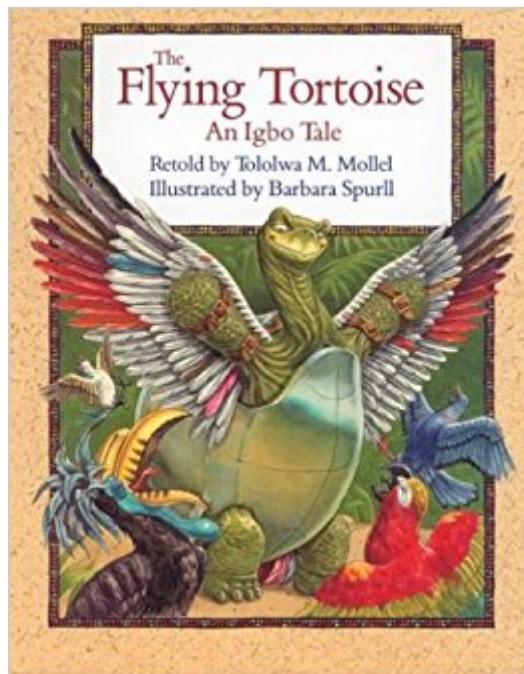


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The Flying Tortoise: An Igbo Tale



Synopsis

This humorous traditional tale from the Igbo people of Nigeria features the trickster tortoise, Mbeku, and shows how the tortoise got his rough, checkered shell as a result of Mbeku's greediness and cunning.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Long, long ago, Mbeku the tortoise had a magnificent shell. It was so smooth and clear and shiny, it even glowed in the dark." This affable Nigerian folktale explains how the tortoise lost the sheen of his shell through his chicanery and greed. Mbeku tricks the birds into bringing him to Skyland, where he cheats them out of a feast. Enraged, they tear off his rigged-up wings and he must jump down to earth-and the birds continue to foil Mbeku when they have the lizard Ngwele build a pile of hard things for Mbeku to land on. Ngwele later mends Mbeku's shattered carapace, but its splotchy surface causes an embarrassed Mbeku to hide in his shell, a habit he retains to this day. Although Mbeku is a fine example of how not to behave, he is lovable as the smirky protagonist. Spurll, last paired with Mollel in Rhinos for Lunch and Elephants for Supper!, watercolors with a jungle-bright palette. She loads her compositions with uncommonly expressive animal characters, seen from comic angles, and, for additional atmosphere, she frames her work in beadwork-like borders. Ages 4-8. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Grade 1-3-This Nigerian trickster tale stars a cunning and vain tortoise who gets his comeuppance. Mbeku convinces the jungle birds to let him accompany them on a visit to the Skylanders so he can steal all of their food. When the birds protest that he cannot fly, he devises an elaborate set of wings and joins them on their trip. When the birds realize they've been duped, they exact a revenge that ends Mbeku's vanity. His previously perfect, smooth shell is cracked and scratched in the process, and henceforth, all others of his ilk follow suit. However, as with any good trickster, it is clear that Mbeku will be back to wreak havoc. The watercolor cartoons exaggerate realistic details and are full of bold tropical colors. Spurll is particularly adept at depicting motion and facial expressions. The campy style is saved from excess by the humor the pictures exude. The text is set off from the illustrations in cream-colored boxes, which makes it easier to read, but crowds the layout. Mollel consistently chooses descriptive vocabulary for his retelling-there's never a mere "said" when a "gasped" or a "hissed" will do. The combination of a lively narrative and vibrant illustrations result in a vivacious read-aloud choice.

Cheri Estes, Dorchester Road Regional Library, Charleston,
SC
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This story is very good for people ages 6-8, or in the 1-3 grades. It is about a tortoise who loves to play tricks and eat. He hears of a feast in the sky, and wants to go, so he tells the birds that are going that he once had a friend there. The birds believe him, and give him feathers to make wings and fly with. Then Mbeku tells them that the people giving the feast love fancy names, so Mbeku chooses King Aaaaallll-Of-You. When they go up to the island in the sky, Mbeku coyly asks who the feast is for, and the hosts tell them that it is for "Aaaaallll of you!" So Mbeku eats the whole feast, leaving none for the birds. The birds furiously rip his wings off, and leave him there. But he cries, and promises never to play another trick. SO the birds go down and tell Mbeku's lizard friend, Ngwele, to make a pile of very soft things. Mbeku, up in the sky, laughs and exclaims about how he fooled the birds. Swallow, who was preening behind a bush, heard him and went down to tell his flock his plan. When Mbeku jumps to land in his pile, it is all bones and rocks, instead of grass and moss and stuff. So Mbeku's shell is ruined, and he asks Ngwele to sew it up. Ngwele agrees, and spends the whole rainy season patching it up. It looks old and dull now, instead of glowing and new, and Mbeku is embarrassed to be seen in it. When he finally goes outside, he pulls his head in his shell so he will not be noticed, a habit to this very day.

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