

Anansi, the Clever Spider

A Tale from West Africa

By Claudia Haas

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Based on the African fable of "Anansi and the Stories," the play tells the story of Anansi and his desires to bring stories into the world and the difficult challenges he faces achieving his goal. Anansi must battle the python, outwit the leopard, protect himself from the hornet's sting, and endure a frustrating encounter with Mmotia, the bad-tempered fairy. With the help of Osa, his wife, Anansi is able to achieve his dream. The play is physical, fast-paced and farcical at times but is faithful to the original folk tale in terms of plot and storyline.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(1m, 2w, 5 flexible)

ANANSI (Ah-NON-see): A clever spider.

OSA (OH-sah): Anansi's clever wife.

NSIA (En-SIGH-ah): Anansi's mother-in-law; hates Anansi.

NYANKORPON(A) (NEON-core-pone): Sky god or goddess;
arrogant, overbearing. Note: If female add "uh" at the end of
the name.

ONINI (Oh-KNEE-knee): A python.

OSEBA (Oh-SAY-bah): A leopard.

MMOTIA (Meh-MO-sha): A bad-tempered fairy.

HARICA (Ha-REE-kah): A hornet.

SET

Simple set with many levels. There should be an entrance that leads to the "sky." Also, there should be an entrance that leads to Anansi's hut and at least one other entrance for the various "animals" to emerge from.

COSTUMES

Costumes can be either simple or elaborate. Spiders can wear black turtlenecks, and their legs can be made by stuffing black socks with newspaper and attaching them to the arms. You may also wish to insert wooden dowels or heavy gauge wire into the legs to shape them or to make them stick out. Other animal costumes need only simple tails, ears, stingers, wings, etc.

PROPS

Butterfly net

Spider web: two sticks with Halloween cobwebs draped between them.

(4) palm leaves

Rope

Anansi, the Clever Spider

(AT RISE: DRUMBEAT as ANANSI and OSA ENTER.)

ANANSI: Welcome! Welcome! It is wonderful to have you gathered here to listen to tales of my heroism, my bravery, my unwavering ability to make things right! You do know that there would be no stories if it wasn't for me, don't you? For it was I, Anansi the Spider, who single-handedly brought these stories to you.

OSA: I don't think so. If it weren't for me, there would be no stories.

ANANSI: Osa? Are there any tales of your heroism? Are there?

OSA: What I recall, Anansi, is that in your stories, it was I, your wife Osa, who did all the work.

ANANSI: *(To audience.)* Excuse me. My wife and I need to straighten a few things out here. *(To OSA.)* No, no, no. You are not remembering properly, dearest wife of mine. For it was here on this very spot that I first called to the Sky God, Nyankorpon.

OSA: I don't think so. It was further down ... where I sent you to gather the wood.

ANANSI: Dear wife, O light of my life, it was HERE I say.

(ANANSI jumps on the spot.)

OSA: And I say that nothing went on right here. *(SHE jumps on the spot.)* It all happened over there!

ANANSI: *(Threateningly.)* Wife ...

OSA: *(Standing up to HIM.)* Husband ...

ANANSI: *(To audience.)* Why don't we let them decide?

OSA: That's a very good idea.

ANANSI: All right. You must pay close attention to everything. And then you can decide if the stories were brought to the world because of me, Anansi, the heroic.

OSA: Egotistical blowhard of a spider, or if we received the stories because of me ...

Anansi, the Clever Spider

-6-

ANANSI: My temperamental wife, Osa. Let's shake on it.
(*ANANSI and OSA exchange many handshakes with their many feet.*) Now back to where I received the stories from the Sky God ...

NYANKORPON: (*Suddenly appearing. Perhaps from a spot up high.*) It is where I say. For I am the Sky God, and I control the stories.

ANANSI: Now, look what you've done. You've brought him here.

OSA: I didn't bring him here. (*To audience.*) Did you hear me invite him over?

NYANKORPON: Quiet! These are my stories. I have half a mind to take them back. Never trust an arachnid with a gift meant for a god! You are all much more trouble than you are worth.

ANANSI: You can't take back the stories! You gave them to me fair and square.

NYANKORPON: Enough! I can do what I like. I am the Sky God. You are a mere spider.

ANANSI: I tell you what, Nyankorpon. Let me prove my worth once again. Let me show these good people how clever and helpful I am. Give me a task so I can prove my worth.

NYANKORPON: Be careful, Anansi. I will charge you with assignments so difficult that you will not be able to succeed. Then, I shall punish you for failing.

ANANSI: I am ready. Assign me my tasks.

NYANKORPON: Very well. But don't say I didn't warn you. I charge you with bringing to me the python, Onini.

(*ONINI peeks out.*)

ANANSI: Oh! Big snake. All right. I can do this.

NYANKORPON: And the leopard, Oseba.

(*OSEBA peeks out from another part of the stage.*)

ANANSI: Nice kitty. Sweet kitty. Huge kitty. I can handle a cat.

Next.

NYANKORPON: Then there's the hornet, Harika.

End of Freeview

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