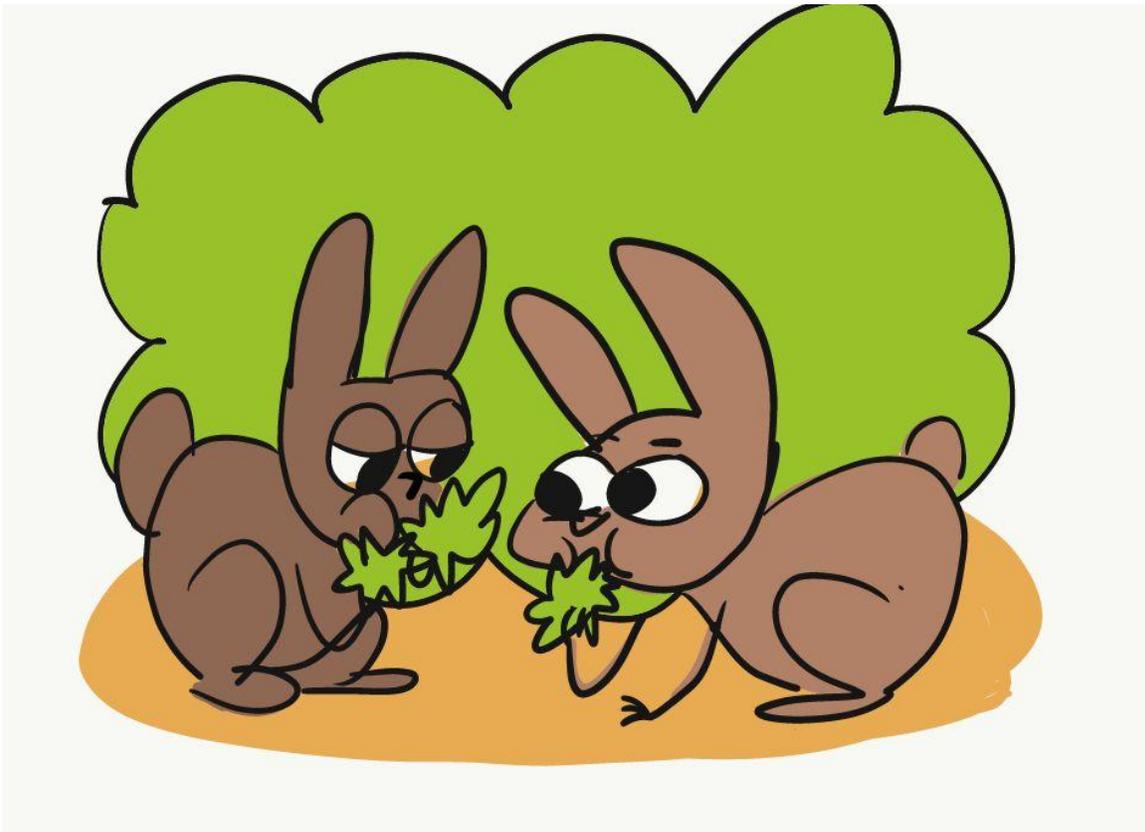


WAKAYIMA THE KING OF THE JUNGLE

By Ernest Bazanye

Mr Kafuddu was looking at Wakayima waiting for the answer to his question. Wakayima was ready to answer it. The cleverer animals in the forest all knew this. There was a time when Wakayima was visited by one of his hare cousins, Iculi, from the forests up north.



Wakayima had just told him about his conversation with the lioness when Iculi said, “These predators should be like us. We don’t have to sneak around and run after our food. We just walk up to it and there it is. It doesn’t even try to escape.”

The two of them nibbled at some leaves.

“See?” said Iculi. “I’m munching at this leaf. The next leaf I am going to eat is just dangling there waiting for its turn. If it were an antelope it would have run away by now.”

Wakayima suddenly had a thought. “But Iculi,” he said, “The carnivorous animals eat the herbivorous animals, right?”

By the way, in case some of you who are reading this are like Benedicto and you don’t remember what is taught in class, carnivorous means animals that eat meat, and herbivorous means animals that eat plants. Next time pay attention and take notes, instead of drawing cartoons in your books if you are like Benedicto. All he ever does is draw. Even in Art class.

Iculi, who knew this, said, “That is right.”

“So,” Wakayima asked, “What do the plants eat?”

Iculi stopped munching for a moment to think about it. Then he said, “I don’t know. Do they eat at all? What makes you think they eat?”

“Well, they grow, don’t they? Everything that eats grows, so I guess that means they must eat something. You put food in you and the food makes you bigger. So the plants must have some way of putting food inside themselves.”

“You have a point,” said Iculi. “But where are their mouths? How do you eat without a mouth?”

That is when a voice from under the bush joined the conversation. The voice was calm and low. It said, “You are eating its mouth.”

The hares looked under the bush and saw a tortoise under the bush, also munching at a leaf.

“Hey Wanfuddu,” said Wakayima to the tortoise. “Enjoying lunch?”

“Very much. This is the best way to eat. I stay under the bush because the leaves down here are much more tender. You should come down here, too, come to think of it,” Wanfuddu the tortoise said.

“Why down there? The leaves up here are much bigger,” said Iculi.

Wakayima turned to his cousin. “You should listen to what this guy says,” Wakayima told Iculi. “He is very wise.”

“It's better to be down here,” said Wanfuddu, “because when you are out there all the carnivores can see you and they are out there looking to eat you. Down here at least you are hidden.”

“Is that why you are down there? Hiding from predators?”

“No. I hide from predators in my shell. I'm down here because the leaves here are more tender. Wakayima, is your cousin paying attention?”

Both hares ended up under the bush a second later because the reason Iculi had not been paying attention to Wanfuddu was that he was paying attention to something else. A short distance away he spotted the shadow of a tail behind a rock.

“Dude, look out. Carnivore!” he whispered. Wakayima turned and saw a lion tail behind a rock. In an instant the hares were both underneath the bush.

“So, you see, the plants get food from two places. They get some from the soil. Animals eat plants, other animals eat each other, but when the animals die, they end up as soil, and the plants eat the soil through their roots. But that is not all,” Wanfuddu continued to say, because that is how tortoises are. They loved talking, even while eating.

Wakayima was not paying attention either. He was peering, alongside his cousin, out from under the bush at the lion that was walking around near the bush.

“They also get food from, and this is really amazing, eating the sun. Yeah,” continued Wanfuddu. “The leaves catch the sunlight and turn it into food. That is

why you always find most plants where it's sunny and you rarely see leafy plants in shade.”

“Look at him,” sniggered Wakayima in a whisper. He looks so desperate. I bet he had an argument with his wife and she refused to hunt any dinner for him today.”

“You guys eat the large leaves and the plant just sends more leaves out to take their place,” Wanfuddu kept on speaking. Tortoises were like that. They knew a lot of stuff and they liked talking about how much they knew. Hares, on the other hand, were cunning, not wise, so instead of listening and learning, they preferred to think up ideas. Mischievous ones.

“Are you thinking what I’m thinking?” Iculi asked Wakayima.

“Exactly what you’re thinking,” Wakayima replied.

As the lion walked past, with his miserable, hungry gait, he suddenly heard a high-pitched voice call. “Hey you, Wampologoma the lion. What’s up? You look really hungry. I thought you were the king. What kind of king can’t even get breakfast?”



Wampologoma looked around. He couldn't see anyone. "Who said that?" he roared.



"Me, the bush over here," came the reply. Of course it was actually from Wakayima and Iculi who were hiding under the bush faking high voices.

"What? Bushes can't talk!" roared the lion.

"Of course we can. We just don't like talking to you animals. You are so silly. Especially carnivores. Running around hunting each other to eat. You are so silly!"

"You are the one who is silly," the angry lion roared back. "If I don't hunt how will I eat? And if I don't eat, how will I be healthy? Stupid plant!"

"Well, you don't see us bushes hunting, and yet, look at me. I'm lush and healthy and bright green," replied the so-called "bush".

"That's because you don't have to eat. You are a bush," said the lion.

“Noooooo. It’s because you don’t know how to eat like me. The easy way. No hunting involved. I just sit here and eat the sunshine and it makes me grow large and thick and strong. One day I will be a huge tree. By then you will have starved to death, of course.”

“What do you mean eat sunshine?” the lion growled. The idea was new to him. “You can’t eat sunshine. Sunshine isn’t food.”

“Well, it is to me. I eat it all day. What do you think all my leaves are for? It is so I can catch sunshine to eat. See? All my leaves are facing the sun. It’s nyummy! You should try it instead of hunting, then you wouldn’t be so scrawny and skinny, looking like one of my twigs,” the pretend-bush replied.

The lion paused for a moment. “You really eat sunshine?” he asked.

“Do you ever see a bush eating anything else?” was the response.

“But how do you do it?” the lion answered.

Under the bush, Wakayima looked at Wanfudu and whispered, “How do they do it?”

“Well, we don’t have a word for it in animal language. In human language it is called photosynthesis,” Wanfuddu began to say but Iculi shushed him. If the lion heard another voice under the bush he would know the bush wasn’t talking.

“It’s easy. It’s just a bit of sofosinsisis. You just find a nice sunny spot and grow there and when the sun comes out it just spills over you and it is delicious! Next thing you know, you are a huge, fat tree.”

“Do you think I can do it?” asked the lion.

“I doubt it. You are just a silly animal, after all. Sosofeensipis is for cool things like us plants.”

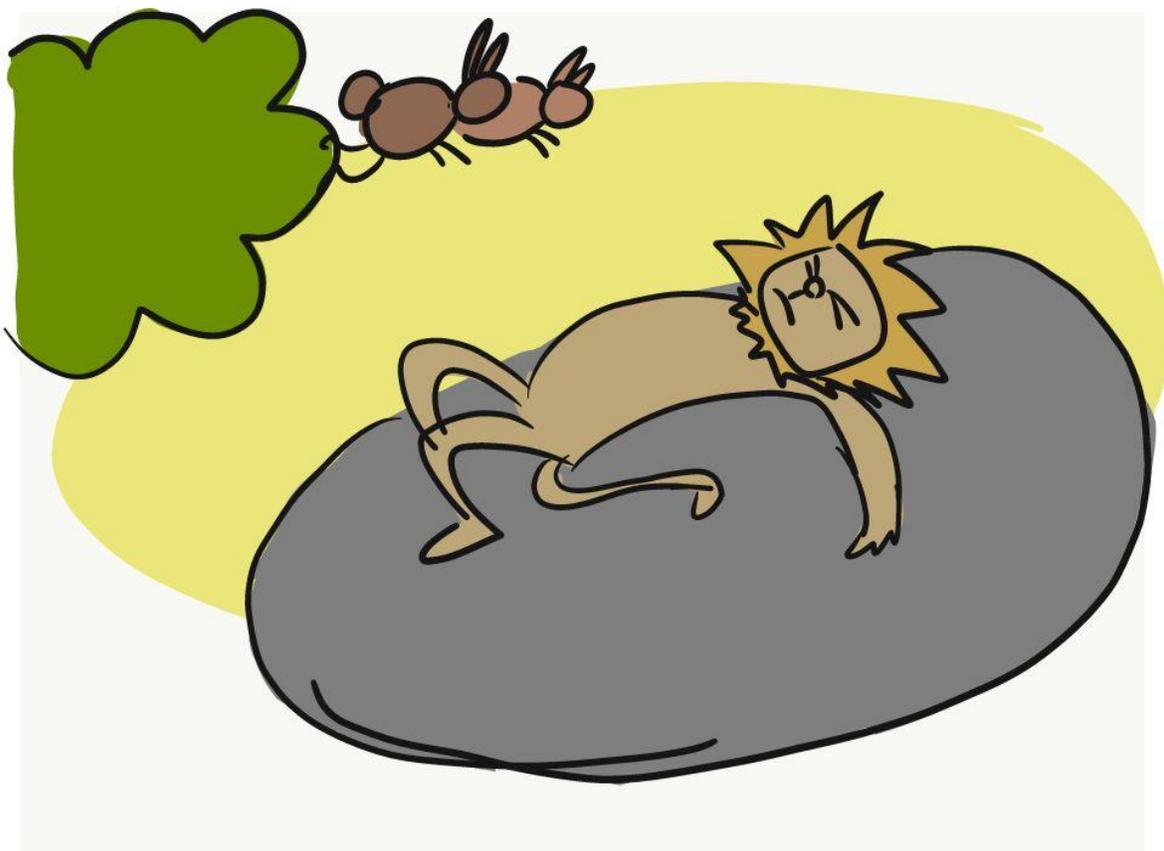
But the lion was really hungry and he couldn’t see any prey anywhere nearby. He had thought he had seen a couple of hares around but now there was no sign of them.

“Why don’t you give it a try. The sun is shining heavily on that rock over there. Try climbing onto it and see,” Iculi mimicked the bush.

The lion looked at the rock. “Yeah, let me climb onto it and try to sposonsinigeris or whatever you said. I’m so hungry I’ll try anything.”

“I guess you could,” replied Iculi in the bush voice. “But let me give you a tip. You have to close your eyes and block your ears and do not move. You have to act as much like a plant as possible, meaning, close your eyes, block your ears and don’t move.”

“Okay, got it,” said the lion. He climbed the rock. Spread himself over it, closed his eyes and lay as still as possible to see if the sunshine would make him feel less hungry.



And while he was on the rock with his eyes closed, Iculi and Wakayima winked at Wanfudu. “Thanks for the tip, Musomesa Wanfuddu,” they whispered. Then, each grabbed a couple of extra leaves and hopped gleefully away, far away from the hungry lion.

Back in class, though, Wakayima suddenly had a disturbing thought. How on earth did Mr Kafuddu know that he, Wakayima, knew about the plants?

Well, I guess you will have to wait for the next story to find out.

Hmmmm. What does Mr Kafuddu know? Hmmmmmm...

The adventures of the cheeky, cunning hare that sneaks into the human school continue with a fresh story each week. Join the mailing list by at >>>>>or visit bazanye.com/wakayima for the latest. Stay tuned!