

In scene 1 of this play, Nyame, the sky god, has ordered the forest creatures to make Leopard stop beating on his noisy drum. All the great creatures—Lion, Bear, and Elephant—have excuses for why they cannot approach Leopard, but Turtle says he can do it. Read scenes 2 and 3 of the play to see how Turtle satisfies Nyame’s demands. Then answer the questions that follow.

The Leopard’s Noisy Drum

by Janice Kuharski

Characters

NYAME, *the sky god*

ELEPHANT

LION

BEAR

TURTLE

LEOPARD

. . .

SCENE 2

SETTING: *Deep in the forest. Tall stool is center; shorter stool is left.*

AT RISE: LEOPARD *is seated on tall stool, beating drum. TURTLE enters left and slowly moves to center and sits on smaller stool.*

LEOPARD (*Pounding drum and chanting*):

5 The forest is mine
 all night and all day.
 The sound of my drum
 keeps others away.
 Let the Lion or Bear
10 or the Elephant come;
 each one of them fears
 the sound of my drum.
 My music is magic;
 my singing is grand.
15 While I have a drum,
 I’m king of the land.

TURTLE (*Shouting over drum*): Good morning, Leopard. I’ve been listening to your music. You have a fine sounding drum and a fine voice as well. (LEOPARD *stops pounding drum and looks up.*)

20 LEOPARD (*Flattered*): Why, thank you, Turtle. (*Boasting*) I do have the best and biggest drum in the forest.

TURTLE: Without a doubt, you have the best sounding drum I've ever heard—but not the biggest.

LEOPARD (*Irritated; stepping down from stool*): How can you say that? There is
25 no drum in the forest bigger than mine!

TURTLE: That would be true—if the great Nyame did not have an even bigger drum.

LEOPARD: Impossible! No drum is bigger than this. (TURTLE *gets up and inspects drum*.)

30 TURTLE: It's a fine drum, indeed. But Nyame's drum is so large that he can fit inside his—with room to spare! Can you do the same?

LEOPARD (*Quickly*): Of course I can! (*Considering*) I mean, I'm sure I could if I tried.

TURTLE (*Shaking his head*): No, I don't think you could fit in this drum. (*Smugly*)
35 I don't think this drum is even half as big as Nyame's. (TURTLE *sits again*.)

LEOPARD (*Upset*): If Nyame can fit inside his drum, then I can fit inside my drum as well.

TURTLE: I've *seen* Nyame get inside his drum.

LEOPARD (*Hotly*): Then you shall see me get inside my drum, as well! (*Puts drum*
40 *on its side*) But you will need to tell me when I am completely inside. (*Begins to crawl into drum head first*)

TURTLE (*Going to drum*): It would be a great honor.

LEOPARD (*Wiggling forward inside drum*): How am I doing, Turtle?

TURTLE: Your hindquarters are still showing, Leopard.

45 LEOPARD (*Inching forward*): Am I inside the drum yet, Turtle?

TURTLE (*Smiling broadly*): Almost, but your tail is still showing.

LEOPARD (*Pulling tail inside drum*): I can't see a thing—it's dark in here. Can you see me now?

TURTLE: Not even a speck of you is showing now.

50 LEOPARD (*Panicked*): Help me, Turtle. I'm stuck. I can't turn around in here! Get me out!

TURTLE: I will let you out, Leopard, but not until I've brought you to Nyame. (*Aside*) Thank goodness much of the way back is downhill this time. Leopard's drum should roll nicely—all the way home.

55 LEOPARD (*Pounding frantically*): Let me out! Let me out or you'll be sorry, Turtle!

TURTLE: My advice to you, Leopard, is to stop complaining and make yourself comfortable. You'll have plenty of time for a nice long nap. (*Curtain*)

SCENE 3

SETTING: *Same as Scene 1. Tall stool is center.*

60 AT RISE: NYAME *sits on stool*. ELEPHANT, BEAR, and LION *sit on floor*. TURTLE *stands next to drum, center left. Sounds of banging and pounding from inside drum are heard intermittently.*¹

ELEPHANT: It's been so long since you left, Turtle. We didn't think you were coming back.

TURTLE (*Proudly*): I am not only back, but I have the drum as well.

65 NYAME: How were you able to bring Leopard's drum back all by yourself?

TURTLE: That was easy. Many animals in the forest wanted to get a closer look at Leopard's wonderful drum. So they were only too happy to help me push.

NYAME (*Admiringly*): Ah! A very clever plan, indeed, my friend!

LEOPARD (*From inside drum; furious*): Let me out! Let me out!

70 NYAME: What is that horrible racket?

TURTLE: It's Leopard, and except for when he's sleeping, he's been screaming like that since we started out. What should I do with him, Nyame?

ELEPHANT: The only thing you can do, Nyame, is banish² Leopard from the forest.

LION (*Eagerly*): Yes, yes. Banish him—and the sooner the better! (*Boastfully*) Then I
75 will be the undisputed king of the forest.

BEAR (*Scornfully*): That's not true, Lion. I should be the one to rule the forest, not you.

ELEPHANT: *I* should be the king of the forest. After all, I'm the tallest, the heaviest, and the strongest.

TURTLE: Your Majesty, I have a suggestion. If Leopard is not around, these three will
80 never agree on who should be king of the forest. And the noise from their endless squabbling will be even worse than the sound of Leopard's drum.

NYAME (*Gets down from stool and paces; stroking his chin*): An excellent point, Turtle. I could not stand another commotion. Leopard is free to return to his home in the forest. (ELEPHANT *helps* LEOPARD *climb out of drum*.)

85 LEOPARD (*Shaking himself out; indignantly*³): It's about time! (*Fluffing himself*) Look! My fur is all matted! (*Grumbling as he exits*) I'm still king of the forest, you know!

TURTLE (*Gestures toward drum*): And here is the drum you asked for, Nyame. What will you do with it?

90 NYAME (*Setting drum upright*): Leopard's drum is just what I need to make loud rolls of thunder. Listen! (NYAME *beats drum, as thunder is heard offstage*. ELEPHANT, BEAR and LION *cower and cover ears*. NYAME *turns toward TURTLE; pleased*.) You have done what Elephant, Bear, and Lion could not do. What reward shall I give you?

95 TURTLE (*Thinking*): Well . . . I have always wanted a house that I could carry on my back when I travel.

¹ *intermittently* — starting and stopping

² *banish* — to send someone away forever

³ *indignantly* — expressing anger over unfair treatment

NYAME (*Nods*): A fine idea! That is exactly what you shall have. (*Exits and returns carrying shell; ties shell on TURTLE's back*)

100 ELEPHANT (*Walking around TURTLE, inspecting shell*): It's magnificent! Look at the colors—olive green and yellow, even a bit of red.

BEAR (*Looking at shell*): And it has a nice design around the edge.

LION (*Nodding*): The shape fits his body perfectly.

ELEPHANT (*Thinking*): I could use something like that—only bigger, of course.

BEAR: How ridiculous! You don't need a shell. But I could certainly use one.

105 LION: And so could I. (*Eagerly*) Let's ask Nyame. (*Turns toward NYAME*) Your Majesty, do you think each of us could have a shell just like Turtle's?

NYAME (*Stroking chin*): Perhaps we should ask Turtle what he thinks of your request. (*Turns to TURTLE*) Well, Turtle, what do you say?

110 TURTLE: I think that if Lion, Elephant, and Bear each had a shell, they would be even stronger than they already are. It would not be fair to give them shells . . . unless each one agrees to give up something that makes him strong.

NYAME: I see your point. What do you think a fair exchange would be?

BEAR, ELEPHANT, and LION (*Excitedly*): Yes, tell us! (*Each in turn looks taken aback as TURTLE speaks.*)

115 TURTLE: Well, Elephant could give up his strong tusks. Lion could give up his strong teeth, and Bear could give up his mighty claws.

NYAME (*Pounding staff*): A splendid idea! Shells in exchange for tusks, teeth, and claws. I'll do it at once!

BEAR, ELEPHANT, and LION (*Ad lib; alarmed*): No! Wait! We can't do that!

120 ELEPHANT: I really don't need a shell after all!

LION: Nor do I. A shell would cover my beautiful mane.

BEAR: I don't need one either. A heavy shell would just slow me down.

125 NYAME (*Firmly*): Then stop wasting my time with your foolishness! I have work to do! (*NYAME beats drum, and thunder is heard off.*) A rain forest must have rain, you know! Now that I have Leopard's drum, I'll shake the skies open and *let the rain come!* (*Lights dim. Thunder is heard and lights flash.* BEAR, LION, and ELEPHANT *cower and cover ears.* TURTLE *pulls head under shell and moves toward exit. Curtain closes.*)

THE END