The cat with the trombone

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Once upon a time a farmer in Moletjie, Limpopo, held music auditions. The farmer was looking for a great singer who could also play music very well. He wanted the winner of the audition to perform at his wedding.
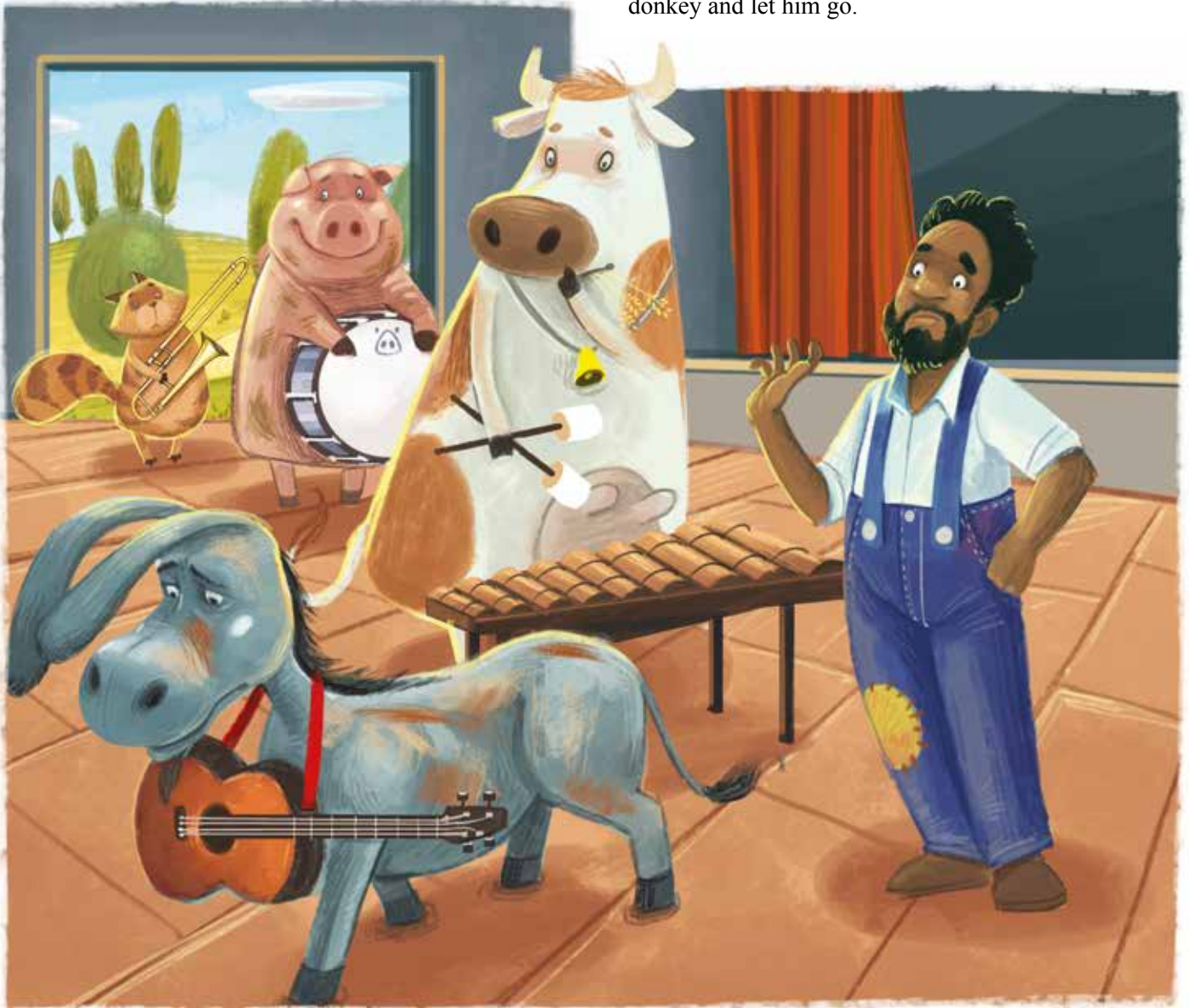
The farmer called the animals together. "Please listen carefully to everything I say," he said. "Tomorrow, I want you to come to the community hall to try out in the music audition. I want you to be clean and look good. You must be able to sing and play music well, and I want you to be interested in what you are doing. Come and show me how good you are."

All the animals listened to him and nodded.

The next day the first animal to audition, was the dusty donkey who had brought his guitar with him. Donkey was given a song sheet to follow. He started playing his guitar:
Twing! Twing! Taaar!
Twong! Twong! Tuu!
Blong! Blong! Beeee!

Then he started singing too:
Oooh! Oooh!
Oooh! Ooooh!

The farmer liked the donkey's music, but he was not happy that the donkey was dirty and dusty. "I like your music. You are a very good guitar player, but you are too dusty to sing at my wedding." The farmer thanked the donkey and let him go.

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Next to audition was the chewing cow. She had brought a marimba with her. She was also given a song sheet to follow.

The cow started playing her marimba:
Donk! Donk! Daah!
Dong! Daah!
Pong! Pong! Piiih!

Then she started singing too:
Mooooo! Mooooo! Oooh!
Mooooo! Mooooo! Oooh!
Mooooo! Mooooo!

The farmer was happy with the cow's marimba playing, but he did not like it that she chewed while she was singing. "You are a great marimba player," said the farmer, "but you are not serious about what you are doing. You shouldn't chew while you are singing." The farmer thanked the cow and let her go as well.

Next came the cheeky, muddy pig with a big drum. The pig walked up to the donkey and cow. He started by telling them that he was the best and he would be chosen to sing at the farmer's wedding. Then the pig told the donkey and cow to leave immediately because they shouldn't waste any more of their time.

The pig started playing his drum:
Baah! Boom! Baaah!
Boom! Baam! Boom!
Bom! Bom! Bom!

Then the cheeky, muddy pig started singing too:
Ooiiiooiiooiiii! Ooiiiooiiooiiii!
Ooiiiooiiooiiii! Ooiiiooiiooiiii!
Grooor! Gruuur! Grrrrr!

After he had finished his song, the farmer said, "You played your drum well, but you are very rude and you don't look after yourself. You are muddy and smelly." Then the farmer thanked the pig and let him go as well. The pig was sad, especially when the cow and donkey laughed at him as he left the audition hall.

Next to come to the stage was the cat. She had brought a trombone with her. The cat wanted to make sure that she was very clean. Before she went on stage, she licked her fur until it shone.

The cat started playing her beautiful trombone:
Meaaaaaaau! Meaaaaaaau! Meaaaaaaau!
Grrrrgrrrraaau! Meaaaaaaau! Grrrrgrrrraaau!
Meaaaaaaau! Meaaaaaaau! Meaaaaaaau!

Sometimes she would play the trombone very high and sometimes very low. Sometimes she danced too. The farmer clapped his hands at every sound the cat made. He was very happy because he had found the animal who would perform at his wedding.

"You look very clean," said the farmer. "I like the way you played your trombone. You have a great talent. You also showed great interest in your music. I choose you to play at my wedding in Polokwane next week."

The donkey, the cow and the pig wanted to know what the cat had done to be chosen.

"You must always look clean and show interest. You must also show that you enjoy your own performance. Make sure you follow the song sheet and look professional when you perform," the cat said.

The donkey, the cow and the pig looked so sad that they had not been selected to sing at the farmer's wedding, that the cat felt sorry for them. Then she had an idea! She asked them if they would all like to join her and form a band! They were so pleased.

"We must start practising our songs right away. We have one week," the cat said to the donkey, cow and pig. The group practised every day.

On the day of the farmer's wedding, he was surprised to see all the animals together on the stage. They all looked very clean. The cow had also stopped chewing and the pig had stopped being cheeky.
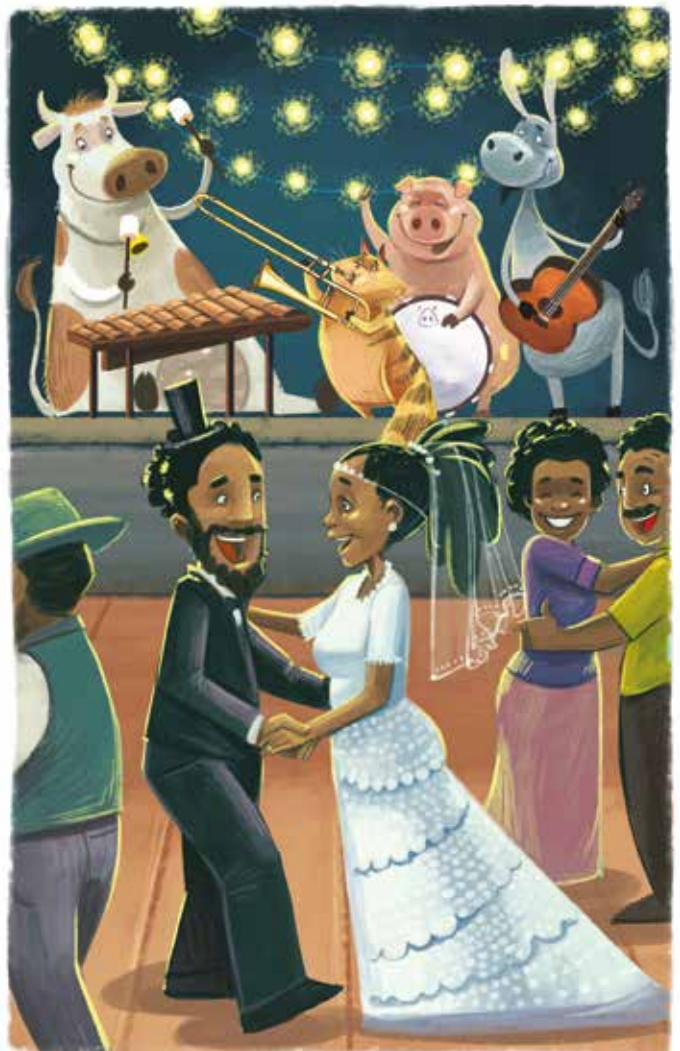
With the cat on the trombone, the pig on the drum, the donkey on the guitar and the cow on the marimba, the music began!

The band started their first song:
Oooh! Oooh! Oooh! Ooooh! Prrrrrrrrrrr! Mooooo! Mooooo! Moooo! Mooooo! Booom! Booom! Booom! Ooiiiooiiooiiii! Meaaaaaaau! Meaaaaaaau! Meaaaaaaau! Grrrrgrrrraaau! Meaaaaaaau! Grrrrgrrrraaau!

The farmer was so happy with the music the band played, that he invited the animals to sit at the table next to him for the wedding feast.

Everyone at the wedding enjoyed the music. They clapped their hands and danced to the music until the sun came up the next morning.

From that day on, the band received lots of invitations to perform at other weddings around Limpopo. The donkey, pig and cow thanked the cat for helping them and they all became great friends.

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.

* As a way of introducing the story, ask the children to use any object as a musical instrument – or let them use their hands and/or feet in different ways to create rhythms. Sing a song together while the children play their instruments. Then, explain that you are going to read a story about animals who played in a band.

* After you have read the story, ask the children to create posters to advertise a concert by the animal band. Before the children start making their posters, discuss what information people would need to know about the concert. Suggest that they make up a clever and interesting name for the band and include this on their posters.

* Play a game with the children. Divide them into four groups. Each group should pretend to be one of the animals in the story: the donkeys with guitars, the cows with marimbas, the pigs with drums and the cats with trombones. Discuss with the children how each instrument is played. Start the game by saying, "Instruments," and then the groups should pretend to play their instruments. When you say, "Stop!", the groups should stand completely still. When you say, "Animals," the groups should make the sound that their animal makes: bray like a donkey, moo like a cow, grunt like a pig or meow like a cat. Alternate between calling out "Animals" and "Instruments".

* Ask each child to write down the names of their five favourite songs that they would like the animal band to sing. Let the children share their lists with you so that you can all find out what the five most popular songs in the class or club are.

* Suggest that the children write a letter or an email to the animal band to ask them to sing at a wedding. Remind the children that they will need to include details like the wedding venue, time, how the animals should be dressed and what kinds of songs they should play.

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.