes were going red from not blinking and he noticed a tiny tremor in Frog’s back leg. He knew that Frog would not hold out much longer and he moved as close as he dared. He knew that he would be just out of reach of Frog’s sticky tongue and that Frog was so desperate that he would try to catch Fly anyway.

Fly was right. Just as he moved again, Frog’s tongue shot out, sticky and terribly dangerous … but just too short to catch Fly. Fly laughed out loud. ‘Frog,’ he said, laughing so hard that now his eyes were watering, ‘did you honestly think I didn’t notice you sitting so still on the lily pad all morning? You looked so silly sitting there pretending you were invisible. I’m far smarter than you are; you will never catch me!’ And with that, Fly flew off, still chuckling to himself.

Frog was furious. He hopped into the pond to cool off after a long morning of sitting in the sun. His eyes were burning and the pins and needles in his back leg were a cruel reminder of what a waste of time the morning had been. As he swam in the cool water, he tried to ignore the knot of hunger that was forming in his stomach.

Frog jumped out of the water onto his favourite lily pad and thought about what a disaster the morning had been. He had been convinced that his plan would work this time. He thought of all the things he had tried in the past. He had hidden in the shadow beneath a log, and Fly had come quite close, but he couldn’t quite manage to get his tongue around the log, so he ended up with a tongueful of bark rather than Fly.
Next, Frog had smeared himself in mud for camouflage, in the hopes that Fly wouldn’t notice him. But the mud had baked hard on his skin and he found that after some time he couldn’t move. He’d had to topple himself into the water to soften the hard shell of mud. He had even tried to stay below the surface of the water so that he could leap out and surprise Fly, but he simply wasn’t fast enough. Each time, Fly laughed out loud and reminded Frog that he was smarter and that he would never be caught.

Frog sighed. Perhaps Fly was right; perhaps he simply wasn’t smart enough to catch the annoying insect. Frog felt defeated. He could hear Fly’s laughter ring in his ears and resigned himself to another hungry night. He curled up on his lily pad, and drifted off to sleep.

The following morning when Frog woke up, the knot of hunger in his stomach had grown and he realised that he could not give up just yet. He thought again about his attempts in the past and tried to work out why he had failed each time. He soon realised that each time he had been desperate to catch Fly, and Fly had realised this soon enough to get away. His hunger must have been too obvious. Perhaps the trick was not to appear so hungry and desperate. The more Frog thought about this, the more it made sense, and a plan began to form in his mind.

The following day, as Fly was hovering over the pond, looking to see what Frog would be up to today, he was surprised to notice that Frog was relaxing on a lily pad, tuning a guitar. He was completely absorbed in the task and didn’t seem to notice Fly.

Fly was intrigued; he had never known Frog to play a guitar before. He settled on a twig nearby to see what would happen. Frog tuned the guitar a bit more and then played a quick tune to check that the pitch was perfect. And so Frog began to play song after song, and Fly became more and more absorbed in his music.

Frog saw Fly settle on the branch and did his best to ignore him. As he played, he noticed that Fly was enjoying the music and that his wings began to twitch in time to the beat.

After a while, Frog began to play a little more softly – just a little – and he noticed that Fly came closer in order to hear the music. Frog was so excited! His plan was working! He did his best to hide his feelings and focused on the music, playing a little softer with each song.

Fly moved closer yet again. He was a bit worried that he was getting too close to Frog, but he thought to himself, ‘Frog isn’t hungry; he’s too busy playing his guitar. Besides, I’m far more clever than he is, and I will notice the minute he sees me. He won’t catch me today.’
Some time passed, and then Frog began to play so softly that Fly came and sat right next to Frog on the lily pad.

Frog saw that Fly was right next to him. He could hardly contain himself, but he noticed that Fly was cautious and was poised to fly away. So he continued to play his guitar until Fly had relaxed completely and his wings were once again twitching in time to the music.

At last! This was the perfect opportunity for Frog. All of a sudden, Frog stopped playing his guitar and his sticky and dangerous tongue shot out – ZAP!

Fly was trapped! He wriggled and squirmed, but he could not free himself from Frog’s sticky tongue.

Frog reeled in his tongue and swallowed Fly in one big gulp! His patience had finally paid off!

And, to this day, frogs still trick flies with their music.
Zeus was the god of the sky. He was considered to be the most powerful god in the world. All the other gods feared and respected him, even his brother Poseidon, who ruled the sea, and his brother Hades, who ruled the underworld. Zeus was tall and muscular and was known for his ability to throw lightning bolts in battle. He had married a beautiful woman and had a number of children. In spite of all this, he was bored.

Zeus thought about what he could do to amuse himself. He thought of turning into an octopus and visiting his brother Poseidon under the sea. But he didn’t feel like getting wet, and Poseidon loved to cause the sea to swell into a storm when Zeus visited, just for a laugh. He thought of visiting Hades in the underworld, but Hades was always so gloomy and the land of the dead held little attraction for him. He thought of throwing some lightning bolts, but it really wasn’t much fun if he didn’t have a target.

Zeus thought about looking for one of the other gods to talk to, but the other gods were terrified of him. He did have a terrible temper, especially when someone lied to him. Since the gods lied often, they generally avoided Zeus and would hide when they saw him coming. Zeus decided not to look for any of them, as he knew he would become even more frustrated if he could not find anyone.
Zeus thought about calling for his wife, Hera. But he was a little frightened of his beautiful wife. He wasn’t a faithful husband, and Hera loved to take revenge on him for his affairs.

So Zeus decided to fly down to earth to see if he could find some entertainment with the humans. Soon enough, he spotted two men walking down a lane. They looked like common travellers, tired from walking all day. One had long, shaggy hair and the other was bald. Zeus hid himself nearby and threw his voice so that it would sound like one of the men was speaking. He was very good at that.

‘Hey, stupid!’ Zeus cast his voice loudly, hoping to start a fight.

The bald man turned to his companion, ‘What did you say?’

‘Nothing,’ said the shaggy-haired one, looking confused.

‘Don’t lie to me,’ said the bald man, his fist clenched in anger. ‘I heard you quite clearly!’

‘I didn’t say anything at all!’ protested the other man, shaking his head.

‘You did! Why are you lying to me? You lied yesterday about eating the last of the cheese. I know you did it! And you lied about knowing an innkeeper in the previous village. Why do you have to lie all the time? I should never have agreed to travel with you!’

Zeus watched as the argument escalated until, eventually, fists were flying. He had a good chuckle while watching the two men fight. They were both weak and they fought in a clumsy and comical manner. Because the men were tired from travelling, the fight did not last very long. Zeus walked away happily, leaving the two men grumbling and picking up their belongings, which had been scattered during the fight.

Zeus was walking along the river when a sudden glint off the water caught his eye. He turned towards the river and saw a beautiful woman. She was a river nymph and her name was Io. The sunlight seemed to sparkle on her skin as it did on the water, and her long black hair was the same colour as the river rocks. Zeus moved towards her and, startled by the sudden sound, she turned. Zeus was struck by the blue of her eyes. They were like the shifting blue of the river – at once deep and dark, like the water at the centre of the river, and a light, bright blue, like the shallower sections of the river near the water’s edge.

‘What a lovely woman,’ Zeus murmured to himself. He found that he was falling in love.

Zeus began to court Io and found that he was no longer bored. He could not get enough of her delicate features and loved to stare into her clear blue eyes. He spent much of his time with her at the river, so much
so, that Hera began to be suspicious about his long absences from home.

Zeus soon realised that his wife was watching him more closely than usual, and he was running out of excuses to visit Io. He was also tired of Hera finding reasons for him to stay at home. He longed to see Io again, but he needed a way to hide from the eagle eye of his watchful wife.

So Zeus covered the world in a thick blanket of white clouds and then flew down to Io, certain that his plan would work.

Hera, however, was not so easily fooled. The thick blanket of clouds made her suspicious. She was furious that Zeus thought he could fool her so easily. She immediately headed to earth. At first, she tried to creep up on him and catch him red-handed. But, the longer she searched, the angrier she became. Eventually, she started to shout out his name, in the hopes that she would find him faster.

Zeus heard Hera shouting his name. Realising that he had been found out, he knew that he had to do something to save Io from Hera’s temper. He looked around him in desperation as he heard Hera’s voice coming closer and closer. He did the only thing he could think of: he turned Io into a white cow.

When Hera arrived, all she found was an innocent-looking Zeus standing next to a pretty little white cow.

‘This little cow appeared out of nowhere,’ he told his wife, pretending to be surprised.

Hera looked around her and realised the grasslands were perfect for grazing animals, especially because there was a river nearby, but she was not fooled. She decided to use Zeus’ trick against him. Fortunately for her, she was a quick thinker. ‘What a beautiful cow,’ she gushed admiringly. ‘May I have it as a present?’

Zeus didn’t know what to do. If he did not agree, then Hera would know that something was wrong and she might punish Io more severely. However, if he agreed, she might not realise anything was wrong and she would hopefully grow bored of the little cow and release it. Zeus decided he had to agree, and the little cow was given to Hera. Hera immediately sent the cow away and placed it under the guard of Argus, the monster with a hundred eyes.

Zeus was distraught. He worried about what Hera would do to punish Io if she discovered the truth. He came up with a plan to rescue Io and set her free. He asked his son Apollo to help him. Apollo was Zeus’ son.