

# Comprehension Activity — Ages 9-10

## First Read This



Read this traditional story from West Africa about a greedy spider named Anansi.

Long ago, all the world's wisdom was stored in a huge pot, stacked like precious jewels in a vault. Such a treasure required a keeper, and this honour fell to a spider named Anansi. He watched over the jar day and night, every so often prising away its lid to indulge in the wondrous facts and fables inside.

But over time, Anansi grew selfish. He was devoted to guarding that jar so why should anyone else share in its contents? As Anansi was muttering to himself about this one day, he had a cunning idea — he would hide the jar! Glancing around, he took the pot of wisdom and scuttled away. For hours, he searched for the perfect place to stash his loot and just as the sun was melting into the horizon, he found it. On an isolated riverbank, he came across a tree, black as charcoal, whose thorned branches reached into the sky like gnarled fingers. Hurriedly, he tied the pot to his front and began the long climb into the tree's menacing grasp. But try as he might, he made little progress. The jar stopped him from clinging onto the bark, and he repeatedly fell to the ground.

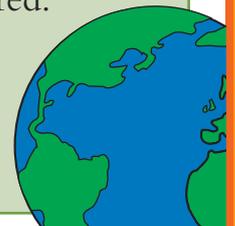
This deed was supposed to be secret, but Ntikuma, Anansi's son, had been following his father all day. Now, watching his father's plight, he offered a suggestion.

“Why don't you tie the pot to your back instead? Then it won't get in the way.”

Anansi snorted. He doubted a child could solve this problem, but to his surprise, Ntikuma's idea worked. Anansi scurried high into a tangle of branches, stowing the pot out of sight. Resting before his descent, a thought struck Anansi — he was hoarding all that wisdom, but it was his son who cracked this puzzle, not him.

“I'm a fool,” he declared. “This wisdom will do most good if it's shared.”

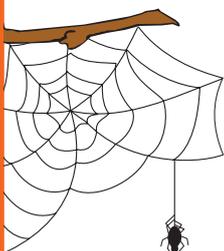
He heaved the pot from the branch, smashing it on the earth below. As its priceless contents flooded out, the heavens opened, washing the wisdom into the river, where it was carried out to sea and delivered all around the world. Now we all share the wisdom Anansi once guarded.



## Now Try These

1. a) Give two adjectives that the author uses in their description of the tree.

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- b) Why do you think Anansi chose to hide the pot in that particular tree?

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2. Circle the word that has a similar meaning to "plight". Use a dictionary to help you.

pain

struggle

mistake

complaint

success



3. Why do you think Anansi doubts a child could solve his problem?

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4. Explain how Anansi's thoughts about keeping "all the world's wisdom" change during the story.

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5. Do you think it was a good thing that Anansi smashed the pot? Why or why not?

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## An Extra Challenge

Imagine you want to recommend this story to a friend. Write a list of reasons why they should read it. Make sure you don't give away the ending! Use the prompts below to help you think of some ideas.



How wise do you feel after those questions? Tick a box.



# Answers

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- Any two from: black, thorned, gnarled, menacing
  - Any sensible answer, e.g. No one would go near such a scary tree, so the pot would be safe there.
- You should have circled: struggle
- Any sensible answer, e.g. He doesn't think a child could know more than him, as he has "all the world's wisdom".
- Any sensible answer, e.g. At the beginning of the story, Anansi wants to keep all the wisdom for himself. At the end of the story, Anansi realises that it would be better to share the wisdom with others.
- Any sensible answer, e.g. Yes, because it meant that the world's wisdom was spread around the globe and everyone was able to share it.

### An Extra Challenge

Any sensible answer, e.g. I enjoyed it because I thought the descriptive language used by the author was interesting and effective, like in the description of the scary tree. The story's plot is exciting, especially Anansi's quest to find a hiding place and seeing him change throughout the story. The characters are spiders, which makes the story unusual. The story has a good message that sharing knowledge and ideas is important.