

WAKAYIMA AND ROGER SOLVE NGIRI'S PROBLEM

By Ernest Bazanye

We stopped the last story in the forest with Wakayima hearing a voice behind him. But before we continue, let me take you back a few moments. About an hour before that. Back to the school.

With most kids, you end the day with your school bag a bit lighter than it was when you started. This is because you have left some books behind with the teacher for marking, and you have eaten your food and so on.

With Wakayima, aka Wakzi, it was always the opposite. He always arrived with a very light bag— it was almost empty— and he always left with some snacks. Whatever he had gotten during the day that he wanted to save for dinner.

Wakayima was always collecting simsim, or biscuits or doughnuts or roasted gonja or something tasty from around the school. What he didn't eat immediately, he saved in his bag to carry back to his home for dinner.

But on this day he had been out of sorts. His mind was far away. He was so preoccupied with his thoughts about the prefect, about his discovery that the class teacher was also an animal like him, and with anger at himself because he felt like one of his cunning plans was failing, that he completely forgot to pick up his bag when he set off after school.

Roger noticed it at Wakayima's desk. The bag with two gonjas wrapped in paper and just a couple of notebooks in it, was lying right there, forgotten on to of his friend Wakzi's desk in the empty class.



“Oh no,” thought Roger. “He’s left his bag behind. Let me keep it for him.” Or that is what he thought at first. Then he saw Wakayima through the window, heading off home. “Actually, I am sure if I rush I can get to him and give him the bag before his people collect him.” And with that thought, Roger picked up the bag and began to run out of the classroom and after his friend.

By the time he reached the school yard, however, Wakayima was quite a distance away. Roger tried to shout, but it was very far.

That wasn’t the only thing Roger noticed. Usually, the kids all gathered at the front of the school near the school parking yard where they could be picked up by their parents and guardians, but that is not where Wakayima was. In fact, he was at the opposite end of the school. He was behind the school buildings, far back behind the old metal swings, behind the stores and at the farthest wall at the back of the school. That is where Wakayima was.

Roger was curious. He couldn’t understand what his friend was doing there. Now Roger was not just eager to give him the bag, he was also eager to find out why Wakayima was going in the wrong direction. So he quickened his steps.

But Wakayima was quite far away, and even though Roger was now a faster runner, Wakayima was still quite quick. It was not easy for Roger to catch up, and even when he tried to shout, Wakayima was too far ahead of him. Not that Wakayima would have heard him, so deeply buried in thought was he.

As Roger followed, he began to get even more curious, because this path they were on was quite a strange path. Not only had Wakayima hopped over the school wall but, after Roger, who couldn't hop as high and had to climb over it, finally got over the wall, he found himself in a bushy, heavily wooded area with a narrow path along it. "Is this where Wakzi's parents pick him up?" Roger wondered, as he followed the distant form of his friend.

"Wakzi! Wakzi! My guy! You left your bag!" he shouted, but the distance was too great. Roger just followed onwards.

Things got even stranger when he saw Wakayima turn round a sudden corner in the path and vanish from view.

When Roger finally reached the corner and took it, he stopped in surprise. There was nothing there but two boulders above a hole in the ground. Roger wondered what was going on.

Obviously, since he could not see Wakzi, that must mean he had gone down the hole.

"Well, here I go as well," Roger said to himself. And he crouched to the ground and climbed into the hole.

In case you have wondered to yourself, how is it that Wakayima, or Ngiri for that matter, get to school in the town every day, yet the forest is usually so far away from any school? Well this is how. They pass through that magic hole.

In what seemed like an instant Roger was out of the other end of the hole and, like magic, he was in the middle of the forest. It was as if he had covered the miles and miles between the town full of people and the wilderness full of animals in just a few seconds by passing through this hole.



Roger looked around him at the trees, and the bushes. The vegetation in the wilderness is very different from what you find in towns and cities. It is thicker and stronger and more colourful. There are different trees and different plants.

There are also quite a few animals. Roger saw some monkeys swing through the trees above him. A squirrel rushed past in front of him.

When he heard a roar and looked to his left and saw a huge chimpanzee, he was suddenly worried. "What is going on?" he asked himself.

He looked around as the fear grew. He was in the middle of a wild forest surrounded by animals. And it was getting dark. What was he going to do?

Then he saw the figure of Wakzi just ahead of him. "Phew," he thought. "At least I can ask Wakzi where we are."

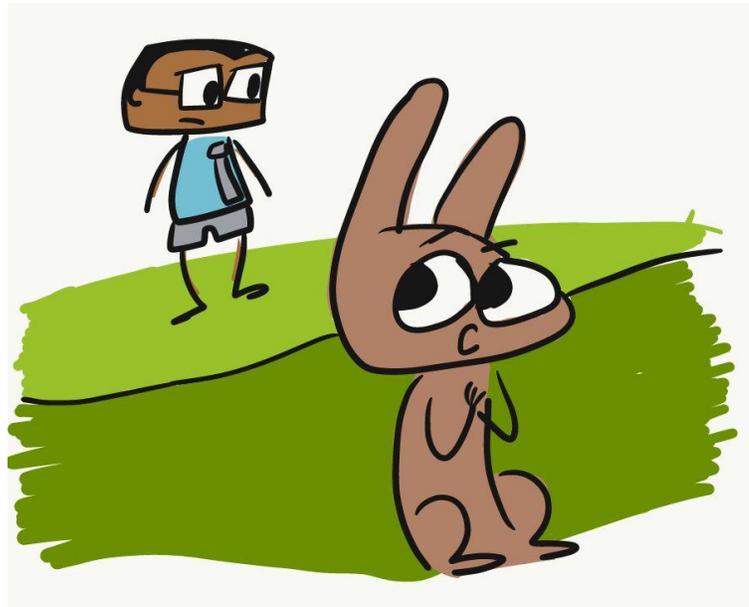
But that is when things got strangest, because, right before his eyes, Roger saw his friend, who he knew as the schoolboy Wakayima nicknamed Wakzi, stretch his ears, bend his knees, curl his back, twist his nose, toss away his shirt and the rest of his uniform and then, the moment Wakayima had finally turned into from a boy into a hare, Roger almost collapsed in shock.

When Wakayima heard Roger's voice behind him, he also almost collapsed in shock, too. What was Roger doing here? Oh no! His secret had been discovered!

Wakayima turned round sharply. "It's not what you think it is," he began to say.

"Are you sure? I think I am asleep and it is a dream. I would rather you tell me that it is what I think it is. Otherwise, you are going to tell me that all along you were a wild animal in disguise?"

"Okay, this is what it is," admitted Wakayima. "One day I discovered that hole that I can pass through to get to the city, and I learned how to change my body into a human one, and then I learned about cassava crisps and simsim and after that I could not resist coming to school..."



"So you have been tricking us all along, pretending to be something you are not?" Roger was a bit angry. He felt as if he had been deceived.

"Well, yeah. But to be fair, I am a hare. Tricksters are what we really are, so when I trick people, I am actually being who I really am, so I have been being myself around you guys all along."

Roger thought about this and it confused him too much.

“Besides, what did you want me to do? Tell you that, ‘By the way, Roger, I am not a crazy human. I am a hare from the forest.’ You would not have believed me.”

“That is true. I would have thought you were trying to trick me again.”

“So, are we cool?”

Roger thought about it for a moment, muttering, “No wonder he always says humans are crazy, and never seems to know about anything outside school every human being knows,” then he agreed. After all, Wakzi was his best friend at school and he had forgiven him for many other things already.

After Wakayima told him the whole story of how he wanted to make Ngiri the prefect, Roger shook his head. “Like I said, there is something you are forgetting.”

“What is that? Do you think Mr Kafuddu knows that Ngiri is also a wild animal?”

“No, you are forgetting the high grades part. Does Ngiri have high grades?”

“You will be surprised,” said Wakayima. “You humans don’t understand many things. That is why you think you are the most intelligent species and other animals are less intelligent than you. You don’t understand that there are many different kinds of intelligence.”

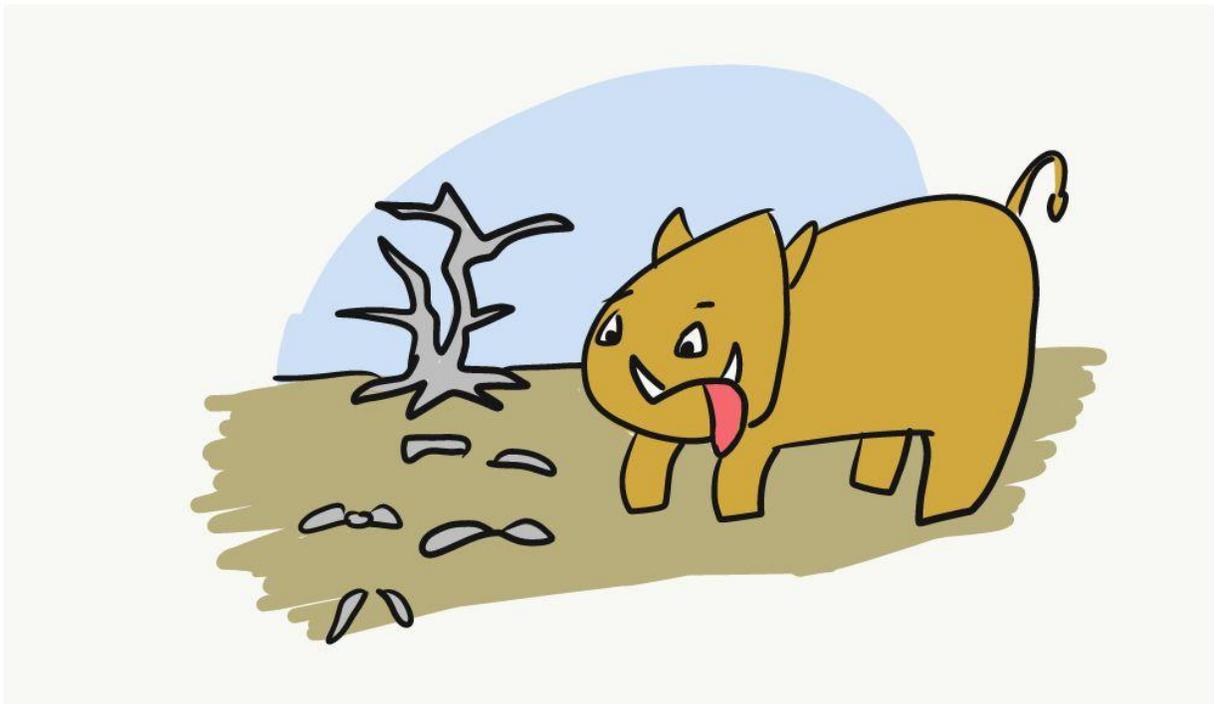
Roger just said, “Hmmmmm,” and prepared to listen.

Wakayima continued. “Take me, for example. My intelligence is cunning and trickery. Then there is Mr Kafuddu, or Wanfuddu the tortoise. His intelligence is wisdom. Do you know what Warthog intelligence is?”

Roger said, “I don’t want to sound mean, but Ngiri has always struck me as rather slow-witted.”

“Oh, yes. He is slow-witted,” Wakayima said. “But that doesn’t mean that he is stupid. Let me tell you about warthog intelligence.” And Wakayima told Roger this story.

One day in the wilderness, Wangiri was foraging around for some food. He was not having much luck because the dry season was coming to an end. All the plants that had bloomed and matured during the sunny days, well, he had found them all and, over the course of the season, eaten them all. When he returned to the field he had been visiting for breakfast all month long he found only wilting plants with no roots. The roots had been his favourite part and Wangiri had eaten them all.



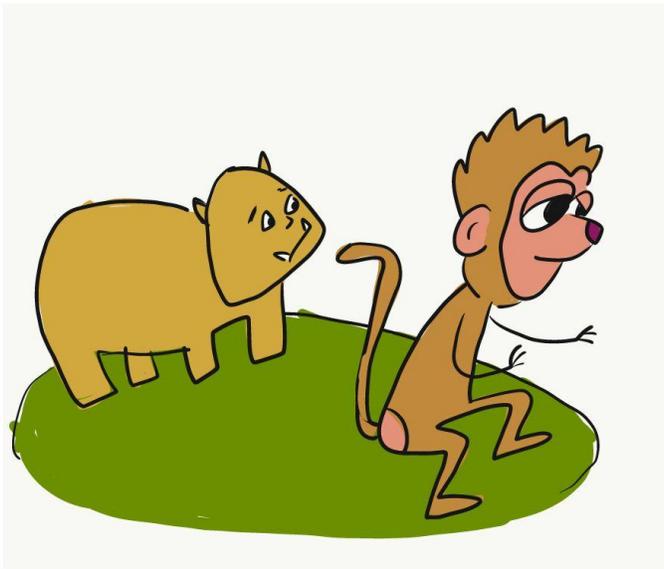
As we all know plants have two mouths— their leaves, which eat sunlight and their roots, which eat nutrients from the soil.

These plants had no leaves left (this was thanks to other animals, including the hares and tortoises) and, due to Wangiri, no roots left either.

But before he could give up hope, Wangiri's nose picked up a scent in the breeze. It was the smell of a baboon.

Wangiri followed the scent. He thought he might find that the baboon knew where to find some food if he followed it.

But nope. When he came upon the baboon and he asked, "What's up Wakiyaga?"



Wakiyaga the baboon replied, "Nothing much. Just doing some personal business. You probably should leave. It's going to be smelly business."

I am not going to go into details, but some of you will understand what was meant.

Okay, for those of you who don't get it, the baboon was doing pupu.

Wangiri was quite hungry, yes, but the baboon's business was also quite smelly. It can put you right off your appetite, so Wangiri ambled off to forage somewhere less stinky.

Now let me tell you something about baboons. Baboons eat fruits. But sometimes, when the fruits are eaten, whereas the rest of the fruit is soft and nummy, there are seeds in it that are small and hard and can't be digested. So when the baboon goes to business, the seeds come out intact and settle on the ground.

The rainy season came, and soon there were plenty of plants to eat. Wangiri's foraging was much easier and he enjoyed it very much.

Until the season was coming to an end and again, Wangiri found that he had overeaten at his favourite patch of plants.

But then, as he rooted around the dead plants he remembered something. Last time this happened he had met a baboon that had just pupud somewhere nearby.

Wangiri didn't need to even use his nose. He already remembered exactly where the baboon had gone.

That is where Wangiri went, too, that day and sure enough, at the exact spot, Wangiri found a proud little bush.

The seed had taken root, grown and was now ready to eat.

So what if it had grown out of pupu? Warthogs don't care.

Wangiri fed on that plant for days and enjoyed it immensely.

That was the thing about warthogs. They had great memories. Even after all that time had passed, after two whole seasons had come and gone, the warthog never forgot that there had been seeds there and so he easily remembered that he would find a nice plant right there waiting.

“Wow,” said Roger. “With a memory like that, he must have no problem passing all his classes.”

“Exactly,” Wakayima said. “He remembers everything. It is just that he often doesn’t care about the formation of mountain ranges or about Zwangendaba and the Ngoni Migration of the 19th Century because that is just human nonsense to him. But he remembers it all, and when the homework comes, it isn’t hard for him to just get the answers right.”

“But what if Mr Kafuddu finds out that he is also an animal, will he allow him to be prefect?” Roger asked.

“Let’s go talk to old Wise Wanfuddu right now and see,” said Wakayima. “But don’t walk too fast. Remember that I am in my hare form so I am smaller than you. I can’t take those large human steps of yours.”

“No wonder you were always saying humans are crazy,” said Roger as they walked down the forest path.

“But they are,” said Wakayima.

Wakayima hopped ahead and up a short shaded path then stopped at a bush where a tortoise stood looking interestedly at some low-hanging leaves.

“There he is,” said Wakayima.

“You said we were going to meet Mr Kafuddu,” said Roger.

“I don’t see Mr Kafuddu. I only see a tortoi... are you trying to tell me Mr Kafuddu is also an animal in disguise?”

“Yup,” answered Wakayima. “He was actually a tortoise all along. When I found out the truth, the only thing that shocked me more than the fact that he was also a forest animal was when he spoke and his accent had totally vanished.”

“Wakayima, is that Roger? Hello Roger. So, you finally found out your best friend’s secret,” Wanfuddu said.

Roger felt a second wave of shock to hear the voice coming out of the tortoise’s mouth. It was clearly Mr Kafuddu’s voice, but with no trace of Mr Kafuddu’s funny accent. It was quite confusing to hear Mr Kafuddu’s voice without Mr Kafuddu pronouncing Ch and R and Fr in all sorts of unexpected places. It was as if someone had taken Mr Kafuddu’s voice and ruined it. Mr Kafuddu’s accent was half the fun of listening to Mr Kafuddu speak.

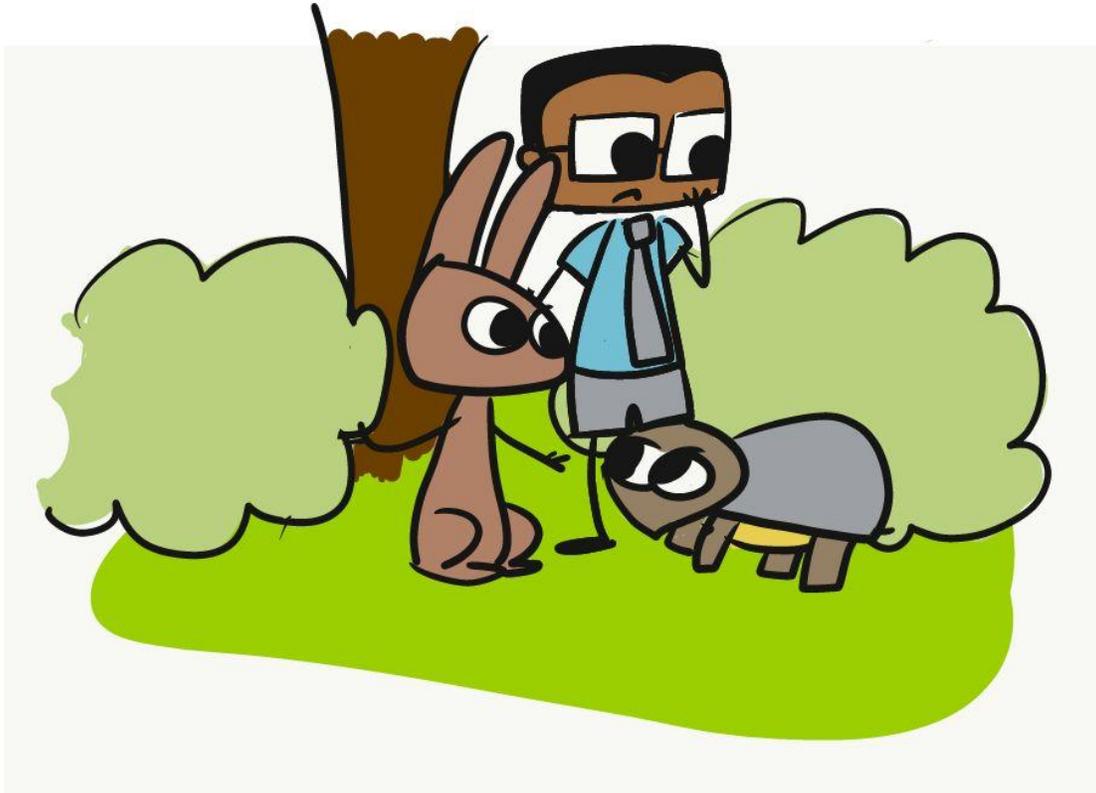
“What happened to the accent? I miss the accent,” Roger said.

“Really?” replied Wanfuddu. “You just found out that your class teacher is actually a talking tortoise and your first question is how come I can pronounce the word ‘friend’ instead of saying ‘fwenj’? I have to work harder on your education, Roger.”

“Sorry. I also don’t know why it is more shocking to hear you speak like that than it is to find out that you are a tortoise, sir,” Roger replied. “But it just is.”

“Told you!” said Wakayima.

They proceeded to tell the tortoise what had brought them there and explained their plan and why they wanted a new class prefect.



“But why should you want Ngiri to be prefect?” Wanfuddu asked.

Wakayima had a lot of reasons. “He would be the best prefect for stopping noisemakers in class. Much much better than Josiah was. For example, just tell him that anyone who says more words than Ngiri is a noisemaker, and there you have it. Ngiri hardly ever says more than two words at a time. Plus, once Ngiri writes down your name, who is going to make him rub it out? Even though he can’t bully anyone anymore, that doesn’t mean anyone can bully him.”

Wanfuddu thought deeply about this. As a wise tortoise he was able to see a useful plan just as well as he would as a wise teacher. And so the next week, Ngiri the student was named class prefect.

Ngiri turned out to be the best choice for prefect. First of all, the kids actually kept quiet in class when he was writing names because few of them dared try to challenge him the way they had challenged Josiah.

Natalia tried once.

“When was I talking? What do you mean I was making noise in class? When? When was I talking?”



“Even now,” said Ngiri. And he wrote her name down again.

She realised who she was dealing with and went back to her desk to be quiet and revise her History book.

In addition to this, there is the fact that Ngiri was quite strong. When a warthog transforms into a human it keeps a lot of its warthog strength, which is quite a lot of strength.

And one of the things with being a prefect is every time there is a tough job, everyone looks to the prefect to do it.

When the teachers need someone to help them carry books or equipment for anything to or from the staffroom and they ask, “Who can help me carry these?” Everyone expects the prefect to do it. Ngiri didn’t mind, because he could carry whole kilos of books easily.

When people had their desks stuck, or they couldn’t unzip a bag, or reach a shelf or any of that sort of thing, they could always call upon the prefect to help. He

would grunt and come along and just flip the desk open, or grab the book off the top shelf.

He most especially enjoyed it when they could not open the lid of a container of food or juice because, naturally, after the prefect helps you open your container you have to share what is in it with the prefect. It is just good manners. Ngiri had finally found the perfect space for himself in the school. He was useful, he was respected, he got to eat plenty of great snacks and this of course included the prefect's doughnut, which was provided to all prefects from the staff room. Roger and Wakayima were proud of themselves for having made this happen. Wakayima realised that even though he had come to the human world just to get a few tasty things to eat, it was worth a lot more to make friends. And it was also very rewarding when his friends and himself could come together to help someone who needed it.

Hope you enjoyed these stories! Tell your friends and share them!

The adventures of the cheeky, cunning hare that sneaks into the human school have been coming out each week. If you want to read the whole series, Join the mailing list by at >>>>>or visit bazanye.com/wakayima for the latest. Enjoy and don't forget to share with your friends!