Miriam Riverlea, "Entry on: The Lion or the Mouse? (Who's Got Game?, 2) by Pascal Lemaitre, Slade Morrison, Toni Morrison", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1243. Entry version as of July 12, 2026.

Pascal Lemaitre , Slade Morrison , Toni Morrison

The Lion or the Mouse? (Who's Got Game?, 2)

United States of America (2003)

TAGS: Aesop Aesop's Fables Androcles / Androclus and the Lion

We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	The Lion or the Mouse? (Who's Got Game?, 2)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States of America
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2003
First Edition Details	Toni Morrison, Slade Morrison, *Who's Got Game?*: *The Lion or the Mouse?*, ill. Pascal Lemaitre. New York: Scribner, 2003, 32 pp.
ISBN	9780743222488
Genre	Comics (Graphic works), Folk tales, Humorous comics, Mythological comics
Target Audience	Children
Author of the Entry	Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaoundé 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Creators

Pascal Lemaitre , b. 1967
(Illustrator)

Freelance author and artist Pascal Lemaitre is based in Belgium. He attended La Cambre, the Belgian school of Visual Arts. He is the author of two children's books, *Emily the Giraffe* (1993, first published in French as *Elvire la giraffe* in 1991) and *Zelda's Secret* (1994), and has illustrated books with numerous children's writers including Toni and Slade Morrison, Kate McMullan and Michaela Muntean. In 2015, the museum *Tomi Ungerer* curated an exhibit of his work. He has also illustrated works for adults, and his editorial work has featured in numerous international publications, including *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times* and *Le Monde*.

Sources:

Official website (accessed: December 30, 2020).

encyclopedia.com (accessed: December 30, 2020).

Bio prepared by Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com

Slade Morrison , 1965 - 2010
(Author)

Slade Morrison was an American artist, abstract painter and musician. The second son of writer and academic Toni Morrison and architect Harold Morrison, he collaborated with his mother on the *Who's Got Game?* trio of comic book adaptations of Aesop's *Fables*, as well as a

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range of other children's picture books. They were working on a book of ghost stories when he died of pancreatic cancer, aged 45.

Source:

Pip Cummings, *'I didn't want to come back': Toni Morrison on life, death and Desdemona*, smh.com.au, published August 7, 2015 (accessed: December 30, 2020).

Bio prepared by Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com

Toni Morrison by Christopher Drexel. Retrieved from flickr.com, public domain (accessed: February 2, 2022).

Toni Morrison , 1931 - 2019
(Author)

Toni Morrison was a well-known American writer, editor and academic renowned for exploring the African American experience, particularly from a feminist perspective. She was born Chloe Anthony Wofford in Lorain, Ohio. Her parents instilled in her a love of reading, music, folklore and a respect for black culture. She was a gifted and hardworking student who studied Latin in high school. She gained a BA from Howard University, majoring in English with a minor in classics, and an MA from Cornell. After a period of academic teaching she became a fiction editor at Random House in New York, the first black woman to hold the position.

She began publishing her own writing in the 1970s and 1980s. Her first book, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), is the story of a black girl obsessed by white standards of beauty. Her best known work, *Beloved* (1987), which was awarded the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for fiction, is based on the story of mulatto slave Margaret Garner, who killed her two year old daughter rather than have her return to slavery. The story has been compared to the myth of *Medea*, and in 1998 was adapted into a feature film co-produced by and starring Oprah Winfrey, and in 2005

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Morrison composed the libretto for the opera *Margaret Garner*. In 1993 Morrison was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, the first African American woman to receive the honour.

Morrison wrote an extensive list of novels, short stories, plays and non fiction publications. With her son Slade, she published a number of children's books. She has received a raft of international honours and recognitions for her work. In 2012 Barak Obama presented her with a US Presidential Medal of Freedom. She died in 2019, aged 88.

Sources:

britannica.com (accessed: December 30, 2020).

womenshistory.org (accessed: December 30, 2020).

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Additional information

Translation

Korean: *Nuga sŭngja ilggayo?: saja wa saengjwi iyagi*, ill. Pascal Lemaitre, trans. Sang-hŭi Yi, Seoul: Chakŭn Kŏrŭm, 2007.

Summary

A Lion, resplendent in the crown and royal robes, believes himself to be the king of the land and wants the other animals to fear him. With a repeated catch cry "Listen up! Listen up! No ifs, maybes, ands or buts! I am the king all over the land" he bellows out his strengths that give him the right to rule. The comic book frames present him showing off his physical prowess at running, jumping and clawing trees, but when he bounds through prickly bushes he gets a thorn stuck in his paw. Painfully chastened, he calls out again, but this time in a meek voice. The other animals hear his pleas but make a litany of rhyming excuses; Tiger has to hurry home to her baby with an ice cream cone; Hyena has to bury a bone and is on the phone. No one wants to help, and Lion cannot remove the thorn by himself. Lying in a crumpled heap, he declares "No ifs, maybes, ands or buts. I am the saddest in all the land."

A tiny mouse is hiding nearby inside the Lion's crown. He hears Lion’s calls for help but doubts he is wanted, being so small and weak. But desperate Lion assures him "You are just the one. You are the right size to get this done." After gaining a promise that he won't be eaten, Mouse tugs out the thorn using his teeth. After agreeing to be lifelong friends, the pair return to their homes.

The next morning, Mouse awakens feeling strong and heroic. He fluffs up his fur like a Lion's mane and goes on a rampaging performance, kicking over flowers and declaring "I'm no longer a mouse, I'm a lion now!" The other animals find his performance hilarious. Feeling annoyed, Mouse bangs on Lion's door, where the chastened king, still in his robe but without his crown, is reading the Savannah Times newspaper. He listens while Mouse complains of his treatment. The visits continue for many days with Mouse wondering aloud why no one will take him seriously. Eventually Lion, against his better judgment, fashions Mouse a tiny mane from his own fur, a big red tongue cut from a scrap of his royal robe, and oversized gloves to wear on his hands and feet. He looks ridiculous, and the other animals laugh harder than ever. Mouse has another idea, and still wearing his

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accoutrements, demands that Lion give up his throne. Lion is angry but relieved to be able to get away from the endless pestering. Tossing aside his royal dress, he leaves his den. The next few pages show him sitting cross legged in a blank space of blue and white, as if on a cloud, as he makes a final declaration:

"Listen up! Listen up! No ifs, maybes, ands or buts.

The biggest bully in the land

Does what he likes, takes what he can…

…believes the sizes of boots and paws

Are all you need to make the laws.

But strong or weak, big or small,

A giant or an elf…

Is he who wants to be a bully

Just scared to be himself?"

An edition by "On-Page Coach", by publisher Hampden-Brown includes in-text summaries, prompts and comprehension questions to support readers in making sense of the narrative, anticipating its developments, and reflecting on its moral message. In addition to these "Before you move on…" sections, each page includes glossary entries for difficult vocabulary, including metaphors. In contrast to the Scribner first edition which features a challenging cursive script, the typeface is an easy to read, sans serif font.

Analysis

This retelling draws upon several different fables of Aesop. One is the story of *The Lion and the Mouse*, in which a lion catches a mouse but agrees to spare his life after the mouse promises to return the favour if he can. When the lion is later captured in a hunter's net, the mouse gnaws through the ropes, highlighting the moral lesson that "No act of kindness, however small, is wasted." The motif of the thorn in the lion's paw derives from another fable, "Androcles" (and adapted into a play *Androcles and the Lion* by George Bernard Shaw in 1912), in which a slave removes a thorn from a lion's paw and as a consequence

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is spared in the Roman Colosseum, as well as a related variant known as *The Lion and the Shepherd*.

Toni and Slade Morrison transform the Aesop fable *The Lion and the Mouse*, which advocates the value of kindness and reciprocity, into a much more sophisticated and subtle story that explores the power of ego and the psychology of the bully. The "Who's Got Game?" books actively promote open-ended conclusions and encourage readers to make their own assessments about the characters and their behaviours. In this way, they directly challenge the tidy moral messages that traditionally feature at the end of each of Aesop's fables. While the originally timid Mouse becomes increasingly absurd in his bizarre costume and inflated sense of self, the Lion attains a kind of philosophical enlightenment after giving away his home, regalia and the bravado of being the biggest and strongest.

Pascal Lemaitre's graphic cartoons are fierce and raw, rather like the characters themselves. A colour palette of browns, oranges and yellows (as well as colour combinations that aren't always attractive or pleasing) conveys the setting on the African savannah. Page 7 pays homage to the famous "Pride Rock" scene from *The Lion King*. The refusal of the other animals to provide assistance to the wounded lion also seems to be an intertextual reference to other similar folktales and children's stories where this thematic repetition is also employed. In her critique of the story, Rebecca Ferguson has noted allusions in the "Who's Got Game?" trio of books to Joel Chandler Harris' "Uncle Remus" stories, which share Aesop's didacticism and draw upon African cultural folklore traditions that Toni Morrison has explored throughout her writing career.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aesop Aesop's Fables Androcles / Androclus and the Lion
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adversity Animals Appearances Authority Desires Emotions Gaining understanding Good deeds Humour Identity Intertextuality Philosophy Subjectivity Talking animals Values

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Further Reading	Ferguson, Rebecca, "Of snakes and men: Toni and Slade Morrison's and Pascal Lemaitre's adaptations of Aesop in *Who's Got Game*?", *MELUS* 36.2 (2011): 53+.
Addenda	The audiobook of the series published in 2007 (accessed: July 5, 2021).

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