



Anansi the Spider



and the Middle Passage

By Frank Higgins

Anansi the Spider and the Middle Passage

By Frank Higgins

Copyright © 2007, by Frank Higgins

Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that a royalty must be paid for every live, pre-recorded, virtual, or online performance, whether or not admission is charged. All inquiries regarding rights—including but not limited to amateur, professional, radio broadcast, internet, television, cable, motion picture, live streaming, public reading, and translation into a foreign language—should be addressed to Pioneer Drama Service, Inc., PO Box 4267, Englewood, CO 80155.

No live, pre-recorded, virtual, or online performance, broadcast, reading, or presentation of any kind, in whole or in part, may be given without permission from Pioneer Drama Service, Inc.

These rights are fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and of all countries covered by the Universal Copyright Convention or with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations, including Canada, Mexico, Australia, and all nations of the United Kingdom.

ONE SCRIPT OR E-SCRIPT PER CAST MEMBER MUST BE PURCHASED FOR PRODUCTION RIGHTS. PHOTOCOPYING, REPRODUCING, EMAILING, OR DISTRIBUTING ALL OR ANY PART OF THIS BOOK WITHOUT PERMISSION IS STRICTLY FORBIDDEN BY LAW.

On all paper and digital programs, printing, and advertising, the following information must appear:

1. The full title: *Anansi the Spider and the Middle Passage*
2. Writing credit: By Frank Higgins
3. Publication notice: “Produced by special arrangement with Pioneer Drama Service, Denver, Colorado”



For Preview Only

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

“Anansi the Spider and the Middle Passage” was commissioned and produced by the Omaha Theatre Company for Young People under the title, “How Anansi the Spider Came to America” under the artistic direction of James Larson. The production opened on January 11, 2004 with the following cast:

Anansi.....Kenny Glenn
Mother/Wife/VultureMabel Kashora
Nyame/Lion/Turtle/Hippo.....Leiloni Brewer
Python/Elephant/VillagerCherisse Coleman
Shontay/Bush Deer/HareRushea Smith
DirectorJames Larson
Scenic designerEric Scot Voecks
Costume Designer.....Sherri Geerdes
Lighting DesignerBill Van Deest
DrummerSeku Neblett
Stage ManagerChristina Whitney

Pictures from this production can be found at the back of the playbook.



“An imaginative re-telling of the Anansi folk tales put into a new context as the tales come to America on a slave ship...Wonderfully theatrical.”

~Omaha World-Herald~

ANANSI THE SPIDER AND THE MIDDLE PASSAGE

Adapted from African Folklore

By FRANK HIGGINS

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(In Order of Speaking)

	<u># of lines</u>
ANANSI	101
SHONTAY	33
MOTHER.....	29
KIDNAPPER 1.....	5
KIDNAPPER 2.....	4
VILLAGER	1
NYAME.....	12
PYTHON.....	21
SHIP CAPTAIN	5
CREWMAN 1	1
CREWMAN 2	1
LION.....	7
ELEPHANT	26
LITTLE BUSH DEER.....	14
TURTLE	16
HIPPO.....	18
HARE.....	44
VULTURE	13
WISE ELDER	17
OPTIONAL EXTRAS.....	n/a

FLEXIBLE CASTING

For a cast of five, the play can be multiple cast as follows:

ACTOR 1: ANANSI, WISE ELDER

ACTOR 2: NYAME, LION, TURTLE, HIPPO, KIDNAPPER 1, CREWMAN 1,
SHIP CAPTAIN

ACTOR 3: PYTHON, ELEPHANT, KIDNAPPER 2, CREWMAN 2, VILLAGER

ACTRESS 1: MOTHER, VULTURE

ACTRESS 2: SHONTAY, BUSH DEER, HARE

ANANSI, SHONTAY and the MOTHER should be played by either African-American or African actors; however, the other roles can be played by actors of any background.

SETTING

Time: At the height of the slave trade between Africa and the Americas.

Place: In Africa, in a prison and on a slave ship. Story scenes take place in the jungle, in the sky and at the bottom of a lake.

The set should be simple and suggestive. Therefore, most props are simply mimed. Feel free to use real props if desired. A raised platform is UPSTAGE to be used for Nyame's entrance. If possible, somewhere onstage there should be a reproduction of the diagram of the slave ship by Brookes. This drawing can be found in most books about the Atlantic slave trade. A cutout tree and a cutout mossy rock are brought on for a couple of the stories.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

If possible, have an African drummer onstage. The drummer can underscore scenes and moments throughout the show. Also, if the script needs to be shortened for time considerations, the Turtle story can be removed.

ANANSI THE SPIDER AND THE MIDDLE PASSAGE

- 1 AFRICAN DRUMMING begins. The CAST ENTERS, except for ANANSI, and dances a lively West African dance (accompanied by live drumming, if available). As the drumming continues, the CAST PRESENTS ANANSI, who ENTERS LEFT and dances from one end of the stage to the other.
- 5 The DRUMMING builds to a CRESCENDO and then STOPS.

ANANSI: I have stories! I have stories!! I have stories!! I will give you the story today about the bad things that greed can do. I will give you the story about a great tug of war, and how every one of you, even if you don't know it, is strong. How can I give you all these stories? I am Anansi, and all stories are mine to give! But! There will be times when I will need your help to tell a story. Will you help me? (*Gets the AUDIENCE to say yes.*) With your help, I will tell you the story of how I won the right to give you these stories. I will give you the story of how I left my home in Africa and came here to your world as part of the Middle Passage. But! That story begins with tears. Are you strong enough for the story? (*Gets the AUDIENCE to say yes.*) Then we begin. (*Waves his arms like a magician, and the LIGHTS CHANGE. ALL EXIT except ANANSI, KIDNAPPER 1 and KIDNAPPER 2.*) Early one day in the jungle of West Africa, outside a village... (*KIDNAPPER 1 from the ensemble spreads nuts on the ground while taking care not to be seen by the villagers. He gestures to KIDNAPPER 2, and the two of them hide ONSTAGE. SHONTAY and MOTHER ENTER RIGHT with a bag to gather the nuts.*)

SHONTAY: Look, mother! There are more nuts over here!

25 **MOTHER:** Be careful, Shontay. We don't want to get too far from the village.

SHONTAY: We should have looked this far away before. There are nuts everywhere!

30 **MOTHER:** When your father and your brothers come back from hunting, we'll fix them a good meal tonight.

SHONTAY: We'll make everybody happy. (*KIDNAPPERS jump up and throw a net over MOTHER and SHONTAY.*)

MOTHER/SHONTAY: Aahh!

KIDNAPPER 1: Tie them up! Quick!

35 **SHONTAY:** Why are you doing this?!

KIDNAPPER 1: Quiet!

MOTHER: Fight, Shontay, fight!

KIDNAPPER 1: If she fights, you will regret it. Is that what you want?

MOTHER: No!

40 **KIDNAPPER 2:** (*To KIDNAPPER 1.*) Your trick worked.

- 1 **KIDNAPPER 1:** Let's go. Hurry. (*The KIDNAPPERS have mimed tying MOTHER and SHONTAY'S hands and now take them DOWN LEFT.*)
- ANANSI:** Shontay and her mother were taken to a place far from their village, and then...
- 5 **KIDNAPPER 1:** Open the door! (*KIDNAPPERS toss MOTHER and SHONTAY into a PRISON CELL. LIGHTING EFFECT: the prison door is defined by light. KIDNAPPER 1 mimes closing the door. SOUND EFFECT: HEAVY DOOR clanging shut.*)
- KIDNAPPER 2:** Two females. They'll bring a good price. (*KIDNAPPERS EXIT RIGHT and take bag of nuts OFF.*)
- 10 **SHONTAY:** Mother! Mother, where are we?
- MOTHER:** In a prison, Shontay.
- SHONTAY:** But we haven't done anything wrong.
- MOTHER:** I can barely see. Listen! I hear many people here. And many
- 15 languages. There are people from many villages who have been thrown together here. This is a bad thing.
- SHONTAY:** Oh, Mother! (*MOTHER embraces SHONTAY and holds her.*)
- ANANSI:** Her mother held Shontay all night. And like the adults and children around them, they moaned with sadness. (*A RITUAL MOAN from MOTHER and SHONTAY.*) We are one village here now. So that
- 20 we can imagine what those people felt, let us moan together... (*Gets the AUDIENCE to moan, then stops them.*) It was not until the next morning that Shontay spoke again.
- SHONTAY:** We'll never see Father again. Or my brothers. We're alone!
- 25 **MOTHER:** We may never see our family again, Shontay. But we are not alone. Look there, in the corner of the window.
- SHONTAY:** A spider?
- MOTHER:** And who is that spider?
- SHONTAY:** Who?
- 30 **MOTHER:** Our friend. His name is—
- ANANSI:** Anansi! And the mother told her daughter about me—how I am in possession of all the stories there are to tell. And little by little, the girl was less afraid.
- SHONTAY:** But how can Anansi possess all the stories? He's just a spider.
- 35 **MOTHER:** It happened like this. A long time ago, all that people did was work and sleep. (*MOTHER and SHONTAY join ANANSI and VILLAGER, who ENTERS RIGHT. They circle and mime working.*)
- ALL:** (*Chant.*) Work and sleep, Work and sleep
All I do is work and sleep.

1 **ANANSI:** Fellow villagers, wake up! Work and sleep, there must be more to life.

VILLAGER: No, this is what life is. It was decided for us from on high. Look up there. (*NYAME ENTERS LEFT and stands on the raised platform. He holds a gold box.*)

5 **ANANSI:** It's Nyame, the Sky God! But what is he holding?

MOTHER: The Box of Stories. All the stories of all the people are in that box.

ANANSI: Look how he only opens it a little, so that only he can hear
10 the stories.

SHONTAY: He hoards the stories for himself.

ANANSI: Then let us call out in loud voices! He'll hear us and help us.

ALL: Nyame! Hear me, Nyame! Help us! (*NYAME does not hear.*)

MOTHER: Nothing.

15 **ANANSI:** Then we should go up there.

SHONTAY: He lives in the sky. How can anyone go up there?

ANANSI: I am Anansi the Spider. I will spin a web all the way into the sky. (*Flings his arms. LIGHTING EFFECT: A gobo of a SPIDERWEB appears all over the stage. ANANSI climbs up to NYAME. MOTHER, SHONTAY and VILLAGER move DOWN LEFT.*)

20 **NYAME:** What is the meaning of this? Someone from the lowly earth visits me in the sky?

ANANSI: Oh great Nyame. Your people are poor and tired. We need to hear stories. Stories will make our lives bearable. Stories will
25 give our lives meaning. (*NYAME opens the box a little and listens. SOUND EFFECT: CACOPHONY OF WHISPERING VOICES.*)

NYAME: (*Snaps the lid back down and VOICES STOP.*) No. The stories have great power. And I do not share.

ANANSI: (*To AUDIENCE.*) How to solve this? (*To NYAME.*) Nyame, they
30 say you are a great gambler. Let us make a bet, and if I win, I get the Box of Stories.

NYAME: How can you win a bet? People, who is the strongest of all?

ALL: Nyame!

NYAME: Who is it that when he talks even the trees tremble?

35 **ALL:** Nyame!

NYAME: Who is the King of All Things?

ALL: Nyame!

NYAME: You have heard of my power. So what can you offer me when I win the bet?

1 **ANANSI:** If I lose, I will stay on the ground and will never bother you again.

NYAME: Not enough. Who is the weakest of animals?

ALL: Anansi!

5 **NYAME:** When Anansi talks, no one listens. When he shouts, everyone laughs. I command you all, laugh at Anansi. (*ALL LAUGH. ANANSI reacts to the ridicule.*) You think that I would give up all the stories to such a weak creature as you? If we bet and you lose, I will make you look foolish, so foolish that all the animals and people will
10 laugh at you till the end of time. Do you still want to risk all that for the Box of Stories?

ANANSI: (*After a pause.*) Yes. My bet is that I can do anything you ask, no matter how difficult.

NYAME: This is too easy. You've heard of Python?

15 **ANANSI:** The big, dangerous snake who lives by the river?

NYAME: Bring me Python, and bring him to me alive. (*EXITS LEFT laughing.*)

ANANSI: (*Turns to the AUDIENCE and gulps.*) What have I done? Python is so strong, he'll eat me. I can run away, but if I do run away, what
20 will happen to the people?

ALL: (*Chant.*) Work and sleep, work and sleep.

All I do is work and sleep. (*VILLAGER EXITS LEFT. SHONTAY and MOTHER move UP to watch the action.*)

ANANSI: The people need stories to help them live. What to
25 do?*(Thinks.)* I'll set a trap. First, I'll need a tree. (*Fetches cutout tree and rubber chicken from OFF LEFT.*) Next, I'll spin a strong web and make a noose. (*Mimes spinning and producing a noose.*) Now, I'll grease the tree, but only high up. And how will I get Python to climb this particular tree? To get a chicken! (*Mimes setting out a
30 cooked chicken and hanging it from the tree.*) Python will want the chicken, he'll start up the tree, then when he's high enough, he'll slip on the grease. And he'll fall into the trap that I'll put on the ground. Ha! And then we'll have stories. Quiet! I hear a slither in the grass. Python!

35 **PYTHON:** (*ENTERS RIGHT singing. [See PRODUCTION NOTES for costuming.]*) Who will I swallow today?

Who will I swallow today?

Will I swallow them whole, or just halfway?

Who will I swallow today?

40 (*Speaks.*) What's this? A chicken? I haven't eaten anybody for hours. Ah, chicken, you're all mine. (*Starts to climb the tree.*)

ANANSI: Foolish Python, this is too easy.

- 1 **PYTHON:** Who would put grease on a tree? And is that noose on the ground for me? There's more than one way to swallow a chicken. I'll stand on my tail. I am one amazing python. (*Snatches the chicken and gobbles it.*)
- 5 **ANANSI:** I have failed. How can I catch this snake? He has more strength in his tail than most animals have in their whole body. (*Sits with his back to PYTHON, who starts to crawl toward ANANSI.*) And because I've failed, no one will have any stories. All that we'll ever do is work and sleep. There must be a way.
- 10 **PYTHON:** (*Throws himself around ANANSI.*) Good morning, Anansi.
ANANSI: Ahh! Good morning, Python. How are you?
PYTHON: I'm very angry. You've been trying to catch me. (*Squeezes.*)
ANANSI: Aah!
PYTHON: And now I've caught you.
- 15 **ANANSI:** But it's just a game, right? Tag, you're it?
PYTHON: (*Still squeezing, sings.*) Who will I swallow today? Will I swallow you whole, or just halfway? (*Puts the costume mouth over the top half of ANANSI'S head while ANANSI talks.*)
ANANSI: Python, you've got it all wrong. I wanted to catch you, but not
20 to eat you. How can someone little like me eat someone big like you? No, this is all my wife's doing.
PYTHON: Your wife?
ANANSI: I've been having a fight with my wife. I say that you are the longest animal in the world.
- 25 **PYTHON:** I am.
ANANSI: Longer even than the bamboo tree.
PYTHON: I am.
ANANSI: But I can't prove it.
PYTHON: You shouldn't fight with your wife about that.
- 30 **ANANSI:** Marriage is difficult. These are the things you fight about when you're married.
PYTHON: We'll settle this right now. Get the bamboo pole.
ANANSI: Oh, you are a wonderful snake. I don't see why you don't have more friends. (*Grabs a bamboo pole and ropes from OFF LEFT and lays them on the ground.*)
- 35 **PYTHON:** This wife of yours is foolish. Of course I'm longer than a bamboo tree. It's insulting to even doubt it.
ANANSI: We'll show her.
PYTHON: I'll stretch myself out to full length. What do you think?

- 1 **ANANSI:** Wellll, you are very long. But the bamboo tree is long, too.
Oh, no, my wife is right.
- PYTHON:** Stop crying, Spider. I can stretch. Tie my tail to the bamboo tree.
- 5 **ANANSI:** Whatever you say. (*Ties Python's tail to one end of the bamboo pole. [NOTE: The legs of the actor can serve as the tail.]*)
Now stretch, Python.
- PYTHON:** Aaah!
- ANANSI:** Not good enough. What's this lump in your middle?
- 10 **PYTHON:** Nothing much, just a man I had for breakfast.
- ANANSI:** We need to take what's left of him and flatten him out.
- PYTHON:** I know what to do. Tie my middle to the bamboo tree.
- ANANSI:** Whatever you say. (*ANANSI does.*) Now stretch, Python.
- PYTHON:** Aaaaah!
- 15 **ANANSI:** Still short. Oh, my wife's going to say, "I told you so." Are there any words more terrible for a husband to hear?
- PYTHON:** I know what to do. I'll stretch my top part even more—tie my head to the bamboo tree.
- ANANSI:** Whatever you say. (*Ties PYTHON'S head to the bamboo pole.*) Somebody strong is always right. There. (*Drags PYTHON to present him.*)
- 20 **PYTHON:** What are you doing? Let me up. Hey!
- ANANSI:** Nyame! Behold! I have brought you... Python!
- NYAME:** (*APPEARS LEFT with the gold box.*) You have captured Python.
- 25 **PYTHON:** Woe is me.
- NYAME:** You have won the bet. You deserve the Box of Stories. (*Hands over the gold box.*) Come on, snake. You cost me the stories, so I'll have you for lunch.
(*Sings.*) Who will I swallow today? (*Drags Python off, and they EXIT LEFT.*)
- 30 **ANANSI:** The stories! Listen. (*Lifts the lid and the CACOPHANY OF WHISPERING VOICES can be heard.*)
- MOTHER:** And hearing the stories made the people's lives better.
- SHONTAY:** Can stories make our lives better?
- 35 **ANANSI:** That is the question. Some of the stories in the story box are very old. But the story of Shontay and her mother being kidnapped is a new story. After being kept in prison for many weeks, the people were inspected by a ship captain. (*SHIP CAPTAIN and KIDNAPPER 2 ENTER RIGHT.*)

PRODUCTION NOTES

PROPERTIES

ONSTAGE: Diagram of the Slave Trade by Brookes (on easel), raised platform.

BROUGHT ON:

Net, nuts (KIDNAPPERS)

Bag for nuts (SHONTAY)

Gold box [with flame] (NYAME)

Stuffed snake with functional mouth (PYTHON)

Cutout tree, rubber chicken, bamboo pole, pieces of rope, moss-covered rock (ANANSI)

Bucket, white masks (CREWMEN)

Yams (LION)

Bananas (ELEPHANT)

Coconuts (BUSH DEER)

Stuffed crocodile (HIPPO)

LIGHTING EFFECTS

Light to define the door of the prison cell, light changes to signify start of a story and a new day, gobo of spider web.

SOUND EFFECTS

Either live or recorded African drumming, sound of heavy door clanging shut, cacophony of whispering voices.

COSTUMING

Traditional African clothing should be worn by all human characters except KIDNAPPER, SHIP CAPTAIN and CREWMEN. NYAME should be dressed in a magical or royal-looking robe with an elaborate headdress. HARE can wear a headband with long ears and perhaps a fuzzy white tail. HIPPO should wear a padded costume to suggest bulk. In the original production, PYTHON was performed by an actor or actress holding a long, stuffed snake with a puppet head that could be manipulated to “bite.” BUSH DEER wore a headdress with ears and horns. TURTLE wore a colorful shell on his back. VULTURE wore feathery robes and a large mask with eyes, beak and feathers. ELEPHANT wore a headpiece with large ears and a trunk that hung below the neck. LION dressed in robes of brown and tan and wore a headdress that looked like a mane.



Little Bush Deer.



Elephant, Little Bush Deer, Lion and Vulture.



Anansi, Python and slaves.

We hope you've enjoyed this script sample.

We encourage you to read the entire script before making your final decision.

You may order a paper preview copy or gain instant access to the complete script online through our E-view program. We invite you to learn more and create an account at www.pioneerdrama.com/E-view.

Thank you for your interest in our plays and musicals. If you'd like advice on other plays or musicals to read, our customer service representatives are happy to assist you when you call 800.333.7262 during normal business hours.



www.pioneerdrama.com

800.333.7262

Outside of North America 303.779.4035

Fax 303.779.4315

PO Box 4267

Englewood, CO 80155-4267

We're here to help!

DIRECTORS LOVE PIONEER DRAMA SERVICE

CHOOSE HOW YOU RECEIVE YOUR SCRIPTS.

We give you more delivery options than any other publisher for receiving both your preview scripts and your full production orders. See our website for more about our many electronic delivery options for both preview and production orders.

TRUST OUR INTEGRITY.

Our family-owned and operated company is proud to offer wholesome scripts appropriate for children's and community theatres, schools, and churches.

STAY WITHIN A REASONABLE BUDGET.

Our affordable scripts offer straightforward costuming, trouble-free props and stage effects, and sets that can be as simple or as elaborate as you desire.

MAINTAIN CONTROL OF YOUR CASTING.

We help you tailor your play for your specific cast size, not the other way around.

BE ORIGINAL.

Get access to fresh, new musicals that let your actors practice true character development instead of simply mimicking Disney or the musicals that are done over and over again.

ENJOY FLEXIBLE PRODUCTION OPTIONS.

All Pioneer Drama plays and musicals can be licensed for traditional, livestreamed, recorded, or online performances. Once you've set up your royalties, you can switch your performance type with no restrictions if your plans change.