

# Anansi Tries to Steal All the Wisdom in the World

A Fable from the Ashanti People of Africa  
Adapted by Matt Evans

Anansi the spider knew that he was not wise. He was very clever, and could outwit many different people, but he knew that he did not have very much wisdom. This bothered him a great deal, but he did not know what to do about it. Then one day he had a clever thought. "I know," he said to no one in particular, "if I can get all of the wisdom in the village and put it in a hollow gourd, I will be very wise indeed. In fact, I would be the wisest of all!"

So he set out to find a suitable gourd and then began his journey to collect the village's wisdom. He went from door to door, asking everyone to give some of their wisdom. The people chuckled at poor Anansi, for they knew that of all the creatures, it was he that needed some wisdom the most. So each put a bit in his gourd and wished him well on his search.

Soon Anansi's gourd was overflowing with wisdom and he could hold no more. He now needed to find a place to store it. "I am certainly the wisest person in the world now, but if I don't find a good hiding place for my wisdom I may surely lose it." He looked around and spotted a tall, tall tree. "Ah," he said to himself, "if I could hide my wisdom high in that tree, I would never have to worry about someone stealing it from me!"

So Anansi set out to climb the towering tree. He first took a cloth band and tied it around his waist. Then he tied the heavy gourd to the front of his belly where it would be safe. As he began to climb, however, the gourd full of wisdom kept getting in the way. He tried and tried, but he could not make progress around it.

Soon Anansi's youngest son walked by. "What are you doing Father?" asked the little spider. "I am climbing this tree with my gourd full of wisdom," Anansi replied. "But Father," said the son, "wouldn't it be much easier if you tied the gourd behind you instead of in front?"

Anansi sat there quietly for a very long time before saying, "Shouldn't you be going home now?" The son skipped down the path and when he had disappeared, Anansi moved the gourd so that it was behind him and proceeded up the tree with no problems at all.

When he had reached the top, he cried out, "I walked all over and collected so much wisdom that I am the wisest person ever, but still my baby son is wiser than me. Take back your wisdom!" He lifted the gourd high over his head and spilled its contents into the wind. The wisdom blew far and wide and settled across the land.

And this is how wisdom came to the world.

*An illustrated version of this story can be found on the world wide web at  
<http://www.afroam.org/children/myths/myths.html>*