Anansi and the Pot of Wisdom

An African Trickster Tale

Long ago, at the beginning of the world, people could not solve their problems. Nyame, the sky god, looked down and felt sorry for humans. He said, “I will send wisdom to the people. Then, they can solve problems.

Anansi, the spider man, overheard Nyame’s plan. He said, “That is a good idea. Give the wisdom to me, and I will take it down to the people.”

Nyame trusted the selfish trickster. He put his wisdom in a big clay pot and gave it to Anansi. “This wisdom is more valuable than gold or silver,” he said. “Take this to the people so that they can solve their problems.”

Anansi took the pot down to the earth. Then, he looked inside. It was full of wonderful ideas and skills. “I will use this wisdom first,” he said to himself. “Then, I will give it to the people.”

Each day, Anansi opened the pot and learned new things. After many days, Anansi said greedily, “This wisdom is too valuable to share. I must keep it all to myself.” He decided to hide it in the top of a tall tree where no human could climb. But how could he carry such a heavy pot up the tree?

Anansi had an idea. He gathered some strong vines and tied them around the pot. Then, he tied the other end around his waist. He started to climb, but the dangling pot kept getting caught in the branches.

Anansi’s young son saw his father’s struggle. “Father,” the boy said, “if you tie the pot to your back, it will be much easier for you to hold on to the tree and climb.”

Anansi followed his son’s advice and tied the pot to his back. The rest of the climb was easier. When he got to the top, he looked down at his son and thought, What a fool I am! I have the pot of wisdom, yet a little boy had more common sense than I did. What use is all of this wisdom to me?

Anansi angrily threw the pot to the ground, where it smashed into millions of pieces. The wisdom scattered all over the world. People found bits of the wisdom and took them home to their families. That is why no one person has all of the wisdom in the world and why we share wisdom with each other when we exchange ideas.
Reading Comprehension

1. Number the following events in the order that they happened.
   ______ Anansi brought the pot of wisdom to the earth.
   ______ Nyame decided to give wisdom to human beings.
   ______ Anansi decided to keep the wisdom for himself.
   ______ Human beings collected the wisdom and began to share it.
   ______ Anansi threw the pot of wisdom to the earth.
   ______ Anansi’s son told his father to carry the pot on his back.

2. How is Anansi described in the story? ________________________________

3. Which of the following words best describes the story’s genre?
   A. myth                  B. novel
   C. history               D. epic

4. What is the main idea of the selection?
   A. Wisdom belongs only to sneaky people.
   B. Wisdom is a heavy burden to carry.
   C. No one person has all of the wisdom in the world.
   D. Parents should always follow their children’s advice.

5. For centuries, people around the world have told trickster tales to explain human behavior. These popular stories feature animals with human characteristics. Their intelligence often gets them into, and out of, problems. Popular trickster characters include Coyote, Hare, Raven, Spider, and Tortoise. Choose a character from this list. Then, on a separate piece of paper, write a trickster tale of your own.