Folktales of Anansi the Trickster

Oral customs are narrated throughout generations of family. Anansi is known as one of the symbols of tradition. He is a cunning trickster with numerous personality traits. I have instituted a collection of folktales regarding Anansi, the deceptive spider. His stories are called Anansesem or “Spider Stories”. These mythologies were passed along from the African, West Indian and Caribbean cultures. The rationale of this culmination is to present a multiplicity of Anansi tales for a school library curriculum. The collection of books was selected from the Lamplighter School Library and the Richardson Public Library.


This tale is spun as Anansi and his wife Aso decide to acquire the folktales that are owned by the Sun God. A high price is set to pay for the stories. A living fairy, forty-seven singing hornets and a python are to be captured and brought to the Sun God for the purchase. The dexterous Aso invents such strategies as tying snake to a log, creating a sticky-gum fairy and collecting bees in a gourd. Anansi follows the advice of his wife and is granted possession of the stories. The illustrator, Lisa Desimini, uses woven patterns on the clothing of the spiders, which expresses the artistic ability of the Ashanti tribe.

This folklore unfolds as Anansi, the West African trickster spider, discovers a moss-covered rock with magical powers. The spider makes a decision to utilize the rock to gain food from Lion, Elephant, Giraffe, Zebra and Bush-Deer. His cunning wit pays off with everyone but Bush Deer, who is not easily mislead. Anansi determines the trick is on him, and the animals manage to secure their seized provisions of food. This story is coupled with the Ashanti tribe of weavers and storytellers.


This is a tale of Anansi, the trickster spider, who takes pleasure in eating fish but is apathetic when it comes to working for food. Anansi attempts to hoax Turtle into catching a fish for his dinner. However, Turtle manages to twist the trick and Anansi is the one who is deceived into weaving a fish net and trapping the dinner. This legend is a variation of Joyce Cooper Arkhurst’s *The Adventures of Spider*. 
This tale weaves Anansi the spider into the belly of a melon. Anansi is trapped inside the ripe melon when he eats too much. He soon becomes bored and resolves to trick Elephant into believing the melon talks. Elephant trusts Anansi’s ploy and presents the talking melon to Hippo and Warthog. They all agree to display it to the King. When the King speaks to the melon, there is no answer. Consequently, the King bellows that the melon is ‘stupid’. Anansi makes a speech that angers the King and as a result the melon is tossed into the thorn bush. When the melon breaks, Anansi is ultimately free to move on from the “talking melon” to the “talking” bananas.

The magic in this Anansi tale is common to most African folk tales. Anansi is a lazy spider that keeps a cluttered house and a muddled front yard. Lion, Zebra and Warthog are laboring animals that express amusement at Anansi and his laziness. But Hyena is like Anansi, very lazy, but his house and yard is picture perfect. Well, it happens that Hyena owns a magic stick that does all the work for him. Anansi discovers Hyena’s secret and sets out to seize the magic stick. The cunning spider succeeds in capturing the magic stick and the dilemmas that precede.

The Bengal tiger, the West Indian and African spider and the American and African goat join together to generate the tale of *Magic Anansi*. These three conventional characters share the same house. “Him” the tiger frightens Anansi and the goats, and they abandon the cottage, leaving “Him” tiger as the solo occupant. As they attempt to escape and cross the river, Anansi employs his magic and web-spinning talent to rescue the goats and salvage his own life. Virginia Hamilton is America’s most Honored Writer of Books for Children.


Kwaku Anansi, the folk-hero of the Ashanti people, has six sons in this troublesome adventure of *Anansi the Spider*, a 1973 Caldecott Honor Book. Anansi’s sons, See Trouble, Road Builder, River Drinker Same Skinner, Stone Thrower and Cushion manage to organize Anansi’s escape from the inside of a fish. In return, Anansi endeavors to reward one of the sons’s with a beautiful globe of light. He questions Nyame, the God of all Things, and asks which son should receive the globe. The reply Nyame offered is in the sky today.
This folklore reveals Ananse’s greedy side of his character. Anansi is preparing food for himself when his hungry friend Akye the Turtle attempts to join him for dinner. Anansi tricks Turtle out of eating any of his food. In return, Akye plays an equivalent trick on Anansi. Mollel uses “East African expressions in this West African tale”.

Anansi’s favorite motive for tricking others is his appetite for food. The Tiger in this tale is cooking a delicious blend of fruit and nutmeg soup. Anansi manages to convince the Tiger to swim in the Blue Hole while the spider helps himself to all of the soup. Anansi blames the monkeys for the empty pot of soup, and in terror they jump high to the treetops. An ending that explains why monkeys “swing in treetops” even today.
Anansi is a defenseless and hungry spider searching for food. In this narrative he eavesdrops while a wicked Queen is casting spell on the number “5”. Anansi resolves to use this hex and produce his next lunch. He has success when he tricks Rabbit and Duck, but Pig was a little more complex. And it was Anansi who became the vulnerable animal.

Setting Analysis:

The Anansi legends discussed compromise the countries of Africa, flavored with Caribbean and Jamaica zest. Along the Western African coast of Ghana (the “gold coast”), the Ashanti people are identified with the Anansi folklore. This coast harbors such animals as hippos, lions, cheetahs, crocodiles, bushbacks, baboons, and birds. The land, which has been deforested, surrounds savannas, swamps, tropical rain forests and mountains. The Moss-Covered Rock was originally a West African tale, but is memorable in the Caribbean culture. The setting is deep in a forest, but Caribbean palm trees and coconuts are seen throughout the story. Another Caribbean flavored tale is Anansi Goes Fishing and Anansi and the Talking Melon. When Anansi goes fishing, the setting is in the forest but the dress of the animals reflects Caribbean. Anansi and the Magic Stick depicts Africa as barren of trees. Magic Anansi surroundings take place in a dusty and dry Africa with an East Indies Bengal tiger resting in a tree. Anansi the Spider acquires the rainforest of Ghana in West Africa. Ananse’s Feast describes the setting in Ghana as hot, treeless and without rainfall. Survival is the synopsis of Anansi’s Last Trick, which is set in Africa with Anansi in the hungry mode. Tiger Soup is an Anansi Tale from Jamaica, set on an island with coconut trees, mangos and nutmeg.
Plot Analysis:

Anansi is well known as a crafty trickster who is small in size, and uses his cleverness to trick other large animals for his staying power. *Anansi the Spider*, *Anansi does the Impossible*, *Anansi and the Talking Melon*, *Tiger Soup*, *Anansi and the Magic Stick*, and *Magic Anansi*, each end with Anansi performing a trick and securing a message at the end of each story. For example, in *Tiger Soup*, Anansi eats all of the soup, frightens the monkeys, who jump to the top of the trees, “where they have been living safe ever since.” However, *Ananse’s Feast* finds Anansi “shivering on a bank, with his empty stomach wailing”. *Anansi Goes Fishing* leaves Anansi in disgrace but explaining how spiders learned to spin their webs. *Anansi and the Moss-Covered Rock* leaves Anansi empty-handed, but still up to his old tricks. And *Anansi’s Last Trick* proves to the readers that even Anansi is not immortal.

Cultural Integration:

The Ashanti people from Ghana in West Africa are rich in culture and tradition. They are recognized for their exquisite metal work and creative fabric weaving. The character of Anansi is a traditional folklore to the Ashanti culture. It is interesting to note the Ashanti people are hard working and the Anansi character is extremely lazy. *Anansi the Spider*, *Anansi does the Impossible* and *Ananse’s Feast* are traditional Ashanti tales. The Ashanti people are part of an ethnic group that forms the Akan community. The illustrations of these three books express the signs of their skillful talent.

*Tiger Soup* expresses the Jamaican culture with the fresh mango, and nutmeg. The musical expressions used throughout the story are typical of the “seed-bed” of civilization. Anansi and the monkeys dance while “beating sticks, shaking shells and making song.” Coconuts are grown in Jamaica as well as West Africa. The palm trees are indigenous of the Jamaican country while Africa is know for its oil and date palms.

*Magic Anansi* ties together the customs of Africa and India. A Indian tiger, African spider and goat express the cultures of both countries. *Anansi’s Last Trick* uses the idea of a sweet potato to catch his food. The African culture uses sweet potato greens to cook with fish and seafood. *Anansi and the Moss-covered Rock* expresses the wetness of the tropical rainforest. The moisture produces moss that grows over ground and rock.

Summary:

The tricksters of Anansi can be used in a school curriculum to express the many elements of cultures around the world. Students enjoy Anansi’s cunning ways and the havoc he creates for himself and others. Anansi storytelling will capture your audience and keep them begging for more. Tricksters are an important element of folklore and the keeping of traditions. Both the students and I will benefit from this research as I share the culture and history of each country with students. I would choose to use a greater number of libraries in my next research on Anansi.