

RABBIT AND TIGER

Tales from Puerto Rico

The people of Puerto Rico have many trickster tales in which the characters of Rabbit and Tiger are used to make a point or teach a lesson. One would think that the fast, fierce, intimidating Tiger would always get the better of small, quiet, timid Rabbit; but this is not the case. In most of the tales, Tiger wanted to catch and eat Rabbit. Fortunately, Rabbit was extremely smart, which enabled him to get out of tough situations involving Tiger.

For example, one time Tiger trapped Rabbit in a rocky ravine. Knowing that he couldn't get away, Rabbit leaned against a large boulder while Tiger approached. Tiger was very happy to have finally cornered his prey. When Tiger got close enough, Rabbit admitted defeat and told Tiger that he was ready to be eaten. Rabbit also told Tiger that the boulder he was leaning against held up the whole, wide world and that once Tiger pulled him away from it the world would roll away with the boulder. The thought of this made Tiger a bit scared. Rabbit suggested that Tiger hold up the boulder while he ran for help. Tiger agreed because he did not want the world to roll away. Once Tiger was leaned up against the

boulder, Rabbit ran away home, laughing all the way for having fooled the big strong Tiger.

Another time Tiger stumbled upon Rabbit, who happened to be fishing. Rabbit thought he was a goner. He then saw the full moon's reflection on the water, which gave him an idea. Knowing that Tiger liked cheese, Rabbit told Tiger that he was just about to pull the large round wheel of cheese out of the water. Tiger grabbed Rabbit's fishing pole because he wanted the cheese for himself. However, Tiger wasn't able to fish the cheese out of the water. Rabbit suggested that Tiger jump into the water to get the cheese. As soon as Tiger dove into the water, Rabbit ran away home, laughing all the way for having once again fooled the big strong Tiger.

One time Tiger accidentally found Rabbit's home. He was so excited that he planned a surprise for Rabbit. Tiger took his time squeezing himself into the rabbit hole. He got all of his body in except his tale. When Rabbit got home he saw Tiger's tale sticking out of his doorway. He knew what was going on, so he thought up a plan of his own. He greeted his home by asking if it was happy. Tiger chose to answer Rabbit by saying he was very happy. Rabbit laughed at Tiger for thinking a home could talk. Tiger became very angry and tried hard to get out of the rabbit hole, but he was stuck fast. Rabbit offered to get help if Tiger promised to stay away from his home. Tiger agreed so Rabbit got Crocodile to come pull

him out. Believe it or not, in this instance, Tiger kept his word and did not come back to Rabbit's home.

However, one day Rabbit was out walking with his wife and two friends, Owl and Dog. They heard Tiger approaching so Rabbit asked the others to hide behind a large rock. When Tiger saw Rabbit, his mouth began to water in anticipation of his next meal. Rabbit suggested that Tiger's timing was poor because a storm was coming; and that he was about ready to tie himself to a tree for safety. Tiger thought he had time to eat Rabbit when Rabbit's friends began to make storm noises. Mrs. Rabbit thumped her hind legs on the ground. Owl flapped her wings and hooted. Dog howled. Upon hearing that racket, Tiger began to worry that he would get caught in a huge storm. He asked Rabbit to tie him to a tree for safety. Rabbit agreed and tied Tiger very tightly to the nearest tree. As soon as this was done, Rabbit's friends stopped making their storm noises and came out from behind the large rock. Tiger realized he had been tricked again as Rabbit and his friends strolled off, laughing all the way for having tricked the big strong Tiger.

Sometimes Rabbit helped other jungle creatures escape Tiger's clutches. This was the case when a family of monkeys wandered too close to Tiger. Rabbit happened to be high up in a tamarind tree when he saw Tiger grab a young monkey. He asked Tiger what he planned to do with the

monkey and Tiger informed Rabbit that he was going to eat it. Rabbit told Tiger that he would look silly if he ate the monkey whole. Tiger did not want to look silly so he asked Rabbit for details. Rabbit told Tiger that monkeys were meant to be eaten in small bites and the best way to do that was to toss the monkey high in the air, close his eyes then open his mouth wide and catch it with his teeth. Tiger did as he was told. Rabbit caught the monkey and threw down a piece of bitter tamarind fruit. Tiger was disappointed with the terrible taste which wouldn't go away; so he ran to the river in hopes of washing away the bitterness. This time, all the monkeys laughed at how the big strong Tiger had been fooled by Rabbit.

Rabbit was lucky to have many friends in the forest. One time Tiger became trapped in a cave when an earthquake rolled a large boulder across the entrance. He called for help. Feeling sorry for the poor trapped creature, Rabbit got help from Water Buffalo and Elephant. The two large animals rolled the boulder away from the cave entrance. As soon as he got out, Tiger grabbed Rabbit with the intent of eating him. Only Tiger thought this was alright. So, the animals called Tortoise over for his opinion. Tortoise asked what the dispute was about. Both Rabbit and Tiger began to talk at once. Tortoise stopped them and asked them to reenact the situation. Tiger went back into the cave. Water Buffalo and Elephant rolled the large boulder back across the cave entrance, thus

trapping Tiger again. At this point, Tortoise noted that if the animals hadn't freed Tiger, there would not be a problem. The animals agreed and walked away, laughing at how they tricked the big strong Tiger.

So the people of Puerto Rico learned from these tales that having brains is better than being a bully.

*Adapted by Kathleen Simonetta, August 2015. Inspired by the following stories found in The Lion Storyteller Bedtime Book; retold by Bob Hartman. Illustrations by Krisztina Kallai Nagy. Oxford: Lion Children's Book, c2009.

"Rabbit and Tiger Save the World," p. 21

"Rabbit and Tiger Go Fishing." p. 33

"Tiger Gets Stuck," pp. 44-45

"Tiger and the Storm," pp. 66-68

"Tiger Eats a Monkey," pp. 83-84

"Tiger Tries to Cheat," pp.102-104

