

# TORTOISE AND THE CHIEF

by Jude Badaki (Nigeria)

*The story is a folktale from the Okulasho people of the Akoko-Edo, Nigeria. It is meant to teach children the need to adhere to community laws and also stress on the need to be honest.*

Once upon a time in a faraway land where animals and humans lived together, there lived a tortoise. The chief employed him as the court barber. On cutting the chiefs hair, tortoise discovered that the former had only one ear and in this land those with one ear never become senior chiefs. Tortoise kept this secret in his heart for a long time, but one day he refused to honour the senior chief's summons. Instead, tortoise went to the main footpath that led to the village. He dug a hole in the ground and whispered into the hole, 'the chief has one ear.'

He then planted a lemon grass the spot where the hole was. On reaching chief's palace, after much persuasion from his wife, tortoise gave the chief a haircut. When the process was over the tortoise also discovered the reason for the chief's long cap. The senior chief always pulled it down to cover his deformed ear.

The lemon grass tortoise planted sang each time passers by touched it. It sang

*The chief has one ear*

*The chief has one ear*

*Chief has one ear.*

'Which chief is this grass talking

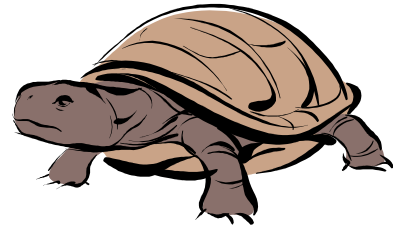
about,' they inquired. But there were many chiefs in the land and all wore caps. So, every chief was summoned to the village square by the council of chiefs. They were directed to pull off their caps and each dance before the animals and people of the land. All the other chiefs danced before the crowd except the senior chief who argued that as a senior chief he was not subject to the laws of the land. Every subject of the land was surprised and some said, 'But the laws of the land are meant for everybody even the chief.' The other chiefs went aside to consult with one another while the crowd waited impatiently to mete out punishment on the offender. When the other chiefs came back, they insisted that the laws of the land be obeyed by the senior chief. They argued that no one person was above the law. They demanded that the senior chief take off his cap and dance before the crowd. Tension and suspense mounted as those who had just arrived the village square were seen complaining that the lemon grass was still singing

*The chief has one ear*

*The chief has one ear*

*Chief has one ear.*

The song continued despite the fact that nineteen chiefs had passed the test successfully, but someone else remained- the senior chief. They



waited and waited for the senior chief to dance before them. When evening came the tortoise walked up to the senior chief and whispered something into his ears. What he said seemed to have frightened the chief who looked left and right at the waiting crowd. Finally, he stepped down from his throne and danced before the crowd with his cap still on his head. One of the angry chiefs walked up to him and removed the cap. Loud cries went up as everybody discovered that the senior chief had only one ear. 'No wonder,' some said, our farms never yield a good harvest.'

The council of chiefs met and decided to banish the senior chief from the village. On that very day, all the animals and people booed him to the outskirts of the land. He was told never to return to the land again.

**Moral: Nobody is above the law and it is good to be honest.**

## In Your Opinion

1. What kind of characteristics has the tortoise in this story? How is this tortoise different from the turtle in the previous story?

2. Draw an animal that you like. Try to write a fable explaining how the animal in your picture got its shape, name, or certain body part (for example, how the skunk received his stripes, or how the snake lost its legs). Share your picture and your fable.