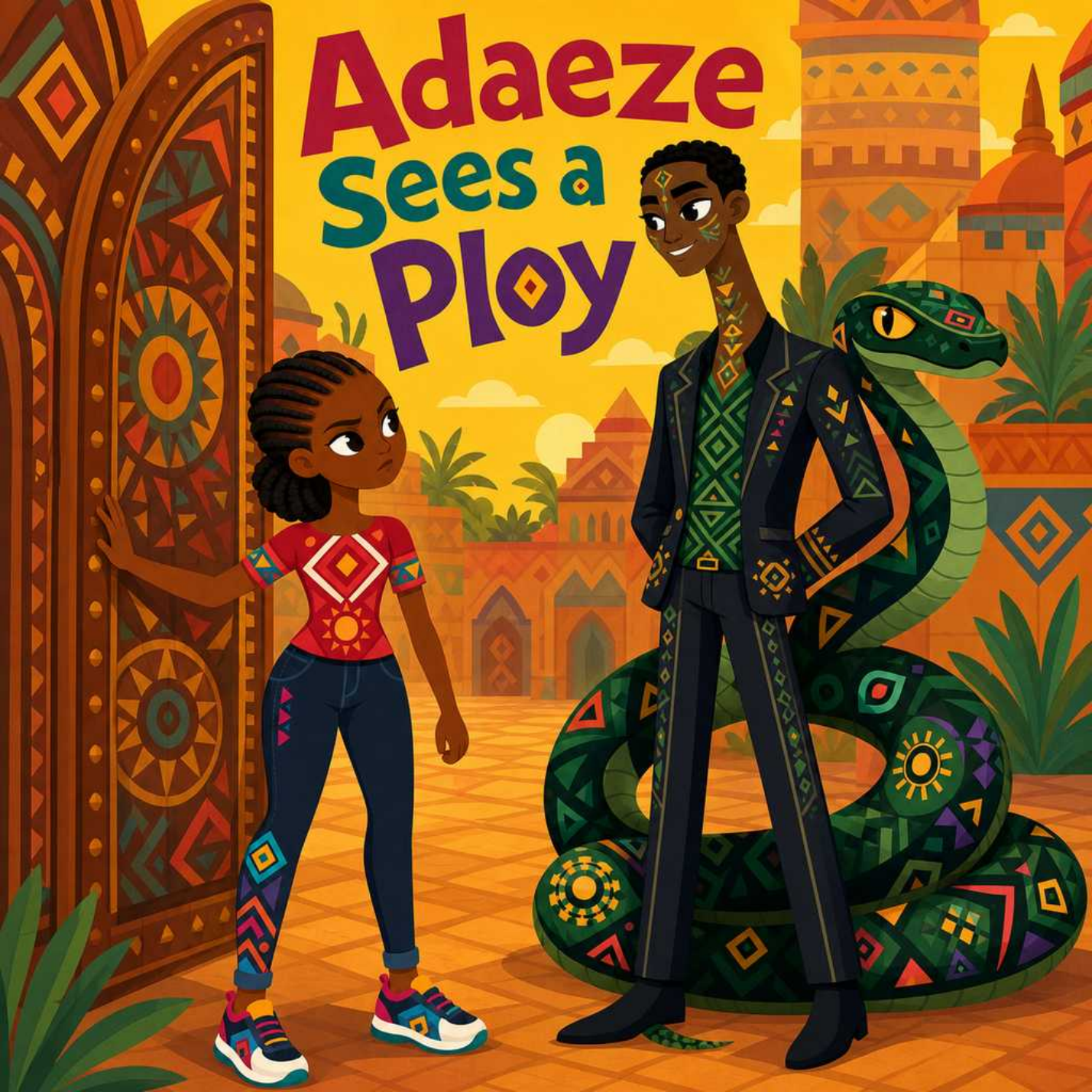


Adaeze Sees a Ploy



Adaeze dwells by the wide lake at Oguta. She is the king's child, and she is smart like water. She reads the hue of the lake, and she can name each tree by its smell.

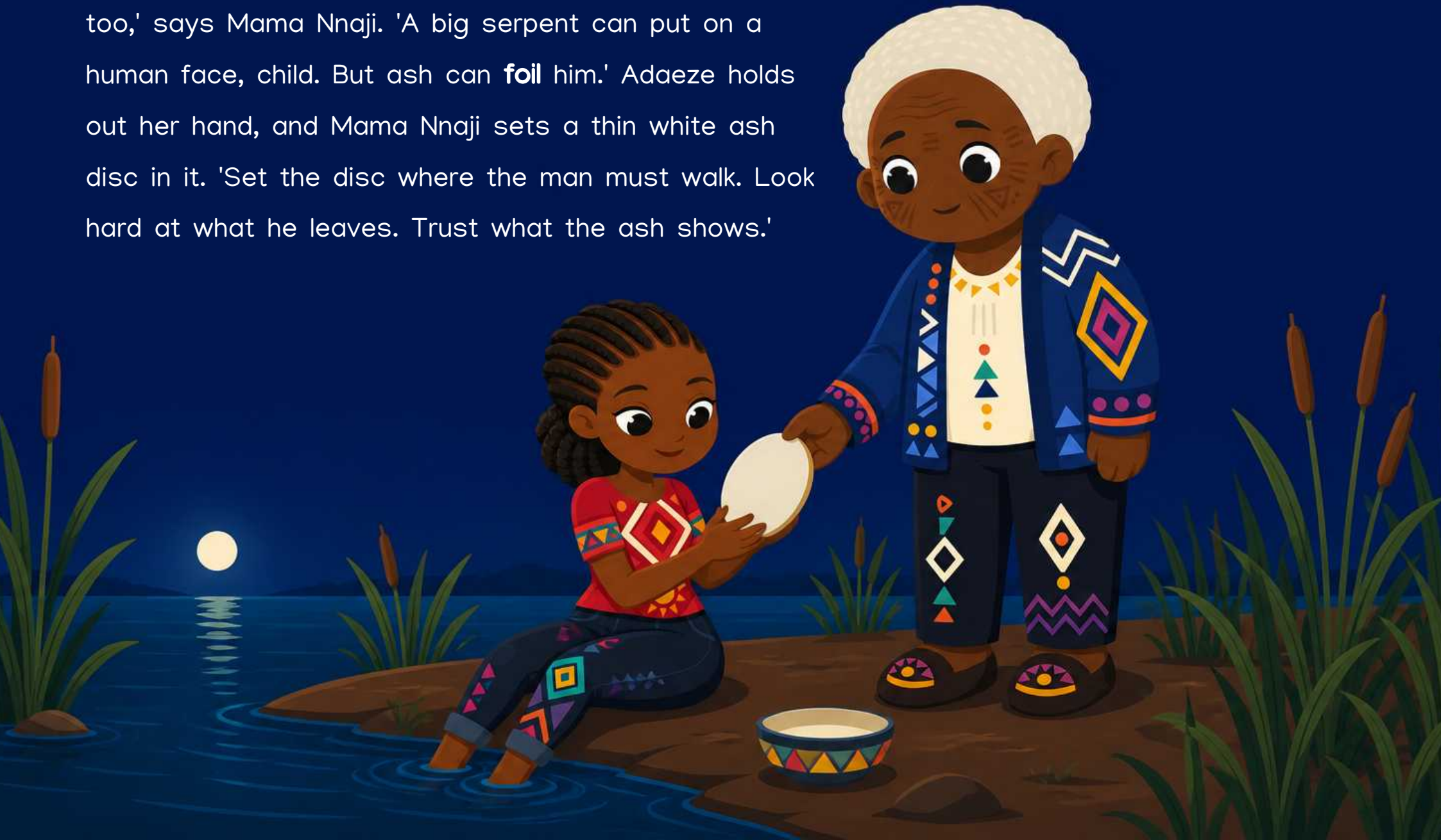
Most of all, Adaeze enjoys a good clue. And one day, a strange man comes to the gate.





A tall man asks to wed Adaeze. He has a smooth **voice** and a sharp dark suit with a green cloth at his chest. When he moves, there is a faint hiss, like scales on dry grass. The King **enjoys** the man's charm, but Adaeze thinks, 'This is a ploy.'

That night Adaeze sits with her feet in the cool lake, and Mama Nhaji comes from the reeds. 'You feel it too,' says Mama Nhaji. 'A big serpent can put on a human face, child. But ash can **foil** him.' Adaeze holds out her hand, and Mama Nhaji sets a thin white ash disc in it. 'Set the disc where the man must walk. Look hard at what he leaves. Trust what the ash shows.'



At dawn Adaeze creeps to the man's door. She lays the flat ash disc on the pale floor, where no one can see it. Then she puts on a smile and joins the king in the hall. The man glides from his room in his sharp dark suit with the green cloth. He passes over the ash disc and does not see it. He smiles his oily smile, but Adaeze checks the floor, and she goes cold inside.





A foot should leave a print.
But the ash shows two
long lines, like the drag of
a big snake. No print. No
foot at all. Something
slides low when no one
can see it. Adaeze thinks
fast. She must show the
king and all the hall what
this man is, or his charm
will win. She must **foil** him.

'We are lake people,' says Adaeze in the hall. 'Each man who asks to wed must let water flow over his hands, and he must hold them flat and still. Open hands show an open mind.' This rule is a **ploy** she makes up on the spot, but her **voice** is so firm that the old men nod.



A child brings the water pitcher, and Adaeze lets a thin stream flow over the man's hands. When the water meets his skin, his right hand starts to change. Dark scales gleam there, slick and oily. Then it is a hand again. But all the hall has seen it. The noisy hall goes very, very still.





'The hall saw nothing,' says the man, and his smooth **voice** is not smooth. 'Adaeze is a girl who sees things that are not there.' 'I read tracks,' says Adaeze. She holds up the ash disc so all can see the twin lines. 'And I read this.' She sets it at his feet. The man looks at it a long while. Then he rises, and he keeps rising.

The suit and the green cloth fall away. A huge serpent coils there, with deep-water scales and a gaze that glows. The hall recoils, and the king grips his seat, but Adaeze does not move. 'The snake is seen,' she says, and her voice is soft and very firm.



The snake gazes at Adaeze a long while. A serpent that is seen and named can not lie, and he can not harm the one who has **foiled** him. 'Smart girl,' he says, and his **voice** is old and deep. 'I will go.' 'Go, and do not come back,' says Adaeze. 'And if I do?' She holds up the ash disc. 'I will make more.'





The serpent slides into the lake with no splash at all, and then he vanishes. The water settles, and Oguta can rest. At dusk Adaeze sits with the king, and he holds her hand a long, long while. He does not need to speak. By the reeds, Mama Nnaji nods once. She gave the disc, yes, but Adaeze made the choice of where to lay it.

Soon other clans come to ask what Adaeze saw. She always says the same thing: 'Look hard. Trust what the ash shows.' At dusk she still sits at the edge of the lake, feet in the cool water, reading the hue of the sky. She still **enjoys** a good test of wit. And by the door she keeps a faint ash ring, not from dread. A smart mind, like a good trap, must always be set.





Adaeze Sees a Ploy

Adaeze, the king's clever daughter at Oguta Lake, enjoys a good puzzle more than anything. So when a smooth-voiced suitor arrives at the gate with a strange hiss trailing his every step, she is the only one who senses something is wrong. Can she prove her suspicion before his charm wins over the whole court? Created to align with the UFLI Foundations scope and sequence (Lesson 95: oi, oy /oi/), this book practices words like 'voice', 'ploy', 'foil', 'oily', 'noisy'.

Phonics Focus: oi, oy /oi/

choice, coils, enjoys, foil, foiled, joins, noisy, oily, ploy, recoils, voice

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