

The king, his sons and the blue-footed bird

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Once the Drakensberg was known as the Great Mountain and the king used to climb to the top with his twin sons, Khahlamba and Thukela, to show them the Great River and the fields below.

“One day these lands will be yours to rule and our people will look up to you for guidance,” the king would say.

His sons would just nod when he said this, but as they grew older, things changed. One afternoon the boys followed their father up the mountain as usual, and at the top he told them again of how they would rule one day. This time, instead of just nodding, they questioned their father.

“But, father,” began Khahlamba, “which of us will you choose to rule?”

“Yes, father,” added Thukela, “which of us do you favour?”

The king was surprised. He couldn’t answer his sons. So, instead he said, “The sun is setting, we must go now.”

For a long time, the king’s sons’ questions troubled him. At night, he tossed and turned and during the day, he sat alone thinking about the questions over and over again. He could not decide which of his sons should rule because he loved them both. He hadn’t thought that one day he might have to choose between them.

One morning the king called his advisors.

“Nkosi, you called,” they said as they came bowing into the hut.

“I need to know which of my sons you think should rule after me,” the king said.

Two of the four advisors said, “You should choose Khahlamba, Nkosi. He is brave and strong, like you.”

The other two advisors replied, “Nkosi, you should choose Thukela. He is wise, like you.”

Back and forth they went, which left the king more confused than before.

That night at midnight, while the king slept, a blue-footed bird flew into his hut and sat down next to him.



“Nkosi,” it squawked.

The king jumped up and grabbed his spear. “Who comes at this late hour?” he asked.

“Nkosi,” said the bird, “you are troubled and I’m here to help you.”

“But you are just feathers and beak, how can you help?” asked the king.

“I can change into any animal big or small. I can help you,” squawked the bird.

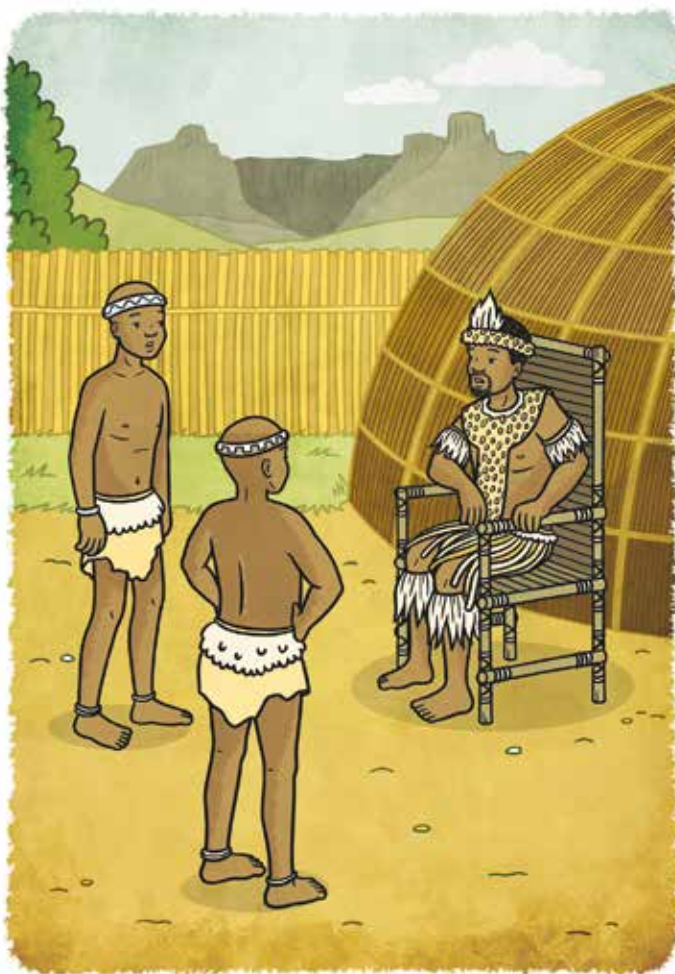
The king was wise and knew better than to trust a bird that could change into other animals. But he wanted to know how the bird planned to help him so he said, “Speak, I’m listening.”

“On the night of the harvest you will send your sons to me. The one who returns, will be the king,” said the bird.

“What about the one who doesn’t return?” asked the king.

The bird didn’t answer this question and instead said, “Trust me, great king, I know best.” Then the bird flapped its wings and flew away leaving the king feeling even more confused.

When the king woke up the following morning, he sent for his sons. “Listen to me very carefully for I will only say this once,” said the king. “On the morning of the harvest I want you to take my spear and hunt a kudu. Don’t go beyond our lands and make sure that you bring the kudu to me at midnight.”



“Yes, father,” said the king’s sons obediently.

On the morning of the harvest, the sons woke up before sunrise and went into the forest with their father’s spear as he had told them to do. No one but their father knew where they were going and what they were going to do.

At midnight, the blue-footed bird flew back into the king’s hut. He found the king awake, waiting for his sons to return.



“Nkosi,” squawked the bird, “I searched for your sons, but I could not find them. Have you hidden them, oh great king?”

“I know better than to trust you, Mamlambo,” said the king.

“What? How did you know it was me?” asked the bird, this time with a cold hiss instead of a squawk.

“Mamlambo is the only creature that can turn into other animals,” replied the king.

“Well, you are a wise king indeed! Too bad that you will have to suffer now!” said the bird as it waved its left wing and changed into a large coiled snake that filled the hut.



“Hiss! You should have sss-sarcificed one of your sss-sonsss,” said the creature whipping its tail and coiling itself around the king.

“I am not afraid of you!” cried the king.

“We’ll ss-see about that,” said Mamlambo squeezing the king even tighter.

Eventually the king could take no more. “I ... give up ... I’ll tell you ...,” he choked.

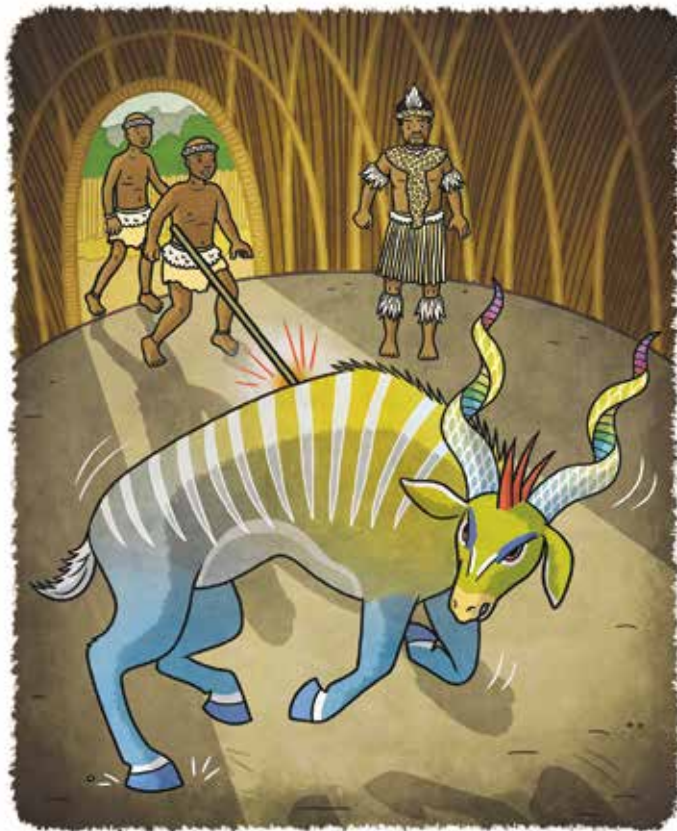
“Good, little king,” sneered Mamlambo. “Where are your sons?”

“I sent them hunting. They’re looking for a kudu. If you change into a kudu you’ll see they will come to you,” said the king.

The creature lashed its tail and turned into a kudu!

“Where are they?” demanded Mamlambo.

Suddenly Khahlamba charged into the hut and tossed the king’s spear. Mamlambo tried to move away, but slipped and the spear went into the creature’s side. Mamlambo shouted so loudly that the hut shook, “You tricked me! Now I will turn into an even bigger snake!”



Mamlambo tapped the ground and changed. But instead of changing into a bigger snake, he turned into a tiny ant! The ant scuttled across the floor trying to run away, but Thukela squashed him with his foot and that was the end of Mamlambo! The two princes had saved their father.

“How did you both know that something was wrong?” the king asked his sons.

“Thukela was wise enough to know that kudus cannot be found in our land, so we knew that this meant you wanted us to be away until midnight and that didn’t seem right,” answered Khahlamba.

The king was proud of his sons. The next day he named the Great Mountain, *uKhahlamba* and the Great River, *uThukela*. And when it was the right time, he made sure that the throne was shared by both his sons.

To this day, the great mountain and the river are still known as *izintaba zoKhahlamba no Thukela*.

Get story active!

Here are some ideas for using the story on pages 1 to 3 with the children in your class and/or your reading club. Choose the ideas that best suit the ages and interests of the children.

- ★ On a large sheet of paper, draw a picture of a king and write, "WANTED: NEW KING". As a way of introducing the story, show the children the sheet of paper and then say, "If you had to choose a new king, what would you want him to be like?" Encourage the children to share what qualities they think a king should have and why.
- ★ After you have read the story, discuss the king's decision to choose both his sons to rule. Ask the children to share their views on this and to suggest what

they would have done if they were the king.

- ★ Suggest that the children draw the part of the story where Mamlambo has turned into an ant, or any other part of the story that was their favourite.
- ★ Give the children clay or playdough and let them use it to make one of the animals that Mamlambo changes into in the story.
- ★ Together act out the story. Let some of the children choose to be a character from the story – the king, Khahlamba, Thukela, the king's four advisors and Mamlambo as the bird, snake, kudu and ant. Let the other children be the narrators who read the story while the characters act it out.

About the Story Powered Schools project

Nal'ibali (isiXhosa for "here's the story") is a national reading-for-enjoyment campaign to spark children's potential through storytelling and reading.

Story Powered Schools is a pilot project bringing the Nal'ibali reading-for-enjoyment campaign's proven approach to literacy development to selected schools in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. Endorsed by the Department of Education, it has been made possible by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The schools that are part of the Story Powered Schools project are committed to sparking their learners' potential through storytelling and reading. They use the power of stories to inspire their learners to want to read and write.

