

THE MOUSE-DEER AND THE CROCODILE

A play for shared reading or readers' theatre
based on a folk tale of Java (Indonesia).

Edel Wignell

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Ack. from Edel Wignell, *The White Elephant: Drama Based on Asian Folk Tales* (2009, Teaching Solutions, Melbourne).

Cast

STORYTELLER 1 STORYTELLER 2
STORYTELLER 3 STORYTELLER 4
MOUSE-DEER CROCODILE
CROCODILE FRIENDS (any number)

The whole class may be involved, either in storyteller choruses or in several shared reading groups.

STORYTELLER 1:	A mouse-deer and a crocodile lived in the jungle.
STORYTELLER 2:	The mouse-deer was looking for a new home. All day, he searched and searched.
MOUSE-DEER:	(sighing) I'm so tired and thirsty.
STORYTELLER 3:	The mouse-deer drank at the river, then carelessly splashed the water with his front feet.
STORYTELLER 4:	Silently, a large crocodile drifted up.
STORYTELLER 1:	It lunged forward and grabbed one of the mouse-deer's feet.
CROCODILE:	Ha, ha, mouse-deer! I haven't eaten for days, and I'm starving.
STORYTELLER 2:	Thinking of a plan to free himself, the mouse-deer stared at the crocodile.
CROCODILE:	You will be a delicious meal.
STORYTELLER 3:	The mouse-deer was terrified, but he didn't show it. Already he had planned his escape.
MOUSE-DEER:	If you're going to eat me, you'd better catch me first.
CROCODILE:	What do you mean? I've already got your foot in my mouth, haven't I?
STORYTELLER 4:	The pain in the mouse-deer's foot was intense, but he didn't show it.
MOUSE-DEER:	You are even more stupid than I thought, Crocodile.
CROCODILE:	Why is that?
MOUSE-DEER:	You don't know the difference between my foot and the root of a tree, so I'll run along home now. Goodbye!
STORYTELLER 1:	Believing the mouse-deer, the crocodile let go and tried to grab his head.
STORYTELLER 2:	But the mouse deer was too fast. He leapt back. The crocodile's jaws snapped shut - empty.
STORYTELLER 3:	The mouse-deer scampered off into the jungle.

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CROCODILE:	(shouting) We'll meet again, and you'll be sorry!
STORYTELLER 4:	The crocodile swam away to his friends, and told them what had happened.
CROC. FRIEND:	How dare he make a fool of a crocodile!
CROC. FRIEND:	We ought to teach him a lesson!
CROC. FRIEND:	If anyone sees him, tell the rest of us.
CROC. FRIEND:	We'll lie in wait for him.
CROC. FRIEND:	He might be smart enough to trick one, but he can't trick us all.
CROCODILES:	Agreed, agreed! Ha, ha, ha!
STORYTELLER 1:	The mouse-deer was happy, for he had found a new home.
MOUSE-DEER:	I'll enjoy myself, and keep away from the crocodile.
STORYTELLER 2:	Then came the dry season. The sun shone brightly and no rain fell.
STORYTELLER 3:	The river began to dry up. The crocodiles retreated downstream where there was more water.
STORYTELLER 4:	One hot day, the drowsy mouse-deer was looking for somewhere to sleep. He reached the river, which was dry.
MOUSE-DEER:	Here's a good place - a rock in the middle of the dry river bed.
STORYTELLER 1:	So he curled up on it and fell fast asleep.
STORYTELLER 2:	Meanwhile, up-river there was a tremendous storm.
STORYTELLER 3:	Water began to trickle downstream. Soon it became a torrent.
STORYTELLER 4:	The mouse-deer slept on, unaware of danger.
CROCODILE:	Let's go upstream again.
CROC. FRIENDS:	Agreed. Everyone upstream!
STORYTELLER 1:	The crocodiles reached the rock where the mouse-deer slept. They saw him, and couldn't believe their luck.
CROCODILE:	Hey! Look here! The mouse-deer.
CROC. FRIENDS:	Let's surround the rock.
STORYTELLER 2:	Slowly the mouse-deer opened one eye, expecting to see a stretch of dry sand.
STORYTELLER 3:	Instead, he saw a swiftly flowing river and a dozen crocodiles with greedy eyes and grinning jaws.
STORYTELLER 4:	He jumped up and almost fell off the rock.
STORYTELLER 1:	The crocodiles opened their mouths wider and surged closer.
MOUSE-DEER:	(to himself) Oh dear! What will I do? I'll be drowned or I'll be eaten by crocodiles.
STORYTELLER 2:	Quickly the mouse-deer thought of a plan.
CROCODILE:	Ha, ha! I told you we'd meet again.
CROC. FRIEND:	Let's see you try to get away this time.
CROC. FRIEND:	You're completely surrounded.
MOUSE-DEER:	I won't try to escape. Ever since I tricked you I've been sorry I hurt your feelings.
CROCODILE:	Really?
MOUSE-DEER:	I came here today to give myself up to you. But why do you have so many friends with you?
CROCODILE:	They're here, little mouse-deer, to help me eat you up.
MOUSE-DEER:	What a shame! I wanted to give myself to you alone.
CROCODILE:	Why is that?

MOUSE-DEER:	I don't want them fighting and tearing over me. Send them away.
CROCODILE:	That's impossible. They've been waiting for you for a long time. Besides, you tricked me last time. You won't trick all of us together.
MOUSE-DEER:	Since there are so many of you, I see a problem.
CROCODILE:	What's that?
MOUSE-DEER:	How can you share me properly among your friends? If some get more than others, there'll be fights.
CROCODILE:	I hadn't thought of that.
MOUSE-DEER:	Do you have a set of scales?
CROCODILE:	No.
MOUSE-DEER:	Then what will you do?
CROCODILE:	You're supposed to be clever. What would you do in my place?
STORYTELLER 3:	The mouse-deer was delighted, for his plan was working perfectly...
STORYTELLER 4:	... but he was careful to hide his joy.
MOUSE-DEER:	(shouting) You've all heard our conversation. Do you agree it would be fairer for me to do the sharing?
CROCODILES:	(bellowing) Yes!
MOUSE-DEER:	Good! Move side by side, starting here and stretching to the river bank. I'll count you and make sure you get equal shares.
STORYTELLER 1:	Hungrily, the stupid crocodiles obeyed.
MOUSE-DEER:	Now, I'll jump from crocodile to crocodile. As I land on each one, I'll tell him what part of me will be his share. When I've finished, you may eat me, but not before.
STORYTELLER 2:	The mouse-deer leapt on to the first crocodile.
MOUSE-DEER:	Your share is the left half of my head.
STORYTELLER 3:	The mouse-deer leapt on to the second crocodile.
MOUSE-DEER:	Your share is the right half of my head.
STORYTELLER 4:	The mouse-deer leapt on to the third crocodile.
MOUSE-DEER:	You may have my neck.
STORYTELLER 1:	The mouse-deer leapt on to the fourth crocodile.
MOUSE-DEER:	You may have my right front leg.
STORYTELLER 2:	In this way, the mouse-deer continued along the line.
STORYTELLER 3:	As he spoke, the crocodiles licked their lips, waiting for their share.
STORYTELLER 4:	At last, the mouse-deer came to the end of the line.
CROCODILE:	And what is my share?
MOUSE-DEER:	My tail, if you can catch it.
STORYTELLERS:	The crafty mouse-deer leapt off, laughed and dashed into the jungle.

Shared reading or readers' theatre

This form of drama provides an opportunity to enjoy sharing without props or sound effects. The readers sit on chairs facing the audience and look up from time to time as they read. The action of the story is in the imaginations of the listeners. The whole class may participate, with large choruses, everyone sitting in a circle. In this play, each Storyteller can be a chorus.