

Extracts: Plot and Theme

Use these three extracts in conjunction with the forum topic on plot and theme.

Do these extracts have a plot – a story? Are there changes or jumps in the plot? What are they? And is there a theme – a message that the writer wants to get across to us? If so, what do you think it is?

On Being Uncka's Brother

Dawes, Kwame. "On Being Uncka's Brother." In *Give the Ball to the Poet*, edited by Georgie Horrell, Aisha Spencer and Morag Styles, 84. London: Commonwealth Education Trust Books, 2014.

"My big brother did not protect me

He watched his friends stand me up

against the huge ficus tree by the gate

and command me to sing while rubbing my belly.

I sang 'In heaven there is no beer', and

belched for them. They laughed and slapped

my grinning brother on the back.

We did not speak for days.

It was years later that I understood

the burden of his shame,

watching me with his nose and eyes

forehead greasy in the sun

looking like a sorry version

of Uncka the fighter, my brother.

Maybe they expected me to growl,

struggle, throw some punches

like a true little 'Uncka Uncka Kill Kill'

Africa boy would; but I only stood there

rubbed my belly and sang,

missing the point of having

a celebrated fighter for a big brother."

The Water God's Challenge

Parker, Vic. "The Water God's Challenge." In *A River of Stories*, compiled by Alice Curry, 134-136. London: Commonwealth Education Trust Books, 2011.

"Olokun was the great god of water. He lived deep down in the sea in a magical palace and he owned a mighty river that filled all the oceans of the world.

The men and women of Nigeria loved Olokun and worshipped him as their favourite god. They built him amazing temples and decorated them with expensive materials and delicately carved figures. People had statues of Olokun in their houses and prayed to the mighty god every day.

All this worshipping made Olokun feel very important. So important, in fact, that he became quite bigheaded.

I shouldn't just be the god of water, Olokun began to think. I should really be the chief god!

The thought niggled away at Olokun until one day he exploded at his servant, "What can the chief god do for humans that I can't?"

"Um... um... I don't know!" the startled servant spluttered.

"Exactly!" roared the water god. "That's why I'm sending you to the chief god with a message. Tell him that I challenge him for his title of chief god!"

The servant gulped.

"Yes, my lord," he squeaked nervously. He dashed away to the chief god's palace, panicking all the way.

Surely the chief god would be furious at such a bold message!

When the servant was shown into the chief god's magnificent chamber, his teeth were chattering and his knees knocking with fear. He bowed low before the chief god's enormous throne.

"Y-y-your m-m-majesty..." the servant stuttered. "Y-y-your r-r-royal h-h-highness..."

"Enough!" the chief god commanded. "I can read the thoughts of all creatures and I know why you have come."

The servant shut his eyes tightly and waited to be sent to the dungeons.

"Tell your master that I accept his challenge."

The stunned servant couldn't believe his ears.

"Of course, I am far too busy to meet Olokun myself," the chief god continued, with a secret smile. "I will send a messenger instead."

The servant scurried backwards out of the room, bowing all the way, and ran to Olokun with the news.

At first, the water god wasn't pleased at all.

"A messenger?" Olokun thundered. "I challenge the chief god and he sends a messenger?"

The servant thought quickly. "Perhaps the chief god is afraid to face you himself, my lord," he suggested.

"You must be right!" Olokun crowed. "I'll soon show this nobody of a messenger exactly what he is up against."

Olokun barked orders and hundreds of servants sprang into action, dashing here, there and everywhere. By the time a fanfare announced the arrival of the chief god's messenger, Olokun's underwater palace sparkled and glittered. Coral tables were laid with delicious food. Beautiful music rippled through every room and the floors shone with a million colourful shells.

Finally, the water god himself strode into his throne room. He was dressed splendidly in amazing robes that swirled and billowed like the waves of the ocean.

The moment Olokun caught sight of the messenger, he stopped dead in his tracks. The messenger was wearing the same clothes as he was!

"Will you excuse me for a minute?" Olokun muttered. "I really must change out of these old rags."

The water god hurried back to his dressing room, his face red with embarrassment.

It wasn't long before Olokun was back. This time, he was wearing robes that clung around him and shimmered like sea mist. Yet Olokun had no sooner laid eyes on the messenger than he turned and headed out again.

“Do forgive me!” he shouted over his shoulder. “I have spotted a speck of dirt on my robes. Allow me to change. Somehow, the messenger’s clothes again matched Olokun’s outfit!

When Olokun entered the throne room for the third time, everyone gasped. The water god was dressed in the very best clothes he owned. They were so rich and fine he had never even worn them before. Olokun had been saving them for when he became the new chief god. As he walked, the robes rippled and changed from the colours of sunrise, to sunset, to starry midnight. They rustled and swished with the secret songs of ancient sea creatures. No one had ever seen anything so beautiful.

Imagine Olokun’s horror when he saw that the messenger had changed his clothes, too. Once again they were both wearing exactly the same robes!

Olokun realised he was beaten. He bowed his head in shame.

“Go back to the chief god,” he whispered. “Give him my respects and tell him I have learned my lesson. I cannot compete with the chief god’s messenger, let alone the chief god himself.”

The water god never found out that the chief god’s messenger was really a chameleon – an animal that changes its colours to match its surroundings. Olokun had been tricked by nature itself.”

The Two Crabs

Ratnatunga, Manel. "The Two Crabs." In *A River of Stories*, compiled by Alice Curry, 58. London: Commonwealth Education Trust Books, 2011.

"It is said that once in a certain country there lived a crab with her little son.

One beautiful sunny morning, the crab and her son went for a long stroll on the beach by the sea. The crashing waves made lovely music in their ears. The palm trees waved to and fro in the breeze. There were a lot of happy people sitting under the palms and watching the scene.

The crab mother became self-conscious. So many people were watching her and her son taking a walk on the beach. She looked at her son and was horrified to see the way he walked.

“Son,” she said sternly, “why do you waddle sideways when you walk? You look so funny, so graceless. And all these people watching! Learn to walk straight without going crookedly.”

The little crab was deeply hurt. He retorted at once, “Well, mother, I was only copying you. I thought it was the way to walk since that is the way you walk. If my walk is not nice, walk straight yourself first and I will do as you do. Show me how to do it.”

The crab mother was silenced.

"You are right, my son," she said at last. "I can do no better."

So the two crabs continued to walk crookedly down the beach on that beautiful sunny morning."

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