

The Ridiculous Riddles of African Folklore: Talking Animals, Tricky Tortoises, and Clever Hares

By Melkisedeck Leon Shine · July 3, 2023

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? October 18, 1899 ?

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In the heart of Africa, where the sun blesses the land with its golden rays, a rich tapestry of folklore has woven itself throughout the ages. This vibrant tapestry is filled with tales that not only entertain but also impart valuable lessons to those who listen. Amongst these captivating stories are the ridiculous riddles that have delighted generations, showcasing the wit and wisdom of African folklore's most beloved characters: the talking animals, tricky tortoises, and clever hares.

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Let us embark on a remarkable journey back to the 18th century, to a time when Africa's oral tradition thrived and the laughter of its people echoed through the savannahs and jungles.

Picture this: It is the year 1789, and the Kingdom of Benin is at its zenith. The great Oba Ewuare II reigns over his people, his kingdom basking in prosperity and cultural richness. It is in this vibrant setting that one particular riddle captures the imagination of all who hear it.

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? January 24, 1789 ?

One day, as dusk settles over the kingdom, a young boy named Kofi ventures into the forest, guided by curiosity. Suddenly, he stumbles upon a massive elephant, its majestic presence commanding respect. The boy's heart races with excitement as he recalls a riddle from his village elder.

"Tell me," Kofi begins, "what creature has four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three legs in the evening?"

The elephant, amused by the riddle, considers the question carefully. ? Its eyes sparkle with mischief as it responds, "Ah, young Kofi, the answer lies in the stages of a human's life. Four legs in the morning represent a crawling infant, two legs at noon signify a full-grown adult, and three legs in the evening symbolize old age, when a person relies on a cane for support."

Astounded by the elephant's wisdom, Kofi returns to the village, eager to share the riddle's answer and the elephant's profound insight with his community.

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? April 5, 1842 ?

Fast forward to the mid-19th century, a time when Africa's diverse cultures were experiencing colonial incursions. In the midst of this tumultuous period, a clever hare named Jabu emerges as a symbol of resistance and cunning.

Gathered in the village square, a group of weary villagers eagerly awaits the arrival of Jabu. This legendary hare, known for outsmarting even the most formidable foes, has been tasked with a riddle that may hold the key to their freedom.

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"Dear Jabu," a villager implores, "tell us, what is a lock that can be opened by only one key?"

With a mischievous glint in his eyes, Jabu ponders for a moment. Then, with a confident smile, he exclaims, "Why, my friends, the answer lies in your hearts! Love is the lock, and kindness is the key. For with love and kindness, any heart can open and be opened."

The village erupts in applause, their spirits lifted by Jabu's wise words and unwavering optimism. Inspired, they stand united, ready to face the challenges that lay ahead.

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? Present day ?

Today, these ridiculous riddles continue to captivate audiences around the world, transcending time and borders. They remind us of the rich heritage of African folklore and the enduring wisdom contained within.

So, the next time you find yourself pondering a seemingly impossible question or craving a touch of whimsy, remember the talking animals, tricky tortoises, and clever hares that have graced Africa's folklore throughout history. Their riddles may be ridiculous, but their messages of wisdom and unity shine brightly, even in the face of adversity. ???