

Anansi, Turtle, and Soup



Anansi cooked all morning.
Soon the smell of his food
filled the whole forest.

He had groundnut stew as
thick as mud, yams fried
gold, and a big pot of hot
soup. Anansi set his table
and grinned.

The good smell was a **sign**
of a fine meal, all for
himself. Then he heard a
slow knock at the door.

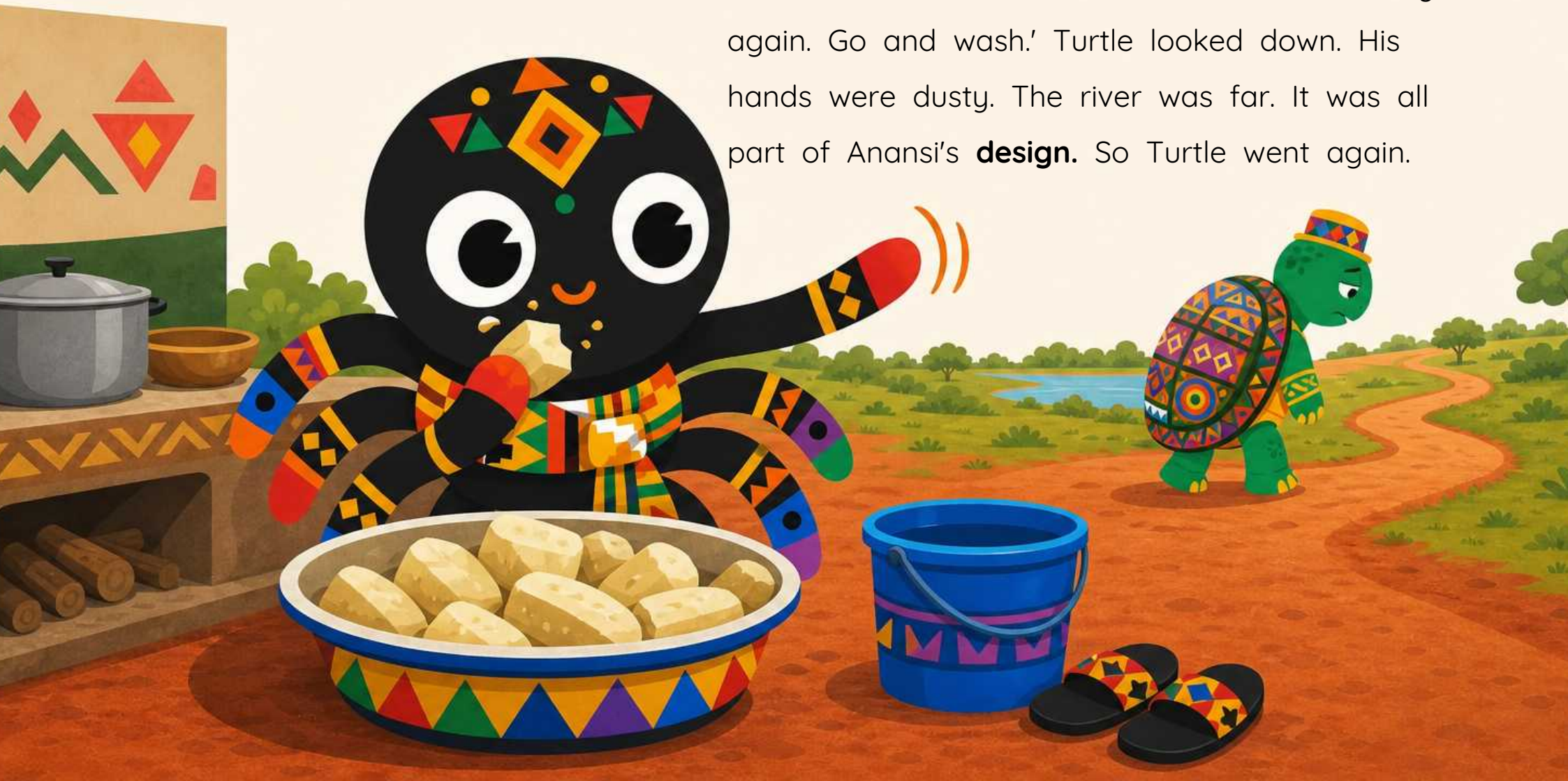




It was Turtle. He was grey with road dust, and his hunger **gnawed** at him. 'Anansi,' said Turtle, 'I have walked since dawn. That soup smells like my best dream.'

Anansi looked at the pots. He looked at Turtle. He looked at the pots again. 'Of course,' he said, with his big, least true grin. 'Please, sit and eat.' Turtle reached for the bowl, but Anansi held up one leg. 'First we wash our hands at the river, Turtle. It is our way.'

The river was far. Turtle's legs were short. By the time he got back, hands clean, Anansi was halfway through the yams. 'Sit, sit! There is plenty,' said Anansi. Turtle reached for the stew. 'Turtle, look at those hands,' said Anansi. 'Dusty again. Go and wash.' Turtle looked down. His hands were dusty. The river was far. It was all part of Anansi's **design**. So Turtle went again.



By the time Turtle got back, hands clean, legs sore, the pots were empty. Anansi wiped his mouth with a bit of cloth and leaned back, full and happy. 'I am so sorry, my friend,' he said, not sorry at all. 'I did not know how hungry I was. Come back some other time.'

Turtle looked at the clean, empty pots. He said nothing. He gave a slow nod, the kind of **sign** that means a plan is coming. 'A guest knows how he is fed,' Turtle said, and walked back down the road.





Three market days later, a folded leaf came to Anansi's door, **signed** by Turtle. It said: Come to my home at the bottom of the river for a feast. I have cooked since the new moon.

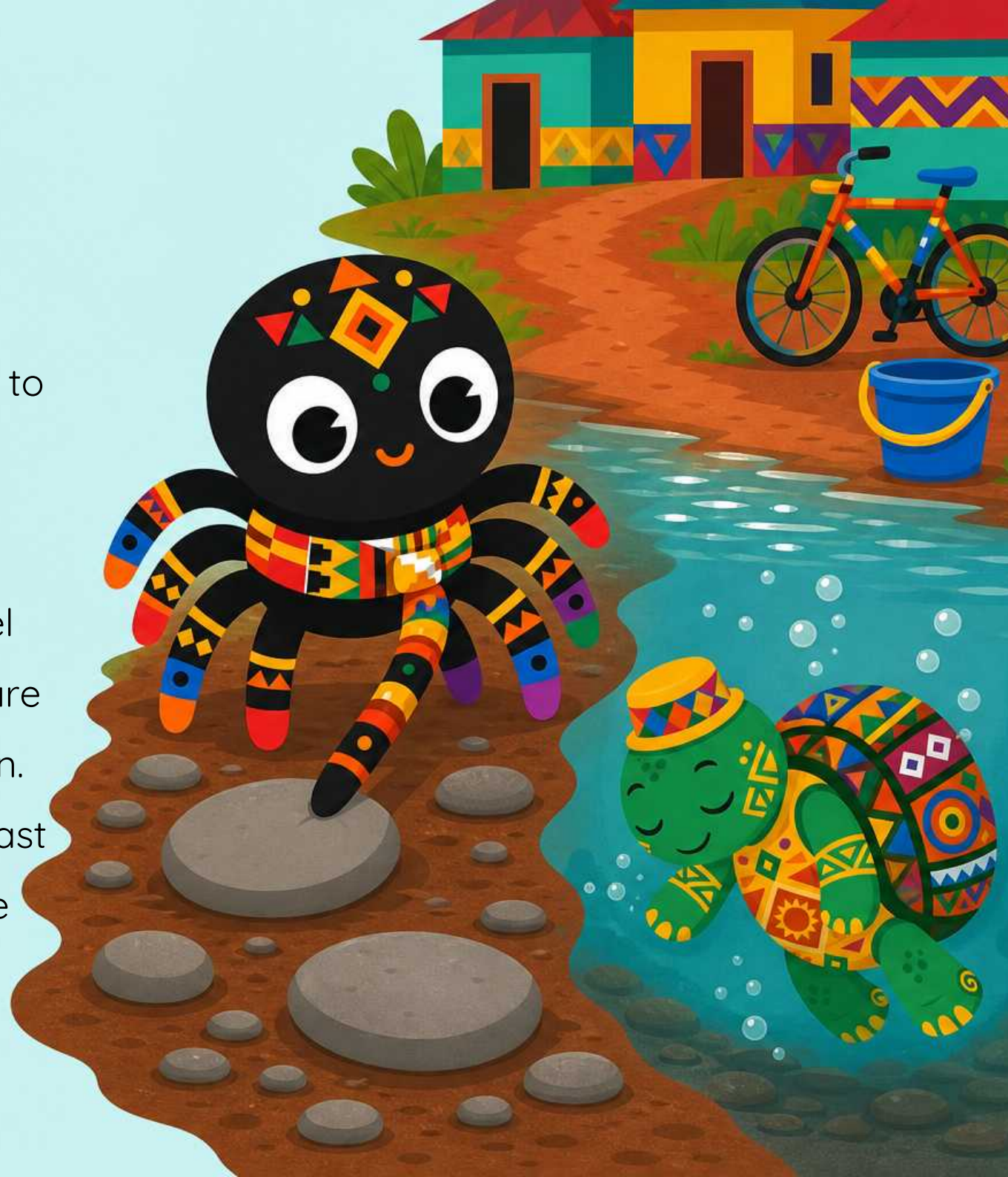
Anansi's hunger **gnawed** with joy. River folk made grand food, he had heard: hot fish, sweet seeds, and more. He was at the riverbank before the morning mist had gone.

The trouble came the moment Anansi jumped in. He floated. Not a little. All the way up. His body bobbed like a **gnarled** log on top, while Turtle sank down so easy and waved him down below, where a table was set with shining dishes. Anansi spun his legs and kicked and popped back up every time. Far below, the feast sat waiting, just out of reach.



Turtle rose up. 'Is something wrong?' he asked, so polite. 'The river pulls hard,' Anansi said, which was not true. 'Turtle, could you tie a stone to my leg?'

Turtle tipped his head. 'Oh, I would not want Anansi to feel bad. Come down when you are ready.' Then Turtle sank again. Anansi looked at the bank. Past the buzzing **gnats**, there were plenty of stones: round, flat, and heavy, half in the mud.





Anansi rushed up the bank and found what he needed: a thick, heavy coat made of **gnarled** reeds, left drying on a post. He stuffed the pockets with stones, six big ones, three on each side, and pulled the coat on.

It was heavy. Very heavy. But when he jumped in, he sank straight to the bottom like a proper guest. Turtle looked up, grinned, and set out the feast: hot food, sweet seeds, all Anansi had dreamed of.

Anansi reached for the first dish. 'Before we eat,' said Turtle, 'we take off our outdoor things. It is the way in my home.' He set down his own small hat and folded it neat.

Anansi looked at the reed coat. If he took it off, he would float up. If he kept it on, he could not reach the food past its stiff, heavy sides. The fish steamed. Anansi's hunger **gnawed**. Turtle began to eat.



Anansi fought with the coat. He tried reaching around it. No. He tried tipping his bowl with one leg, but the bowl flipped over. He tried pulling off just one arm. The coat's weight shifted. Anansi tilted, **gnashing** his jaws, and the river took him: up, up, and out of the water, spinning slow, to land on the bank with a thump and a shower of wet stones. Far below, Turtle ate the last fish and folded his napkin.





Turtle came up a moment later, full and calm. 'I am so sorry, my friend,' he said, in a tone Anansi knew all too well. 'I did not know how much there was. Come back some other time.'

Anansi sat on the bank, wet and **resigned**, his stomach empty, stones all around. He thought of the dusty road. He thought of the river, twice. 'A guest knows how he is fed,' Turtle said, and slipped back under the water.

Anansi went home and sat by his cold stove a while. Then he went out and bought yams and groundnuts, and he cooked enough for four. The next traveller who knocked, a dusty bird from the long road north, was fed right away, at the table, with no trip to the river.

It was not because Anansi had turned good. It was because Anansi had a fine memory. A guest knows how he is fed, and so, it turns out, does a host. That is the **sign** of a wise man.





Anansi, Turtle, and Soup

Kwaku Anansi has cooked a feast fit for a king, and he plans to eat every last bite himself. But when dusty, hungry Turtle knocks at the door, will clever Anansi share his soup, or trick his tired guest away from the table? And when Turtle sends a leaf 'signed' with an invitation to his own river feast, who will go home with an empty stomach this time? This Bookbot level practises the 'gn' sound in 'gnawed', 'gnarled', 'gnashing', and 'resigned'.

Reading Skills: <gn>

design, gnarled, gnashing, gnats, gnawed, resigned, sign, signed

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