Eleanor A. Dasi, "Entry on: The Magic Gourd by Baba Wagué Diakité", peer-reviewed by Divine Che Neba, Daniel A. Nkemleke and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/208. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

Baba Wagué Diakité

The Magic Gourd

United States of America (2003)

TAGS: African Storytelling African Traditions Magic



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

General information	
Title of the work	The Magic Gourd
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	Baba Waguè Diakitè, *The Magic Gourd*. New York: Scholastic Press, 2003, 32 pp.
ISBN	0439439604
Genre	Folk tales, Illustrated works
Target Audience	Crossover (children and young adults)
Author of the Entry	Eleanor A. Dasi, University of Yaounde I, wandasi5@yahoo.com
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Creators



Baba Wagué Diakité , b. 1961
(Author, Illustrator)

Baba Wagué Diakité was born in 1961, in Bamako, Mali in West Africa. His mother named him "Wagué," or "Man of Trust," after his maternal grandfather. He spent his early childhood with his grandmother in the village of Kassaro where his earliest education started. He later joined his mother in Bamako, where he began his formal education in a French school. "He maintains that his best education came from stories that were told to him by his grandmother and mother about animals and the First People"*.

"Though Diakité was always artistically inclined, he did not begin the work for which he is known until after he moved to Portland, Oregon in the United States in 1985"** where he met artist Ronna Neuenschwander, whom he married; the couple have two daughters. His first children's book *The Hunterman and the Crocodile* was published by Scholastic Press in 1997 and received a Coretta Scott King Honor Book Award. "He has illustrated numerous children's books including *The Pot of Wisdom* and *Jamari's Drum* for Groundwood Books of Canada"***.

"He is the founder and director of the Ko-Falen Cultural Centre in Bamako, Mali, which enables artists and travellers from other countries to live, meet, study, and collaborate with artists of Mali"****. Together with his wife and their two daughters, they divide their time between two homes: Portland, Oregon, and Bamako, Mali.

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* "About Wagué", Baba Wagué Diakité website, babawague.wordpress.com(accessed: July 30, 2021).

** "Baba Wague Diakite", Art in Embassies. U.S. Department of State website, art.state.gov (accessed: July 30, 2021).

*** "About Wagué", Baba Wagué Diakité website, babawague.wordpress.com(accessed: July 30, 2021).

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**** "Radiozine on 02/22/13", KBOO fm website, kboo.fm (accessed: July 30, 2021).

Sources:

Official website (accessed: July 30, 2021).

art.state.gov (accessed: July 30, 2021).

kboo.fm (accessed: July 30, 2021).

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Additional information

Summary

The story begins with Brother Rabbit, who wanders around the parched country in search of food to feed his family who were starving because of a drought. While on his journey, he runs into a chameleon that is stuck in a thorny bush. The chameleon calls out for his help and promises to reward him well if he comes to its rescue. Rabbit rescues Chameleon and in return, Chameleon rewards his kindness with a magic gourd that fills up with anything that its owner desires and requests.

Overwhelmed by this luck, Rabbit thanks Brother Chameleon and rushes home with the magic gourd. He does not only use it to feed his family but also friends and neighbours.

Word floats around and reaches Mansa Jugu, the greedy king. The greedy king and his soldiers break into Rabbit's compound and steal the magic gourd with the aim of making gold and riches for themselves. Unable to get the magic gourd back, Rabbit is bound to return to his former lifestyle—scrounging for wild roots. Optimistic as before, he sings, "*Feeyeh ku, feeyeh ku. Waara sa kun tay.*" (meaning: Luck will come. Life will be good). And that is how he stumbles on Brother Chameleon again, who sympathises with his predicament and offers him another gift, *Fara-Ba*, the little mysterious rock that plays music on the heads of those who do not call it by name. Though Rabbit did not know what he was going to do with the unusual gift, he nonetheless thanked Chameleon and took the gift home.

Brother Rabbit pays Mansa Jugu a visit and offers him the mysterious stone. Greedy as he is, Jugu disregards *Fara-Ba* who in turn plays music on his head. Rabbit then uses this as an opportunity to get back his gourd. Though Mansa, the king, is reticent, he finally gives back the gourd and asks that everything that he has obtained as a result of the magical powers be taken away. But Rabbit takes only his gourd and leaves him with the food and gold. But before he returns home to flee with his family into the forest, he shouts "*Fara-Ba*" and the little rock drops into his hand. He and his family then join Chameleon, who taught them how to go in and out of the bush unnoticed. In the meantime, Mansa Jugu swears revenge on Rabbit but when he finds out that Rabbit left him all the food, he changed his mind and began to understand the value of generosity and friendship.

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Analysis

Stories that tell of objects that supply unending amounts of food abound around the world. We can cite among others *The Magic Porridge Pot** (from Germany), *The King's Magic Drum*** (from Nigeria), or the classical motif of Cornucopia, the horn of plenty. The story above is one of such stories, but inasmuch as it tells the story of the acquisition of a magic gourd that provided everything its owner desires, it is also a tale of generosity, compassion, and goodwill as positive values that are required to accompany such benefaction from the gods. These values are opposed to greed and bad faith which are frowned upon. The story above accentuates these positive values as it illustrates the outcome of positively or negatively using the gourd that provides food for a starving community. Rabbit is presented as kind-hearted and compassionate. That is why he does not hesitate to help when Chameleon calls out for assistance and does not also take away everything that the magic gourd provided for Mansa Jugu. These attributes are contrasted with those of Mansa Jugu who is brutal, insatiable and vengeful even on things that do not belong to him.

The story also underscores the value of friendship and the need to always be optimistic about life. Though Rabbit is starving, he still has hope that things will get better. His optimism combines with his friendliness which results in his helping the chameleon and getting invaluable gifts in return. The song of praise sung to Rabbit and Chameleon at the end of the story accentuates further on the illusory value of material wealth. It says the real wealth is spiritual which entails a compassionate relationship with others.

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* See: Grimm Brüder, "Vom süßen Brei" in *Kinder- und Haus-Märchen. Band 2*, Berlin: Realschulbuchhandlung, 1815, 107–108.

** Dayrell E., "The King's Magic Drum" in *Folk stories from Southern Nigeria, West Africa*, London, New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1910, 20–29.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs,

African Storytelling African Traditions Magic

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Characters, and Concepts	
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Animals Character traits Desires Friendship Magic Values
Further Reading	Dayrell, Elphinstone, "The King's Magic Drum" in *Folk stories from Southern Nigeria, West Africa*, London, New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1910, 20–29 (accessed: July 30, 2021). Dieterlen, Germaine, "Masks and Mythology among the Dogon", *African Arts* 22.3 (1989): 34–88 (accessed: July 30, 2021). Grimm, Brothers, "The Sweet Soup" in *Household Stories*, London: David Bogue, 1857, 326 (accessed: July 30, 2021). Grimm, Brüder, "Vom süßen Brei" in *Kinder- und Haus-Märchen. Band 2*, Berlin: Realschulbuchhandlung, 1815, 107–108. Rattray, R. S., "How the Whip and the *Maara* Spoon (a Broken Bit of Calabash) Came to the Haunts of Men" in *Hausa Folk-Lore: Customs, Proverbs, etc. Collected and Transliterated with English Translation and Notes. Vol. 1*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913, 80–107; online (accessed: July 30, 2021).
Addenda	Origin: Mali.

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