Eleanor A. Dasi, "Entry on: Juma and the Honey Guide: An African Story by Nneka Bennett, Robin Bernard", peer-reviewed by Divine Che Neba, Daniel A. Nkemleke and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/766. Entry version as of November 04, 2026.

Nneka Bennett , Robin Bernard

Juma and the Honey Guide: An African Story

United States of America (1996)

TAGS: African Storytelling African Traditions



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

General information	
Title of the work	Juma and the Honey Guide: An African Story
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States of America
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1996
First Edition Details	Bernard, Robin, *Juma and the Honey Guide: An African Story*. Ill. by N. Bennett, Parsippany New Jersey: Silver Burdett Press, 1996, 32 pp.
ISBN	0382391640
Genre	Folk tales, Illustrated works
Target Audience	Children
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Creators



Nneka Bennett (Illustrator)

As a graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design, Nneka Bennett uses training, experience and intuition to create designs and find innovative solutions for both print and digital projects involving television, publishing and branding. She is the lead on-set graphic designer on TV shows for FOX and MTV. Before that, she spent five years as an art director at Little Brown and Company designing book covers.

She is a member of local 800, Art Directors Guild of Los Angeles. She lives in Boston with her husband.

Source:

Official website (accessed: July 30, 2021).

Bio prepared by Eleanor A. Dasi, University of Yaoundé I, wandasi5@yahoo.com



Robin Bernard (Author)

Robin Bernard is a naturalist writer, painter and draftsman. She has written and illustrated picture books for children and has served as author and illustrator for some education theme units. She has also frequently contributed to Ranger Rick magazine. Some of her books include: *The life of a Butterfly* (1995), *Amazing Animals* (1996) and *A Tree for all Seasons* (1999) amongst others.

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Source:

books.google.pl (accessed: July 30, 2021).

Bio prepared by Eleanor Anneh Dasi, University of Yaoundé I, wandasi5@yahoo.com

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Additional information

Summary

The story begins with Bakari telling his son Juma that the honey-guide bird is calling for him and he will follow him to bring home a treat. Juma opts to follow his father and his father accepts, promising to teach him how to get honey. Both father and son then follow the singing bird out of the village into the forest and walk past a number of different kinds of wildlife: giraffes, ostriches, zebras and a family of warthogs. Finally, they come to a group of yellow acacia trees beside a waterhole where the honey-guide settles and stops singing. Bakari draws his son's attention to the bird's quietness and makes him understand that, "By being quiet, he tells us that we are very close to the bee's nest. And look! There it is, right in that tree!"

Bakari then gathers dry twigs and made a small fire at the foot of the tree. He sprinkles some water on it so that the smoke can drift up into the nest for the bees to fly away. Bakari pokes the empty nest with his stick, catches the honey comb and asks Juma to taste. After Juma tasted, Bakari breaks off a chunk and asks him to climb up the tree and leaves the piece for the *kidege*. Puzzled, Juma hesitates to do as instructed and demands an explanation only to learn that: "That is how we say *asante* (thank you) to the *kidege* (the little bird)" (p. 13). But Juma still does not want to give up the honeycomb and poses further questions until he is told that if he does not, the bird might lead him to a lion's den instead of a bee nest. Juma hurriedly climbs the tree and leaves a honey comb for the bird. He finally understands that the ritual and tradition to always keep part of the honeycomb for the honey-guide bird in gratitude must be observed.

Analysis

Since ancient times, humans have been known to communicate with other elements of nature, particularly animals and birds, when there is a situation of friendship. The above story is based on a true and unusual relationship that the honey guide, a real bird in East Africa, created with the Dorobo* people of Kenya. This bird likes eating honey but cannot break into a hive. So it surveys hives that are ready to be harvested and conducts men there, who then harvest and give the bird a share of the honey. Because of the help the bird gives in finding a ready beehive, it has almost become a sacred bird among the people. That is why they reserve a honeycomb for it whenever they harvest. As noted in the story, the honey harvest, and the tradition of reserving

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	some honey for the bird-guide are handed down from generation to generation, as seen in the relationship between Bakari and his son Juma. Bakari understands the language of the honey guide bird and teaches Juma how to behave. The story about the bird leading Juma to a lion's den is a way to frighten Juma into submitting to the tradition. This is one of the ways through which traditions were maintained in Africa – creating fear in the younger generation of some impending doom if what is demanded is not observed. That notwithstanding, it was also a way of guaranteeing a symbiotic relationship, and ensuring continuity maintaining the cycle of life with other elements of nature. As mentioned above, this is an age-long practice as seen on the illustrations in the book which suggest pre-colonial Africa.
	* The Dorobo are a diverse group of hunter-gatherer people comprising the Okiek, Mukogodo, Mosiro, Kinsakasa amongst others. The name Dorobo originates from "ll-torrobo", a Maasai term for "the ones with cattle". Where hunting is banned, they make their living through beekeeping. Source: prayafrica.org (accessed: July 30, 2021).
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Storytelling African Traditions
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Animals Gaining understanding Nature Parents (and children) Relationships Tradition
Further Reading	*The Oxford Handbook of Animals in Classical Thought and Life*, ed. Lindsay Campbell, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Spottiswoode, Claire, Keith S. Begg and Colleen M. Begg, "Reciprocal signaling in honeyguide-human mutualism", *Science* 353 (2016):

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387–389; https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aaf4885 (accessed: July 30, 2021).

Addenda

Origin: East Africa (Kenya/Tanzania)

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