

The woman of the mountain

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Three warriors met at a crossroad for the first time. They were all on their way to the mountain. They looked at each other and then one of them spoke. "I am Buntu from the east village. I have been sent by my king to find the woman of the mountain," he said.

The second warrior said, "I have been sent by my king from the north village to find the woman of the mountain. My name is Lwazi."

"And I am Khathaza from the west village," said the third warrior. "I'm also on the same quest."

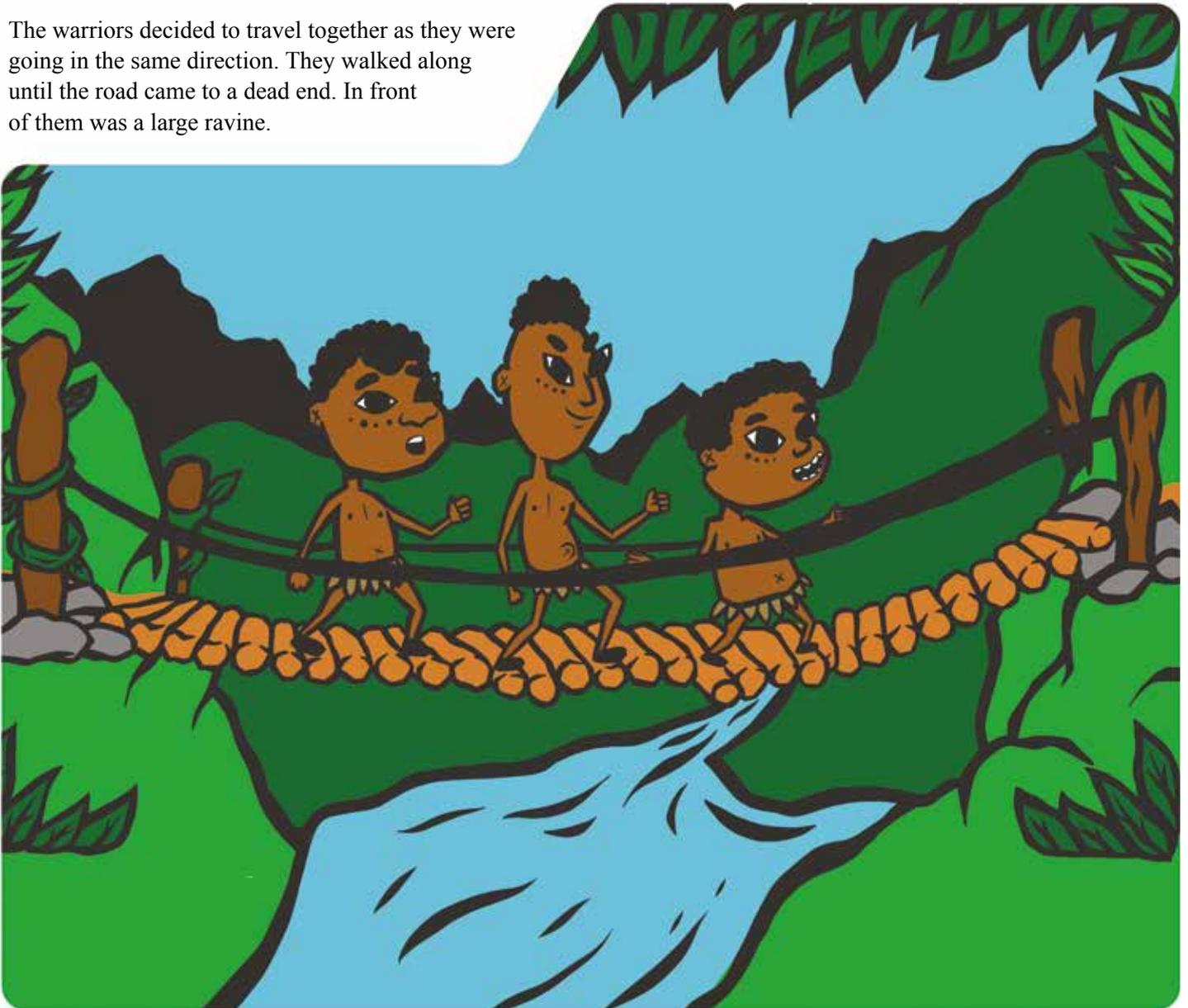
The warriors decided to travel together as they were going in the same direction. They walked along until the road came to a dead end. In front of them was a large ravine.

"We should go around the ravine," said Buntu.

"But that would take days. We must think of another way," said Lwazi.

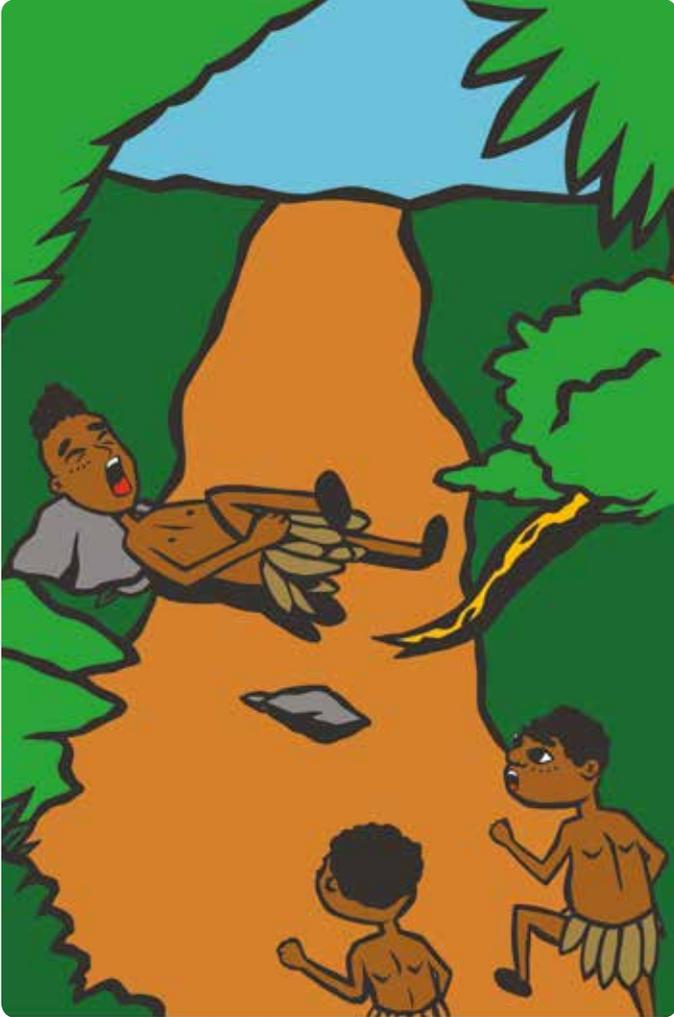
"There is a way," said Khathaza. "My people are good builders and they have taught me a lot about building. With your help, I can build a bridge."

The warriors gathered logs and vines, and together they made a strong bridge. Then they crossed the bridge and continued on their journey.



They walked along for a while until they saw the mountain in the distance ahead of them.

As they drew closer, Lwazi hurried in front of the others. He did not see the snake on the path. He stepped on it and it bit his foot. When Buntu and Khathaza finally caught up to him, they found him crying in pain.



Buntu ran into the bush and returned with a plant that he had dug up. “My people are gifted with the knowledge of plants,” he said. “This plant’s leaves will stop the poison from travelling deep into your wound.” He rubbed the leaves on Lwazi’s wound.

After a while, Lwazi stopped groaning. “Thank you,” he said, “the pain has gone.” Lwazi was limping, but he could still walk, so the warriors continued their journey.

They walked for most of the day. They were hot, tired and thirsty when they came to a crystal clear pool at the foot of the mountain. Khathaza was the first to run to it. He knelt down to drink. Lwazi grabbed his shoulder and held him back.

“Something about this pool is not right,” warned Lwazi.

But Khathaza was so thirsty that he leaned forward to drink the water. Suddenly, a hand reached out from the water and pulled him in. Buntu and Lwazi tried to save him, but they couldn’t. Then a young woman appeared.

“It’s the woman of the mountain,” whispered Lwazi.

“We must kneel down to show her respect or we will also be pulled into the pool.” The two warriors knelt in front of the young woman.

“Travellers,” she said, “if you wish to save your friend, you must solve a riddle.”

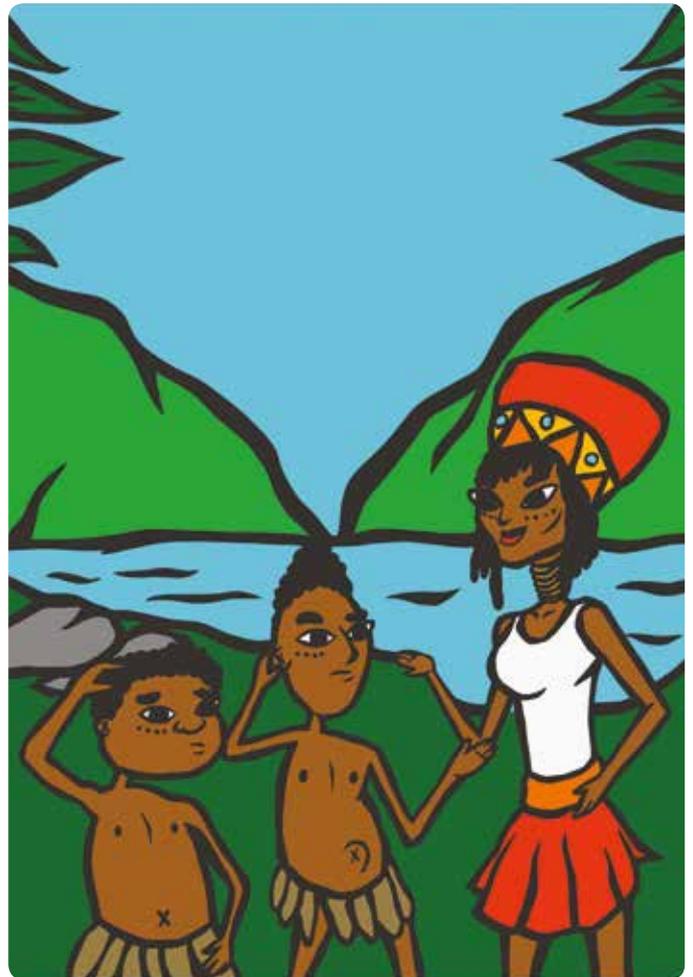
“What happens if we fail?” asked Buntu.

“Well, then you will join your friend,” she replied.

“Are you ready?”

“Yes, we are,” replied Lwazi. Buntu was too nervous to speak. “Don’t worry! My people are gifted with knowledge,” Lwazi whispered to Buntu.

“My night is your day and my day is your night,” began the woman. “I am a month old, but have been around for millions of years. What am I?”



“I know,” said Lwazi. “If your day is our night, then that means you can only be seen at night. You are the moon. The moon has been around for a very, very long time.”

The woman nodded and Khathaza appeared out of the water. He was so grateful to have been saved.



“You have come to the mountainside and you have completed the test. I will now grant each of you one wish,” said the woman.

Buntu was the first to make a wish. “Every time there is a storm, the water floods the land. I wish that the floods would stop.”

Lwazi spoke next. “A terrible drought has destroyed my village’s crops. I wish for rain.”

Khathaza was the last to speak. “My people don’t know how to grow plants. We only have meat to eat. Now our children are sick. My wish is that you would give us fields full of different kinds of fruit and vegetables.”

The woman of the mountain sat on a rock and thought about the warriors’ wishes.

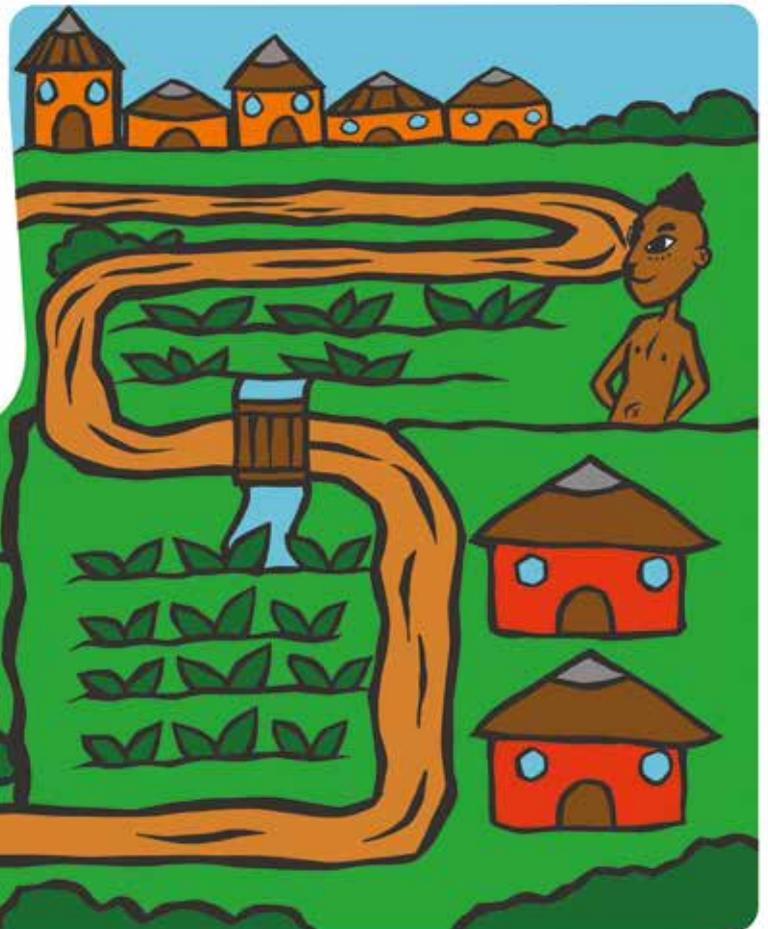
“Sadly, I will not be able to grant your wishes,” she said. “But you can grant each other your wishes.”

“But how? We don’t have magic,” said Khathaza.

“You don’t need magic,” she replied. “Khathaza, you and your people are great builders. If you build a canal, you can lead the flood water away from Buntu’s people’s fields. Lwazi, if you help Khathaza, you can lead that canal to your fields and then you will not have to wait for the rain. You will get the water from the canal. Buntu, you and your people are gifted with the knowledge of plants. You can teach Khathaza how to grow different fruits and vegetables.” The woman of the mountain smiled. “That is how all of you can have your wishes granted.”

As the three warriors listened carefully to the woman, they understood why they did not need magic. They learnt that they only needed each other. They understood that all it would take for them to have what they wanted, was for them to work together just as they had done on the path up to the mountain.

And so it was that the people from all three villages helped each other and they all prospered.



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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.

- ★ Before you read the story, go outside and play a game with the children. You need something that is easy to throw and catch like a ball or a beanbag. Ask a volunteer to be a lion who wants to catch children. When the game begins, everyone runs around in the space with the lion trying to catch one of them. They are only safe when they are holding the ball or beanbag, so the children have to throw it to each other as soon as they see the lion chasing one of them. After the game, explain that you are going to read them a story about how important it is to work together, just like they did in the game.
- ★ After you have read the story, together discuss questions like these.
 - What lesson did the warriors learn?

- Do you think that any of the warriors would have been able to reach the woman of the mountain on his own? Why/why not?

- ★ Ask the children to suggest other titles for the story.
- ★ Have a discussion about what different symbols can mean, for example, what do the children think a green leaf, a lion or an owl could be symbols of. What do they think the colours, purple, green and blue show? Now let the children create a flag for each of the warriors using colours and symbols that show what his people are good at.
- ★ Suggest that the children think of something in nature to make up a riddle about. (Example: You throw away the outside and cook the inside. Then you eat the outside and throw away the inside. What am I? Answer: A mealie.) When they have finished, let the children share their riddles with each other and try to guess the answers.

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.

