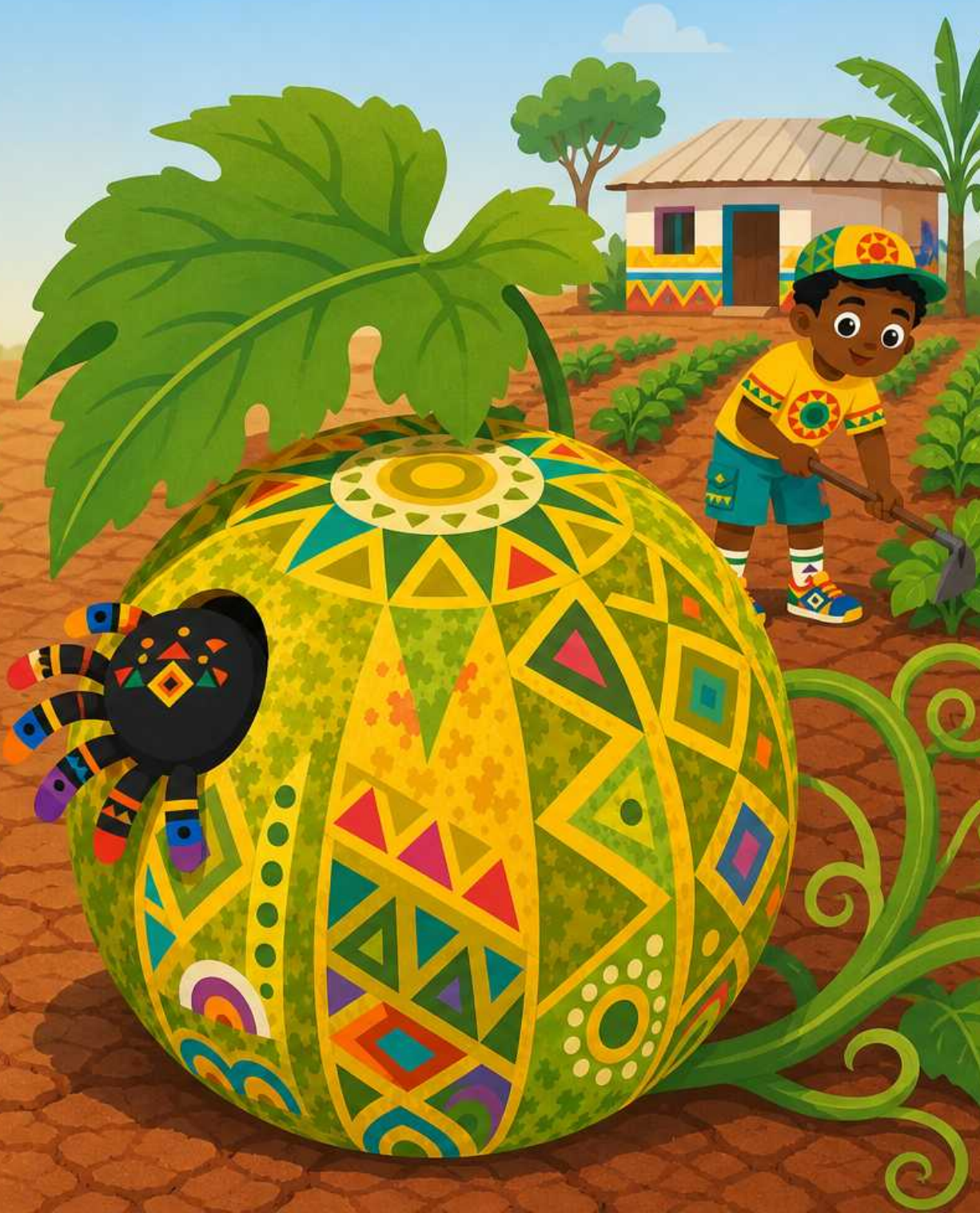
Eight Legs, One Small Hole

No rain fell for two weeks. The only glad thing in the whole village was Kofi's prize melon. It sat fat and round and yellow-green in the shade of its own big leaf.

Anansi smelled it from far off. He waited till Kofi looked away, bit a tiny hole in the tough skin, and slipped inside. It was dark and sweet and cool, just right for a hot day.

Anansi ate and ate and ate, and by his **eightieth** bite he was fast asleep, long before he saw the problem.



Here was the problem. Anansi had gone in as a small spider. Now he was as big as a yam. His fat belly pushed the melon walls on every side. The hole was far too small to get back out.

He tried to push. He tried to twist. He tried to go out with all **eight** legs first. None of it worked one bit.

Outside, he heard Kofi begin to walk back across the field. Anansi pulled his **eight** legs in and held very, very still.

Kofi reached the melon, gave it a proud pat, and walked on. Anansi could breathe again. He was stuck, but he was not caught, and he could work with stuck. There was lots of melon left to eat, and the shade was cool and fine. Then Elephant came down the road above the field, so big that each step **weighs** a ton. And Anansi had an idea. He would call it his best idea. Everyone else would call it his worst.

'Good morning, Elephant!' Anansi called in his deepest melon-voice. Elephant stopped. She looked left. She looked right. No one stood on the road at all.

'Down here,' said the melon. Elephant looked at the melon. The melon looked at Elephant. 'Elephant is a real **heavyweight** today!' said the melon.

Elephant backed away one step, then two, then turned and ran, which a big elephant almost never does.

The tale spread fast, and got bigger with each telling. By night the whole village had heard that Kofi's melon could talk. By morning a crowd of **eighty** stood at the field.

Anansi waited till they leaned in close and quiet. Then, in his best deep melon-voice, he said, 'The rain will come back in seven days.'

The crowd went oh. Someone ran to tell their gran. 'Who ever heard a melon talk?' whispered one old woman, but she watched it hard, just in case.

Word reached the King by noon. The King was a big man who took both melon and odd things to heart. He called for the melon to come to court. Anansi's belly dropped. Being carried to the palace was not the plan. Being set before the King and all his wise folk, in a bright room with no place to hide, was very much not the plan. But **eight** strong helpers were already loading the melon onto a cloth.

The court was full. The King sat on his carved stool in his best cloth, gold and black. His wise folk sat in **eight** rows, and the crowd pushed in at every door.

The melon was set on a low table. The King leaned in and said, 'The melon can speak, we are told. Please, speak.'

Inside, Anansi thought fast. He could keep up the act. He could stay quiet and let it all fall flat. Or he could give his best show and think about the way out later. Anansi was never going to pick quiet.

Anansi gave it his all. The melon told the King that his gran's nut soup was missing one thing. Pepper-seeds, said the melon. A good guess, and it was right.

The melon said the **eighth** day of harvest would be lucky. Then it said where the drummer had lost his drumstick. Behind the water jar. Right again!

The King was glad. The wise folk sat stunned. At the back, Kofi stood with a face that said his feelings were all mixed up.

Then a sharp-eyed wise woman named Abena stood up. She had been quiet a long, long time. 'My King, I have a question for the melon,' she said. She walked to the table. 'Melon,' she said, 'what am I thinking right now?' The court held its breath. Inside, Anansi held his breath too, all **eight** legs still. He could not know what Abena was thinking. Any guess would be wrong, and her face said she already knew it.

'The melon,' Anansi said at last, doing his best, 'is thinking about what Abena is thinking.' The court was still for one more second.

Then the King stood up slow. 'I have been a good host to this melon,' said the King, 'and it makes a fool of my court.' His voice had gone very quiet, which in kings is worse than loud.

'Take it away.' He picked up the melon, **weighed** it once in his hand, and threw it.

The melon hit the courtyard floor with a crack heard in three **neighboring** villages. It burst in a big splash of skin, seeds, juice, and one very fat, very dizzy, orange spider.

Anansi bounced twice, rolled under a bench, and lay still, hoping they would take him for a big seed. Kofi looked at the ruined melon. Then at Anansi. Then at the King. Then back at Anansi.

'Who ever heard a melon talk?' said Kofi, and it was a long, long time before anyone could stop laughing.

The King sent Anansi home with a stern word, a towel, and a bag of pepper-seeds for Kofi's soup, since the court owed him that much. Anansi walked back through the village, still faint orange, picking melon seeds from his legs. He had been cool. He had been clever. He had almost tricked a king. What he had not been was small enough to leave in time. 'Who ever heard a melon talk?' No one. And no one heard Anansi say he should have stopped eating **eight** bites back. But the next season, all the **neighbors** watched Kofi's melon field very close indeed.

EIGH

Eight Legs, One Small Hole

Anansi the spider sneaks inside Farmer Kofi's prize melon for a cool, sweet snack, then eats so much he can't squeeze back out. What will he do when the whole village hears the melon talk? Can a hungry trickster fool an elephant, a crowd of 'eighty', and even the King himself, or has Anansi finally outsmarted himself? A juicy West African tale of one very greedy spider. This Bookbot book practices the 'eigh' sound with words like 'eighty', 'eightieth', 'neighbors', and 'weighs'.

Reading Skills: <eigh>

eight, eighth, eightieth, eighty, heavyweight, neighboring, neighbors, weighed, weighs

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