

Python on the Step



When the river took his yam garden away, Anansi had no food at all. Python let him eat from his store, and he did not ask Anansi to pay him back. But this **afternoon**, Python came to get his pay. He looped his long thick body on the step and blocked the way in. Anansi froze with one leg up, and his eyes went wide. Python had not come for yams. Python came to eat Anansi himself.





'You must pay me back,' said Python, and his words were soft and **smooth**. 'I have made up my mind, Anansi. The meal I want is you.'

Python was as thick as a tree. When he smiled, he opened so wide that he could eat Anansi three times over, and his long fangs gleamed.

Anansi shook from leg to leg beside his pot. He needed a plan, and he needed it **soon**.

'Wait!' said Anansi, and he held up one leg like a wise man giving a speech. 'You can not eat me today, Python.' Python tilted his big head, and his eyes went thin and mean. 'I am the longest animal in this forest, and I eat what I like,' he hissed. 'That is just the problem,' said Anansi in a smooth, cool way. 'If you eat me like this, the animals will say you did it like any old snake. Is that a meal fit for a king?'



Anansi kept talking in his smooth, cool way. 'I was on my way to get red vine-rope for Nyame, the Sky-God,' he said. 'It is the strongest rope in the forest. It is so strong it can hold any loop a real king might wish to tie.'

He held up a long red vine-rope from the bench where he kept his tools.

Python stared at the bright red rope, and his eyes went wide.





Python liked to boast. But no animal had ever called him the king of the perfect loop, and the words sat in his chest like a stone.

'Tell me more,' he said. His mood was shifting.

Anansi smiled a sly smile.

'Only a king can tie the perfect loop,' he said softly.

Python asked what it looked like. Anansi told him: seven loops, over and under, and no plain snake could finish it. 'Most snakes give up at three,' Anansi said sadly. Python huffed and said, 'Show me the first one.' So Anansi looped the red rope over a low branch.



Python began. His big body looped once, and Anansi called, 'Loop one, well done!' Python looped back the other way, and Anansi whooped and called, 'Loop two! So smooth!' Then Python looped under, and Anansi said, 'Loop three! Most snakes give up at three!' Python smiled wide with each loop. But with each loop, he got more and more tangled. He tried so hard to loop like a king that he did not see his own tail. It had looped tight over his own middle.





'Time for seven,' said Anansi. 'Over, under, and back.' Python stretched, strained, twisted his grand neck, and tied loop seven. 'Only a king can tie the perfect loop!' he boasted. Then he tried to slither over to Anansi, but he could not move an inch.

Python thrashed and hissed. He pulled left, and the loop got tighter. He pushed right, and it got tighter still. The vine-rope held him fast, so he roared, 'Anansi! Set me free at once!' But Anansi **zoomed** away on the path, past the ferns, and called back, 'Only a king can get free of the perfect loop!' His glad hoots rang all the way to the river.



But Python had one trick left. He filled his wide chest and let his roar **boom** into the trees. 'Anansi cheated me!' he yelled. 'Tell Nyame the Sky-God! Tell each animal in the forest! Anansi is a cheat, a cheat, a cheat!'

The **boom** rolled from tree to tree like thunder. Birds shot from the branches, and the monkeys tried to block the **boom**. Far back on the path, Anansi stopped his glad **hoots** and looked back, afraid.





Anansi stopped on the path and stood still under a big tree. If Nyame the Sky-God got word that Anansi was a real cheat, he could never tell his tales again. There was just one thing to do, so Anansi went back. He undid **loop** seven, then six, then five. 'I did not cheat,' he told Python. 'I gave you something better than one spider meal. You tied **loops** that no animal has ever tied, and **soon** that story will be told in every corner of the forest. That makes us even.' Python was still for a long, quiet moment. 'Yes,' he said at last, and this time the word felt different.

Python let Anansi go free and glided off into the deep ferns with his head high. Anansi went home on the forest path with the red vine-rope looped over his back. The forest animals talked of that **afternoon** for a long, long time. Anansi told them he tricked Python. Python told them he was never tricked at all, and maybe both of them were right. The cleverest **loops** of all were the **loops** that Anansi tied with words. But Anansi kept the rope. A spider can always use good rope.





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When the river takes his jam garden, Anansi owes Python a debt, and this afternoon Python has come to collect: the meal he wants is Anansi himself. Thinking fast, Anansi spins a tale about a royal vine-rope with a perfect knot fit for a king, one only the longest, most flexible creature could ever tie. Can Anansi talk his way out of becoming Python's afternoon meal? Created to align with the UFLI Foundations scope and sequence (Lesson 90: oo /ū/), this book practices words like 'loop', 'smooth', 'afternoon', 'boom', 'soon'.

Phonics Focus: oo /ū/

afternoon, boom, cool, food, hoots, loop, loops, mood, smooth, soon, tools, whooped, zoomed

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