



Why Mosquitoes Buzz

Ghana / Jamaica

So, everybody knows that Ananse and Mosquito used to be friends. They also used to be farmers. And as farmers often do, they would sometimes get together and discuss matters pertaining to the reaping and planting. One reaping season they decided to participate in the yam festival.

Brother Mosquito often boasted that he came from a long line of yam farmers and that his father was the best of the best. On this occasion his boasting was the best. Brother Mosquito told Kwaku Ananse that his father would have the biggest yam at the festival. As a matter of fact, he said he had seen, with his own eyes, the size of the yam his father had reaped for the occasion. Kwaku Ananse started to think about all the big things he knew. As big as an elephant. As big a house. And then he blurted out, “As big as what, Brother Mosquito?”

Brother Mosquito said, “Kwaku Ananse, you have never seen a yam as big as that. You cannot imagine a yam as big as that. It is as big as my foot”.

Kwaku Ananse felt his heart skip a beat with fright. He felt his eyes pop out of his head with disbelief. Then he steadied himself to say, “Big as your foot, Brother Mosquito?”

Mosquito repeated, a little louder, just in case Kwaku Ananse had not heard, “Yes, as big as my foot”.

Kwaku Ananse turned up his nose with scorn. “Brother Mosquito”, he said, “there is no end to your conceit. You are so conceited that it has rendered you foolish. Big as your foot?”

And with that Kwaku Ananse spun around faster than a wheel leaving Brother Mosquito and seeming to gather speed that he collided with Brother Yellow Snake who was coming up the path. This collision so frightened Brother Yellow Snake that it set off a chain reaction of panic and alarm among the animals. Brother Yellow Snake ran into the nearest hole he could find oblivious of the fact that it belonged to Rabbit. Rabbit was so alarmed at this unexpected visit that he ran out of the hole at double speed and crashed into Brother Monkey. In jumping out of the way, poor Monkey found himself up in a tree and could not seem to stop himself from jumping, this limb and that limb until he landed in a bird’s nest, monkey-toe distance away from a baby bird. As you might well imagine this caused the Mother Bird to fly into a rage. She confronted Brother Monkey and demanded an explanation for his action. Of course, Monkey blamed Brother Rabbit. Mother Bird refused to take his word for it and demanded that he should face the accused so that the truth could be revealed. And that set off a reverse chain reaction. When they found Brother Rabbit he blamed Brother Snake. So Bird, Monkey and Rabbit set out to find Yellow Snake who blamed Kwaku Ananse for frightening him in the first place. Brother Yellow Snake became a member of the search party hunting down Kwaku Ananse. Ananse declared that Brother Mosquito was the source of all the troubles and it all stemmed from his penchant for boasting which caused him concoct a tale about a yam as big as his foot.

A chain-gang of irate animals surrounded Brother Mosquito and peppered him with an unrelenting volley of questions to which the answers could only have been yes.

“Were you in fact having a conversation with Kwaku Ananse?”

“And was that conversation about reaping and planting?”

“And did you really say that your father had reaped a big yam?”

“Did you mean to imply that it was the biggest yam you had ever seen?”

“And could it possibly be true that you said that humungous yam was as big as your mosquito foot?”

Poor Mosquito. He kept on saying yes as fast as the questions were posed. There were so many questions and they kept coming for such a long time and Mosquito kept repeating yes that after a while it seemed as if all the yesses were joined together in one big holy yessssssssssssss, to become the only thing Mosquito could utter.

And ever since that day Brother Moquito cannot get past that to make another sound. Try as he might, the only sound he can make is yssssssssss. He can only blame Kwaku Ananse.

Jack Mandora, me no choose none. ☐

Adapted by Amina Blackwood Meeks (2019).

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Comments

Spider Ananse –or Kwaku Ananse, Nanzi, Ananansa, Annancy, Anansiil, B'anansi, Ayiyi- is one of the most ubiquitous and imperishable characters in the oral tradition of humanity. Born in West Africa and forced to travel to the Caribbean area by the European slave market, Anansi becomes something like a hero for cultures that tell their anecdotes and feats, sometimes representing him as a spider, sometimes as a human and even as a combination of both.

On this occasion, the Anansi story comes from Jamaica, in a wonderful adaptation by the storyteller and custodian of the Jamaican oral tradition, Amina Blackwood Meeks, who adds a note to her contribution to the Collection:

All Jamaican stories end with Jack Mandora, me no choose none.

Jack Mandora is the Keeper of the Gates of Heaven. He needs to be reassured that we understand the stories but we do not choose to emulate the anti-social ways which they might contain. (Me no choose none – I do not choose any of that.)

Many spellings exist in the diaspora for the name of this central figure of West African folklore. We choose to use the spelling from his homeland of Ghana, as an act of cultural reparation taking the cue from Anansesem meaning spider stories.

According to Amina, this version of Anansi and the Mosquito is influenced by the version documented by Louise Bennett Coverley, who is regarded as the Mother of the Jamaican Storytelling and a cultural icon on the Caribbean island.

Sources

Aardema, V. (1975). *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears*. New York: Dial Books.

Meeks, A. B. (2019). Ananse and Mosquito. Through private and personal email.

Associated text of the Earth Charter

Principle 6c: Ensure that decision making addresses the cumulative, long-term, indirect, long distance, and global consequences of human activities.

Other passages that this story illustrates

Principle 10d: Require multinational corporations and international financial organizations to act transparently in the public good, and hold them accountable for the consequences of their activities.

