



## African Storybook Guides

### **Developing, translating and adapting African Storybooks**

There are different ways of making storybooks for the African Storybook website. You can translate or adapt a storybook, and publish a new version of that storybook. You can develop and create your own storybooks.

We share some ideas that have helped us to develop storybooks, as well as what we have learned about translation and adaptation.

See also the other guides in this series:  
*Preparing to use African Storybooks with children*  
*Using African Storybooks with children*

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19 Ameshoff Street  
Braamfontein  
Johannesburg

[www.saide.org.za](http://www.saide.org.za)  
[www.africanstorybook.org](http://www.africanstorybook.org)

## Developing stories

There are many ways of developing a story for early reading. Below we share with you some of the ways in which we have developed stories. You can develop a story on your own, in pairs, or in a group of three or more people. It's always a good idea to share your story by reading it aloud to someone else at least once (as well as out loud to yourself).

Remember to develop the story in the language with which you are most familiar, the language in which you think and feel! You can translate it later if you want to.

When you develop a story you have to think about who you are writing your story for. On the African Storybook website, our target audience is early childhood and lower primary school children. Your storybook should interest young children, and either be one that can be read aloud to young children, or a storybook that young readers could read on their own.

The pictures are a very important part of any storybook. As you develop your story, think of how the characters, the activities and the emotions in your story could be shown in pictures.

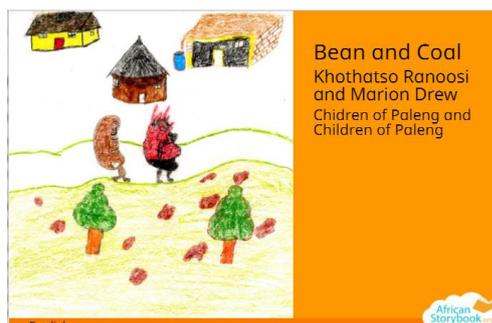
### Activity 1: What kinds of stories do children enjoy?

Before you develop a story, it's a good idea to read some storybooks, and ask yourself what makes a good story for children. Think about these questions:

- What are the ages and interests of the children?
- Must a story have a moral or lesson?
- Do we want to teach particular values in the stories we write for children?
- Does a story have to have a beginning, middle and an end?
- What is the role of illustrations in a story for children?

In ***Preparing to use African Storybooks with children*** (*African Storybook Guides*, available at [www.africanstorybook.org](http://www.africanstorybook.org)) there are a number of activities and resources to support you in exploring these questions. In particular see 'Activity 1: Choosing storybooks for children', 'Resource 1: What children need when learning to read', and 'Activity 2: A 'good' storybook for children'.

It is also important to find out from children what stories they enjoy! For example, we discovered that a favourite story with children was [Mr Fly and Mr Bighead](#), written in Lugbarati for Ugandan children in Arua. When children at Paleng library in the mountains of Lesotho were asked to tell their favourite story, they told the story of [Bean and Coal](#). The concept of laughing so much that you split in two seems to be popular with children!



### Activity 2: Different ways of developing stories

The next few activities will help you to think about different ways in which you can develop stories. Different people find different ways of developing stories easier than others. Choose one that you think will work, or try them all at different times.

#### Idea 1: Drama and role-play

Drama and role play are useful, because they encourage you to imagine the characters in the story properly. Also it is often easier to work from a story that is oral, and then put it in writing.

Try the following:

1. With a partner choose two imaginary characters (for example, grandmother and a sad child; or a farmer and a crow; or a snake and a frog). Decide on a problem the characters have (for example, the child is afraid of an older child in the village; or the farmer catches the crow eating his maize; or the snake and a frog are friends, but have an argument about something).
2. Have a conversation with your partner about the characters and their problem. Pretend you are the characters and use your imaginations. What do they say and do? Write it down, and soon you will have a story.

#### Idea 2: Developing stories from your childhood experiences

In a workshop with adults on the importance of seeing that children are safe, the facilitator asked the parents to tell a story about when they themselves felt unsafe as children.

Here were some of the stories.

**A:** I was very little. My uncle was roasting peanuts on the fire. He left the pan on the fire and went into the house. I decided to roast my leg and put it on the pan. It was like putting meat in oil. I ran into the house and hid in a big basket. When my mom came home, she beat my uncle.

**B:** I was 8 years old. We went swimming in a nearby lake, where the water was not deep. But suddenly I found myself in deep waters. I could not swim. The water is muddy and your feet get stuck in the mud. Every time I came up I waved my hands, hoping that someone would see me. One person did try to rescue me, but then he also got stuck and had to go back. But he tried again and this time he rescued me.

**C:** I was 5 years old. Every Saturday my parents went overnight to pray. I was the youngest. We lived in a mud hut. One Saturday night it rained very hard and the roof collapsed. Then the wall collapsed on top of me. My brothers and sisters ran away. When they had gone far, they realized that I was not with them. They ran back to free me. I spent two weeks in hospital.

Any one of these could be developed into a full story for children.

#### Idea 3: Developing stories from pictures

Find a set of pictures from a magazine, or from a wordless picture book on the African Storybook website, or a set of photographs. The pictures do not need to be used in any particular order. Write words or sentences related to each of the pictures, to make up a story.

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For example, what event do these photographs suggest?

What is the story behind these pictures of making and performing music?



Is there a story about modes of transport in these photographs?



Could all four of these photographs be used together to create a story?

And look at these two illustrations, from the African Storybook website. Can you imagine a story about either of these characters?

Why is the woman singing (or laughing) while she farms?

Why do animals love this young girl?

What are the possible stories about them?



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### Idea 4: Developing stories that relate to most primary school curricula

You could write stories that can be formally linked to teaching reading as described in the school curricula. The following were the themes that were used to develop storybooks for the School Readiness Programme (SRP) in Tanzania:

**My Life** – name, gender, identity, greetings, express feelings, follow simple instructions, rights and responsibilities.

**My Health** – take care of oneself and belongings, good hygiene, avoiding danger, fine and gross motor skills, crossing roads safely.

**Our Family** – cooperative relationships, family members, culture, good character

**Our Environment** – names, cleanliness, immediate to wider environments, home to school and services in the community.

**Our Games** – communication, good character, cooperation and safety, drawing, simple patterns, counting, innovation, risk-taking, enquiry and self-confidence.

**Our School** – names, exploration inside and outside, games, arts, reading, writing and numeracy, encourage enthusiasm for starting school.

### Idea 5: Gathering stories from elders in the community

Arrange to spend time with someone in your community who is known for telling stories.

Ask them to tell you a story. Take notes while they tell you the story. If possible, use your cell phone to record the person telling the story.

Spend more time listening to and writing down the story.



### Idea 6: Connected and unconnected words

Think of any five words, especially nouns (you can use more words). The words could be related to vocabulary you want to teach, or just any interesting words. The list of words in this activity is only an example, from five languages:

elephant	tlou	indlovu	ndovu	enjofu
river	motswedi	imfula	mto	olwabi
pot	pitsa	lbiza	chungu	esongo
vegetables	dienywa	imifino	mboga	elyani
stone	letlapa	itshe	jiwe	ebaale

Then, next to each word write one or two new words. The words could be connected or related to each other in meaning, but choosing completely unrelated words makes it more interesting. For example, next to elephant you could put ice cream, and candle.

Now develop a story idea from your set of words.

### Activity 3: Writing your first story draft

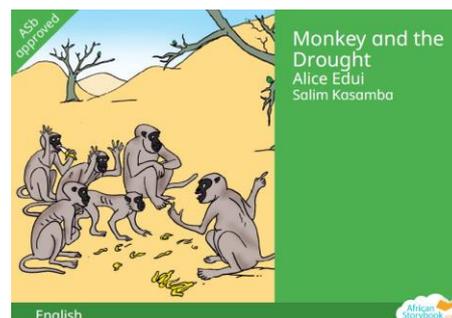
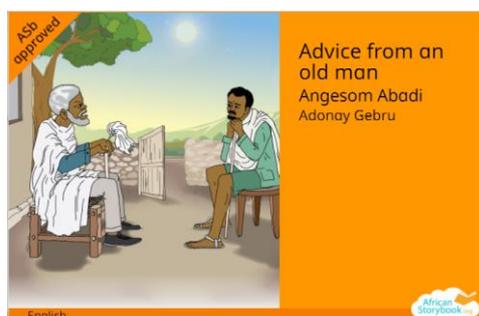
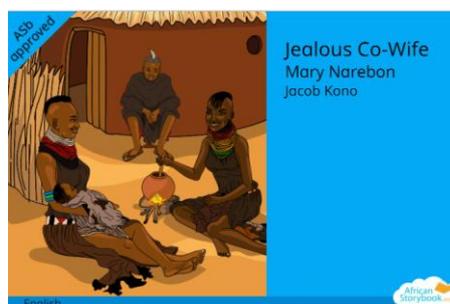
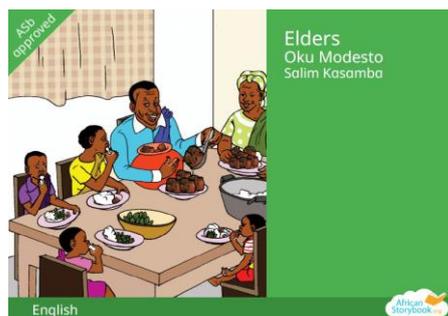
After trying one or more of the ideas for generating stories described in Activity 2, prepare a first draft of your story. You can write out the whole story if you are ready, or start with a list of points. Whenever you develop a story there are some important things to think about. You should be able to answer these questions:

1. What **theme** do I want for my story?
2. Who are **the characters** I want in my story?
3. **What happens** in my story?
4. **Where** does it happen?
5. **Why** does it happen?
6. **How** does the story begin, progress and end?

There are some **common themes** that are used in many stories (for children and adults). These themes reflect ideas and issues that are important to human beings, and which make our lives challenging and rewarding. Here are some popular story themes:

- Goodness versus Badness
- Greed versus Generosity
- Responsibilities and Rights
- Kindness versus Cruelty
- Famine versus Plenty
- Power versus Powerlessness
- Imaginary / Magical and Real
- Wisdom versus Ignorance
- Bravery versus Cowardice

Look at the covers of these storybooks and see if you can identify their themes. Find the storybooks on the website to check your predictions!



## From a story to a storybook

The journey from a manuscript to storybook takes time, and it always benefits from feedback along the way.

After you have written down the first draft of your story and received feedback from at least one other person, you need to break your manuscript into pages. The total number of pages in your storybook should be divisible by four, for example, **8, 12, or 16 pages**. This is because multiples of four work best for printing a storybook. It is also a good idea to break your story into pages based on an idea for a picture to accompany the text on each page.

You then have to check the words and sentences on each page to see that they are at the correct level for the children for whom they are intended. When a child reads alone, the book needs to be at a **level of reading** that is appropriate for the child. If a child can read two languages, she may be at different reading levels for each one.

On the African Storybook website there are five levels of storybooks. Each level has a character and word limit, and the website limits you from going beyond the character and word limit for that level. The size of the letters is largest for Level 1 and Level 2, and smaller for the higher levels. The website sets the size of the letters (the font) when you select the level for your story.

### Reading levels on the African Storybook website

#### **Level 1 - First words**

Single words or a short simple sentence; up to 11 words per page.

#### **Level 2 - First sentences**

Two or three short sentences; 11–25 words per page.

#### **Level 3 - First paragraphs**

One or two short paragraphs; 26–51 words per page.

#### **Level 4 - Longer paragraphs**

Two or more paragraphs; 51–75 words per page.

#### **Level 5 - Read aloud**

Fewer pictures; more than 75 words per page.

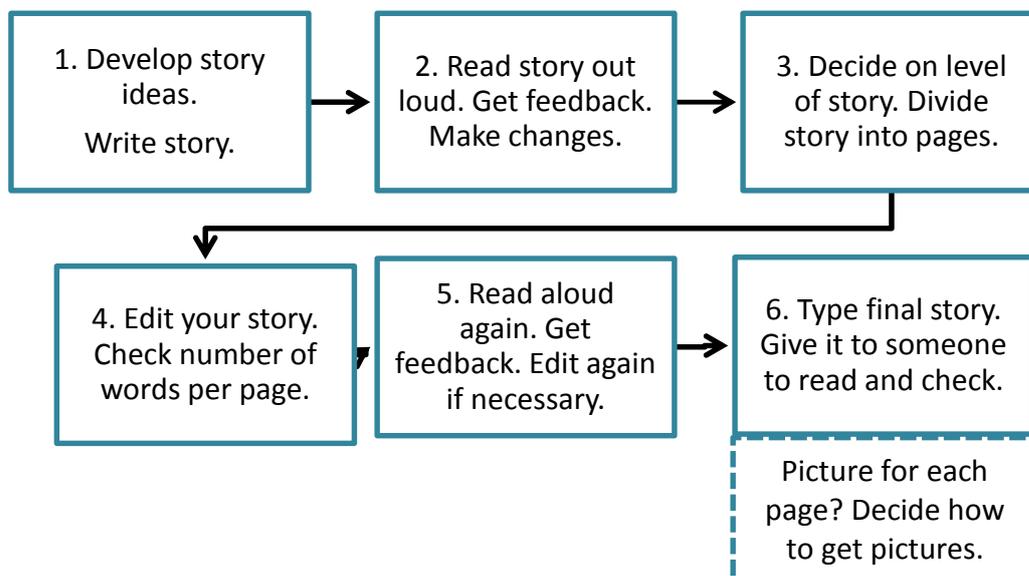
*These levels are not linked to specific grades in school.*

*It really depends on the child's reading ability in the language of the storybook.*

*Higher levels can also be used with young children as read aloud storybooks.*

### Process for writing a story

...and getting the story ready to become a storybook



### Activity 4: Getting feedback and finalising your story

This activity shows one approach to reflecting on your story and finding ways of making sure it meets the needs of children learning to read.

1. Read your story aloud to someone and ask them for feedback:
  - Are there interesting characters and setting?
  - Are there interesting themes or ideas, challenges or surprises for children to enjoy and think about?
  - Is there a good use of vocabulary for the reading level of children?
  - Is there creative use of language (for example, repeated sounds, rhythm, poetic elements)?
  - Is there any part of the story that seems unnecessary?
  - Is the story well enough told over the planned number of pages? Is there approximately the same amount of text on each page?
2. Use the feedback to edit the story. Type the final edited story. Have you got:
  - Title of the storybook?
  - Names of writers, and translators?
  - Language name of the story?
  - Number of pages and the level of the storybook (words per page)?
3. Write notes about the illustrations that you want for each page. Decide how to illustrate your story.

**MAKE (CREATE)** your storybook on the African Storybook website, using the website publishing tools. This involves putting the typed text on the storybook pages, and uploading your illustrations. You can find out more about the processes of creating storybooks by reading and following the HELP notes on the African Storybook website.

### Activity 5: Ways of illustrating your storybook

Most of the storybooks on the African Storybook website have an illustration for each page. Sometimes we commission an artist to draw illustrations specially for a particular storybook. Some storybook creators draw their own pictures (or take photographs) and upload them to the website to use in a storybook. Others use illustrations from the **African Storybook picture database** of over 8,000 illustrations; others again source openly licensed illustrations from the internet.

1. If you would like to use pictures from the African Storybook database, have a look at some examples of successful use of website illustrations. These storybooks were created independently by users of the website. They selected pictures from the online database that best matched their stories.



2. Please remember that some pictures you can find on the internet may be free, but others you will have to pay for if you want to use them. A good place to start your search for free images is <https://search.creativecommons.org/>. You need to make sure that the pictures you use are also open license (that is, they may be shared and used without payment, but you must acknowledge the artist or photographer on the storybook).

Illustrations that have **Shutterstock** written across them like the one below are NOT openly licensed or free, even though the website says you can create a free account.



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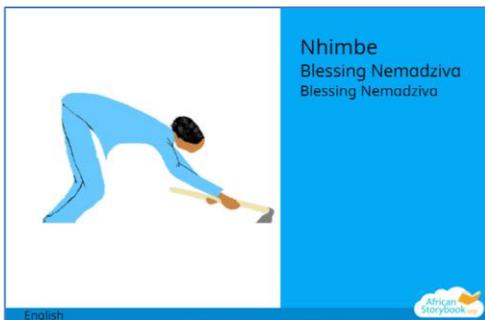
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- For any illustrations that you want to use in creating your storybook on the African Storybook website, please make sure that:
  - The picture or photograph is **square**.
  - The file is a **PNG** file. (The stands for **P**ortable **N**etwork **G**raphics, and it simply means that the file is suitable for use on a website.)
  - Each PNG file is between 72 dpi and 300 dpi. (This stands for **d**ots **p**er **i**nch, and it refers to the number of dots that make up a picture. Pictures that are 300 dpi will look smoother and better than pictures with less dots per inch.)

For inspiration, take a look at the storybooks created and published by Blessing Nemadziva.



For his first storybook, he paid an illustrator to do the drawings for him.  
See: [Sekuru Mkuku](#)



For his second storybook, he created his own pictures using a computer programme.  
See: [Nhimbe](#)



For his third storybook, he used a combination of pictures from the internet, and pictures he himself had created.  
See: [Holiday experience](#)

Here are some more examples of storybooks created by users of the website.

- With pictures from the website picture database:  
[What shall I use to travel?](#), [Imagine](#), [Things I do at school](#), [Dangerous objects](#), [What are you doing?](#), [Mrs Rubandama the tailor](#).
- With photographs or drawings, including pictures drawn by children:  
[Thoko's fantapine seed](#), [Things I know](#), [Sun, moon, rain and wind](#), [Sofia escapes](#), [Neymar's visit to Africa](#), [Mape the dancing ape](#), [Swimming](#).

## Translating and adapting storybooks

Because African Storybooks have an open license, anyone can translate or adapt the storybooks without having to ask for permission or pay a fee.

On the website, you can **ADAPT** storybooks to change the story to a higher or lower reading level – to suit the level of the readers; or to suit the context and culture of a community. You can **TRANSLATE** storybooks so that children have them in a language that is familiar to them.



This story, called [Magozwe](#), was created in Kenya. It has been translated into: Afrikaans, Arabic, Asante Twi, ChiTonga, CiNyanja, Dagaare, Dagbani/Dagbanli, Dangme, Ewe, Fante, French, Ga, Gonja, IciBemba, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Kasem, Kiswahili, Mampruli, Nsema, Portuguese, Sepedi, Sesotho (SA), Setswana, Silozi, Siswati and Tshivenda, Xitsonga.

You can find out more about the processes of adapting and translating storybooks by reading and following the HELP notes on the African Storybook website.

### Activity 6: Translating a storybook

1. Choose a storybook to translate into a language of your choice.
2. Decide whether or not you are going to translate from English (or French or Portuguese), or from another African language. The discussion in *Resource 2: Translate from English or from another African language?* might help you to decide.
3. Use the TRANSLATE tool on the website to create and publish a new translation of your chosen storybook. Also see *Resource 1: Process for translation*.
4. While you are translating, write down some of the challenges that you experience in the translation process:
  - What was easy about translating?
  - What was most difficult about translating?
  - What do you think was lost in the translation?
  - What do you think you gained from doing a translation?
  - Did the level of the story change when you did the translation? If so, why do you think that happened?

Talk about these challenges with another translator, and share ideas for how to deal with any difficulties.

### Resource 1: Process for translation

One of the most important lessons we have learned from our experience of translation for the African Storybook is that direct, literal translations don't work well. It's best to try to re-tell the story in the target language, using the pictures, and not only the words.

It is also advisable to do translation with others - in pairs or in a group – as happens with the Lunyole Language Association in Eastern Uganda. This is their process:

1. In an initial meeting there is agreement on the approach to aspects of the language such as spelling system, vocabulary and level, punctuation, and grammar issues.
2. Each person is then allocated a story or stories to translate at home. Each translator writes her or his translation in full.
3. The translators meet and read their translations to each other, and come to an agreement about tricky issues including, linguistic, cultural, suitability for children and community.
4. The translation is then finalised and typed.
5. Translators swap final translation to ensure it is correct in terms of grammar, punctuation, spellings, special characters and diacritics, etc. Any further corrections made if necessary.

### Resource 2: Translate from English or from another African language?

The African Storybook website makes it possible to translate from any language into any other language: the translation does not have to be from English into an African language. As is discussed below, our experience is that it is preferable to translation from one (related) African language to another.

Lorato Trok, who did most of the **Setswana translations** on the African Storybook website, reflected on her recent experience of translating from Sesotho into Setswana. She found the process to be more interesting, less time consuming and easier than when English is the source language. However, care has to be taken. Sesotho, Sepedi and Setswana are part of the same Sotho group of languages and some words are related and mean the same things, but some words have very different meanings. For example, in Sesotho, 'Ke lapile' means 'I'm hungry' but in Sepedi and Setswana it means 'I'm tired'. In isiXhosa and isiZulu, both Nguni languages, 'Lambile' means hungry, just as it does in Sesotho.

Tseliso Masolane, responsible for many of the **translations into Sesotho** on the African storybook website, reported that translating from Setswana to Sesotho saved him time as he only had to translate parts where words and sentences were different and he did not have to struggle as much to find the right word in Sesotho as he would have with only the English text available to him. The text in Setswana gave him direction about what words to use in Sesotho and how to paraphrase sentences in instances where meanings were opposites.

Xolisa Guzula, a PhD student in language, literacy and bilingual education at the University of Cape Town, translated 21 African Storybooks from **isiZulu to isiXhosa**. Xolisa said that this form of translation was like re-telling the story for the target group and it did not feel like

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she was translating. Xolisa explains that isiXhosa translation is riddled with complexities. 'There are issues of literal translation and of imposing English onto isiXhosa in ways that just do not make sense in the language. Translation is a constant negotiation between the source language and the target language,' she says.

In Zambia, African Storybook worked with CAPOLSA, a language unit attached to the Department of Psychology at the University of Zambia. CAPOLSA's first two editions of Early Grade Readers (published in **iciBemba, Silozi, Chinyanja** and **Chitonga** in 2013, and in **Kikaonde, Lunda** and **Luvale** in 2015) included stories composed in one of those languages and translated into another, building on the well-documented fact that all of these languages have closely similar grammar and sounds, as well as some common vocabulary. phonology as well as some lexical commonalities (belonging to a single language group).

### Activity 7: Adapting a storybook

1. Have a look at *Resource 3: Reasons for adapting a storybook*.

Is there a storybook in the African Storybook collection that you enjoy, but is not quite right for your children? Do you need to make it simpler? Do you need to change the names and places so that your children can relate to the story more easily?

2. Use the ADAPT tool on the website. Make the necessary changes to the storybook and publish a new version.
3. While you are making these changes, write down some of the challenges that you experience. These questions may guide you:
  - What happened to the language when you adapted the storybook to a lower level?
  - Do you think it would be easier to adapt a storybook from Level 1 to Level 4? Why?
  - What do you think was lost in the adaptation?
  - What do you think you gained from doing an adaptation?

Talk about these challenges with someone else who has tried this process, and share ideas for how to deal with any difficulties.

### Resource 3: Reasons for adapting storybooks

These are the reasons that website users and African Storybook staff commonly have for adapting storybooks:

- Change the story to a higher or lower reading level to suit the level of the readers. For example, changing a story from Level 4 to Level 1 by cutting the number of words per page, and simplifying words and sentences.
- Aspects of the story to suit the context and culture of a community. For example, changing the names of characters and of places.
- The ending of a story to a preferred ending.
- To change or add illustrations.

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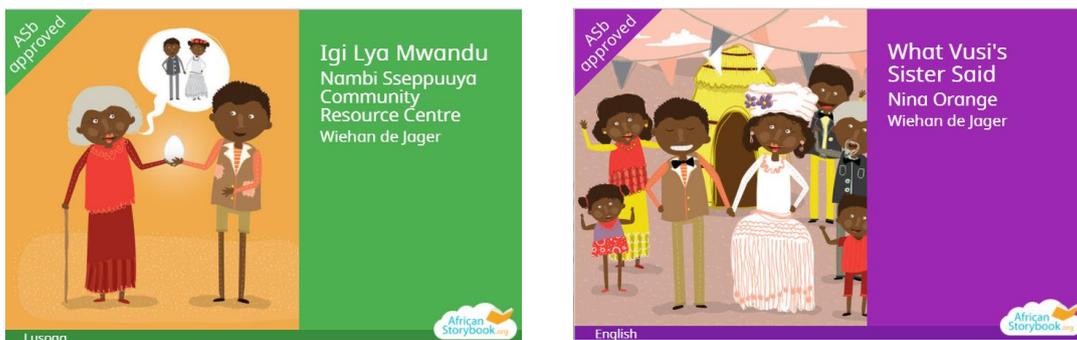
- To re-use the illustrations of a good storybook on the site to create a different storybook.

### Changing for context

Sometimes all that is changed in order to make a story suitable for a different context are the names of the characters. For example, South Africans who adapted the Kenyan story, [Khalai talks to plants](#), changed the title of the adapted story to [Palesa loves plants](#). They decided to choose a local name for the girl that matched the theme of the story.



But often adaptations for context extend to much more than the names of the characters. For example, look at these two versions of the same story. The original, [An egg for bridewealth](#), is from Uganda, and culminates in a famous Lusoga proverb, 'What goes around, comes around'. But the proverb might not be familiar to children who grow up elsewhere. The storybook [What Vusi's sister said](#) uses the same pictures as [An egg for bridewealth](#) and a very similar idea, but it isn't based on 'what goes around, comes around'. The storybook creator also wanted to introduce the character of a sister, and to give a surprise happy ending.



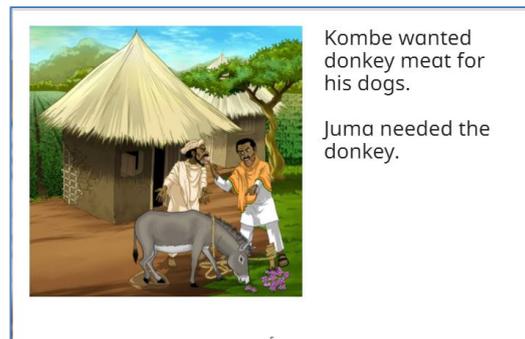
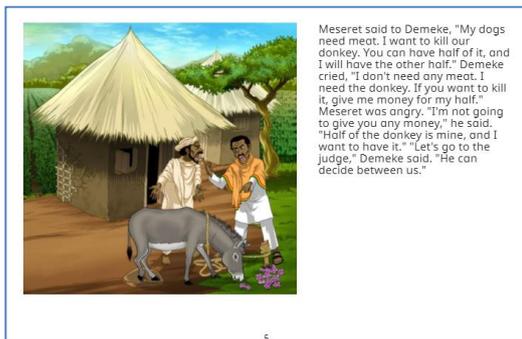
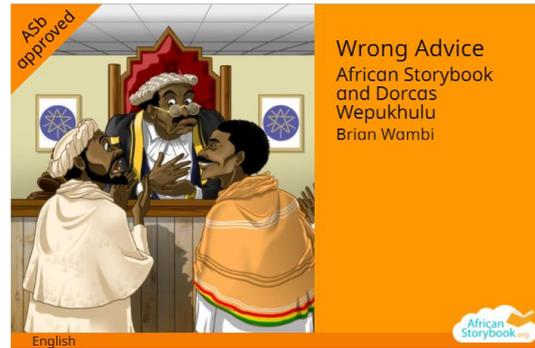
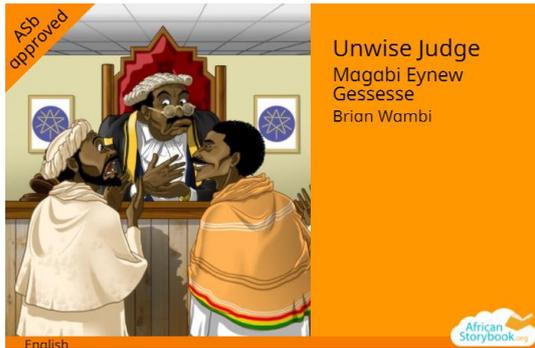
A story about a young man who was given an egg by his grandmother. The young man is not very good at looking after the egg, but fortunately has good luck.

Vusi's granny gives him an egg to take to his parents. It is an important ingredient in his sister's wedding cake. But on the journey something happens to the egg.

### Adapting in order to change the reading level

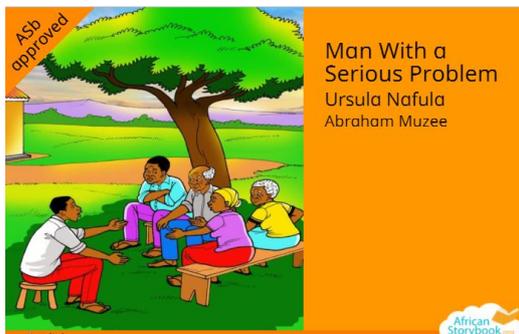
Most of the adaptations on our website are changes of level. For example, look at these two versions of the same story. [Unwise Judge](#) is at Level 5. [Wrong Advice](#) is at Level 1. Look at the difference in the language of the same page in the two versions.

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### Re-using pictures of one storybook to create completely different storybook

There are many examples of this adaptation technique. Here is one:



***Man with a serious problem:*** A man is generous enough to offer accommodation to his aging grandparents, aunt and uncle. Find out how life changes as time goes by.

***Teret:*** This is a story about a poor shepherd who cannot afford to feed and house his animals properly. It is only when he has sold them, that he realises how much he values them.

## Acknowledgements

Authors: Sheila Drew, Tessa Welch and the African Storybook team

With thanks to our education partners, who enthusiastically embraced African Storybook and gave of their time to design and carry out these activities.



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