Pascal Lemaitre , Slade Morrison , Toni Morrison

The Ant or the Grasshopper? (Who's Got Game?, 1)

United States of America (2003)

TAGS: Aesop Aesop's Fables





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	The Ant or the Grasshopper? (Who's Got Game?, 1)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States of America
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2003
First Edition Details	Toni Morrison and Slade Morrison, *Who's Got Game? The Ant or the Grasshopper?* Ill. Pascal Lemaitre, New York: Scribner, 2003, 40 pp. (unpaginated)
ISBN	9780743222471
Genre	Comics (Graphic works), Folk tales, Humorous comics, Mythological comics
Target Audience	Children (recommended for)
Author of the Entry	Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com
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Creators



Pascal Lemaitre , b. 1967
(Illustrator)

Freelance author and artist Pascal Lemaitre is based in Belgium. He attended La Cambre, the Belgian school of Visual Arts. He is the author of two children's books, *Emily the Giraffe* (1993, first published in French as *Elvire la giraffe* in 1991) and *Zelda's Secret* (1994), and has illustrated books with numerous children's writers including Toni and Slade Morrison, Kate McMullan and Michaela Muntean. In 2015, the museum *Tomi Ungerer* curated an exhibit of his work. He has also illustrated works for adults, and his editorial work has featured in numerous international publications, including *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times* and *Le Monde*.

Sources:

Official website (accessed: December 30, 2020).

encyclopedia.com (accessed: December 30, 2020).

Bio prepared by Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com



Slade Morrison , 1965 - 2010
(Author)

Slade Morrison was an American artist, abstract painter and musician. The second son of writer and academic Toni Morrison and architect Harold Morrison, he collaborated with his mother on the *Who's Got Game?* trio of comic book adaptations of Aesop's *Fables*, as well as a

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range of other children's picture books. They were working on a book of ghost stories when he died of pancreatic cancer, aged 45.

Source:

Pip Cummings, *'I didn't want to come back': Toni Morrison on life, death and Desdemona*, smh.com.au, published August 7, 2015 (accessed: December 30, 2020).

Bio prepared by Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com



Toni Morrison by Christopher Drexel. Retrieved from flickr.com, public domain (accessed: February 2, 2022).

Toni Morrison , 1931 - 2019
(Author)

Toni Morrison was a well-known American writer, editor and academic renowned for exploring the African American experience, particularly from a feminist perspective. She was born Chloe Anthony Wofford in Lorain, Ohio. Her parents instilled in her a love of reading, music, folklore and a respect for black culture. She was a gifted and hardworking student who studied Latin in high school. She gained a BA from Howard University, majoring in English with a minor in classics, and an MA from Cornell. After a period of academic teaching she became a fiction editor at Random House in New York, the first black woman to hold the position.

She began publishing her own writing in the 1970s and 1980s. Her first book, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), is the story of a black girl obsessed by white standards of beauty. Her best known work, *Beloved* (1987), which was awarded the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for fiction, is based on the story of mulatto slave Margaret Garner, who killed her two year old daughter rather than have her return to slavery. The story has been compared to the myth of *Medea*, and in 1998 was adapted into a feature film co-produced by and starring Oprah Winfrey, and in 2005

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Morrison composed the libretto for the opera *Margaret Garner*. In 1993 Morrison was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, the first African American woman to receive the honour.

Morrison wrote an extensive list of novels, short stories, plays and non fiction publications. With her son Slade, she published a number of children's books. She has received a raft of international honours and recognitions for her work. In 2012 Barak Obama presented her with a US Presidential Medal of Freedom. She died in 2019, aged 88.

Sources:

britannica.com (accessed: December 30, 2020).

womenshistory.org (accessed: December 30, 2020).

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Additional information

Adaptations

Audiobook of the series published in 2007, audible.com.au (accessed: December 30, 2020).

Summary

According to the text on its dust jacket, these books are "more than a play on these beloved fables, *Who's Got Game?* is AESOP LIVE!" Toni and Slade Morrison have adapted the well-known tale of the Ant and the Grasshopper to a modern day setting. The gangsta rap associations of the title are underscored by the New York setting, with the city populated by a variety of minibeasts, and the rhyming, rhythmic verse that borrows the intonation patterns of hip hop. The story is recounted in comic book form, with full page illustrations balanced with those with multiple panels. Both the characters' dialogue and narratorial commentary are inscribed in a cursive, somewhat scrawled font, with occasional words by the effusive Foxy G rendered in large scale block letters for extra emphasis.

Best friends Foxy G, a grasshopper, and Kid A, an ant, enjoy hanging out in the park together, climbing trees, playing basketball, swimming in the lake and music on the grasshopper's wings. But as summer comes to an end, Kid A tells his friend that he's "got to split", as "there's a lot of work to be done". But Foxy G insists on remaining in the park, to "GROOVE, MOVE, PROVE, DISPROVE". After an awkward scene, Kid A departs to clean the house, does the shopping, and cooks food for his growing family. His heavily pregnant wife watches TV as he stocks their pantry. When winter comes, Foxy G finds himself freezing in his cardboard box home in the snowy park. His delicate wings, his musical instrument, are crumbling in the cold. He battles through the snow to visit his former friend, who stands on the porch of his cosy home, chewing on a doughnut. Desperate but still proud, Foxy G falls to his knees to beg his friend for help: "I quenched your thirst and fed your soul, you can't spare me a doughnut hole?", but Kid A is unmoved by his pleas, admonishing him for his lack of diligence and foresight. Foxy G counters that he is artist, and that "Art is work, it just looks like play." They argue over the value of creativity, before Kid A slams the door on his former friend. As the shivering, desperate Foxy G walks off into the desolate snow, he wonders aloud:

"His day is darkest when I leave

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With all my music up my sleeve.

Name, fame, blame, shame –

The question is: who's got game?"

The final pages of the book are full page illustrations with no written text. On the first, Kid A, looking troubled, peers out the window at the retreating figure of Foxy G. Christmas presents are piled beneath a lovely tree and his wife continues to watch TV. The facing page looks down from a distance on Kid A's small cottage on the very edge of the big city. The tiny figure of Foxy G can be seen walking away as the snow drifts down. Over the page, the house and the grasshopper are shown again, but this time inside a snow dome, on a page that is otherwise white and empty. It is labelled with a little golden sign, asking again "Who's Got Game?" On the very last page, which is covered in falling snow, is a female ladybird, dressed in coat, scarf and boots, and leading a pet ant on a leash. In her hand she holds a much smaller version of the snow dome and is looking it with an expression of wide-eyed concern.

Analysis

In recent years several children's writers have adapted Aesop's Fables with a contemporary, hip hop aesthetic. A decade and a half before Jef Czekaj's *Hip and Hop in the House* (2018) and Kay Davenport's *Hip Hop Aesop: The Boy Who Cried Wolf* (2018), Toni and Slade Morrison's trilogy of *Who's Got Game?* books borrows the language and intonation of rap music to update and reframe some of Aesop's best known stories for a new generation of young readers. Traditionally, the fable of The Ant and the Grasshopper promotes the value of hard work over lazy indolence, but this retelling adopts a more ambiguous moral position, celebrating the value and importance of creative pursuits of art, music and storytelling, and inviting readers to question the Ant's hard-hearted decision to reject his friend. The dustjacket explains the Morrisons' intentions:

"In our revisions the original stories are opened up and their moralistic endings reimagined: the victim might not lose; the timid gets a chance to become strong; the fool can gain insight; the powerful may lose their grip."

The story's final pages leave readers to make their own moral

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assessments of the behaviour of the ant and grasshopper, and the shifts in perspective encourage a flexible and open-ended interpretation. The final revelation that the story's events are taking place within the microcosm of a snow dome invites reflection on ideas of scale, relativity and our place in the world.

Lemaitre's line drawings populate New York with a cast of peculiar looking bugs, spiders and other garden creatures, who congregate under the railway overpass and traipse the snow-covered city streets in hats and heavy overcoats. A discordant colour palette of purples, browns and oranges helps to convey the ideological clash between the former friends. The depiction of New York landmarks and cultural icons, including Central Park and Broadway Theatre, adds authenticity to the setting, though subtle intertextual references, such as the title of another of the Morrisons' collaborations with Lemaitre, *The Book of Mean People*, featured on a billboard poster, may be missed by younger readers. Similarly, the cursive font is likely to be difficult for some children to decipher. Yet with some adult guidance and support, children are likely to find *Who's Got Game? The Ant or the Grasshopper?* an appealing and thought-provoking book.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aesop Aesop's Fables
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Abandonment Animals Conflict Emotions Friendship Humanity Intertextuality Isolation/loneliness Modernity Morality Names Peers Rejection Socialisation Society Success and failure Survival Talking animals Values
Further Reading	Ferguson, Rebecca, "Of snakes and men: Toni and Slade Morrison's and Pascal Lemaitre's adaptations of Aesop in Who's Got Game?" *MELUS* 36. 2 (2011): 53+.

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