



# Stories of the Ancient World

Keeping  
Humans in Line



## Keeping Humans In Line

Many of the stories that ancient people told about their gods and goddesses were about the ways they punished humans who disobeyed them. Gods and goddesses set strict rules and limits for humans, and they did not like it when they challenged their opinions, or boasted about their own power, or tried to take control of things that were not for humans to control.



These stories are often scary and had grisly endings, but they allowed humans to decide on rules to live by, hoping to avoid the fate of those who angered the gods.



## **Anansi and The Wisdom of The World**

Nyame the sky god had given Anansi the spider a very special task. The god had called out to the scuttling creature and asked him to collect together all of the wisdom in the world, bring it up into the sky and give it to him. If Anansi agreed to do this, Nyame promised that he would give him something very special in return.



But Anansi was not so naïve as to carry out the task before he had found out what the reward would be. ‘And if I do it, what will you give me?’ he asked Nyame. Nyame thought about this for a moment, and then he spoke. ‘If you do it, I will give you a glittering crown to wear on your head.’

Anansi did not seem convinced.



‘And on the crown,’ Nyame continued, ‘I will write the words ‘The Cleverest Creature in All the World’ so that everyone who you pass in the street will know who you are.’ At this, Anansi’s six eyes lit up, and he agreed to do as the sky god had asked.



Nyame chuckled to himself, knowing that he had found the spider's weakness. Anansi did not hear him, though – because he was busy chuckling to himself too. Anansi was delighted to have been given such an easy task. In his own mind he was sure that he already knew everything there was to know in the world.



In fact, he had been collecting knowledge and wisdom from everyone he met for as long as he could remember. He had stored it in a pot made from the skin of a calabash, in a hole he had dug in his garden.





It would take him no time at all to dig it up and deliver it to the sky god. Nyame, he was sure, would hardly be able to believe how quickly he had accomplished his task.



Anansi went back home and dug up the calabash pot from his back garden. His wife Aso was not convinced of his plan. 'Are you absolutely sure,' she asked him, 'that the sky god, Nyame would give you such a simple task?' But Anansi did not listen.

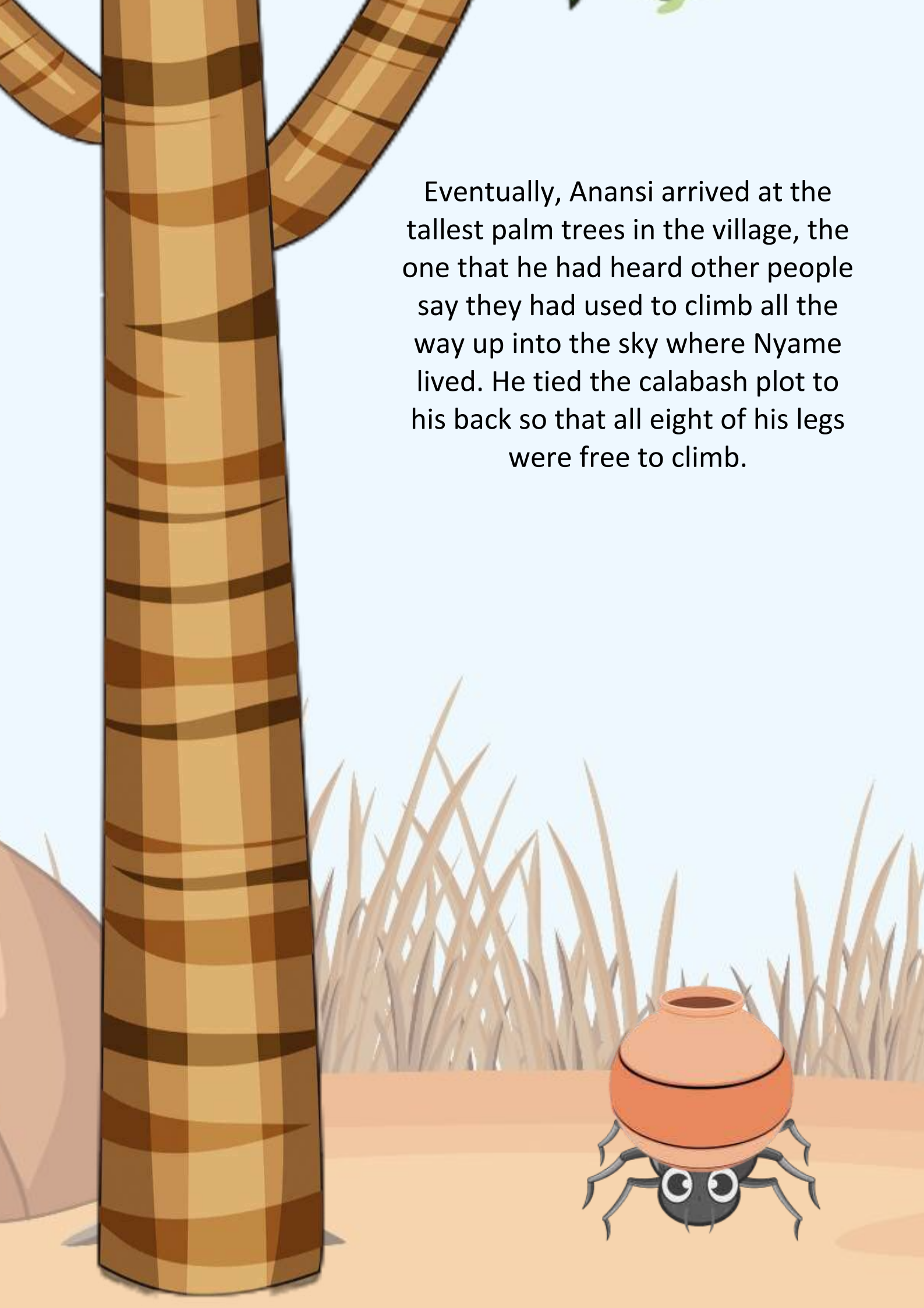


He was impatient to get his hands on the glittering crown that would announce to everyone that he was cleverest creature in all the world. He carried the calabash pot with all of the wisdom of the world inside it through the village.




He moved slowly because the pot was heavy – which was hardly surprising given the weight of all the wisdom it contained.



A tall, slender palm tree with a brown trunk and two arms extending upwards. At the base of the tree, a black spider with eight legs is carrying a large, round, orange calabash pot on its back. The spider is positioned on a sandy ground with some dry grass and a rock in the background. The scene is set against a light blue sky.

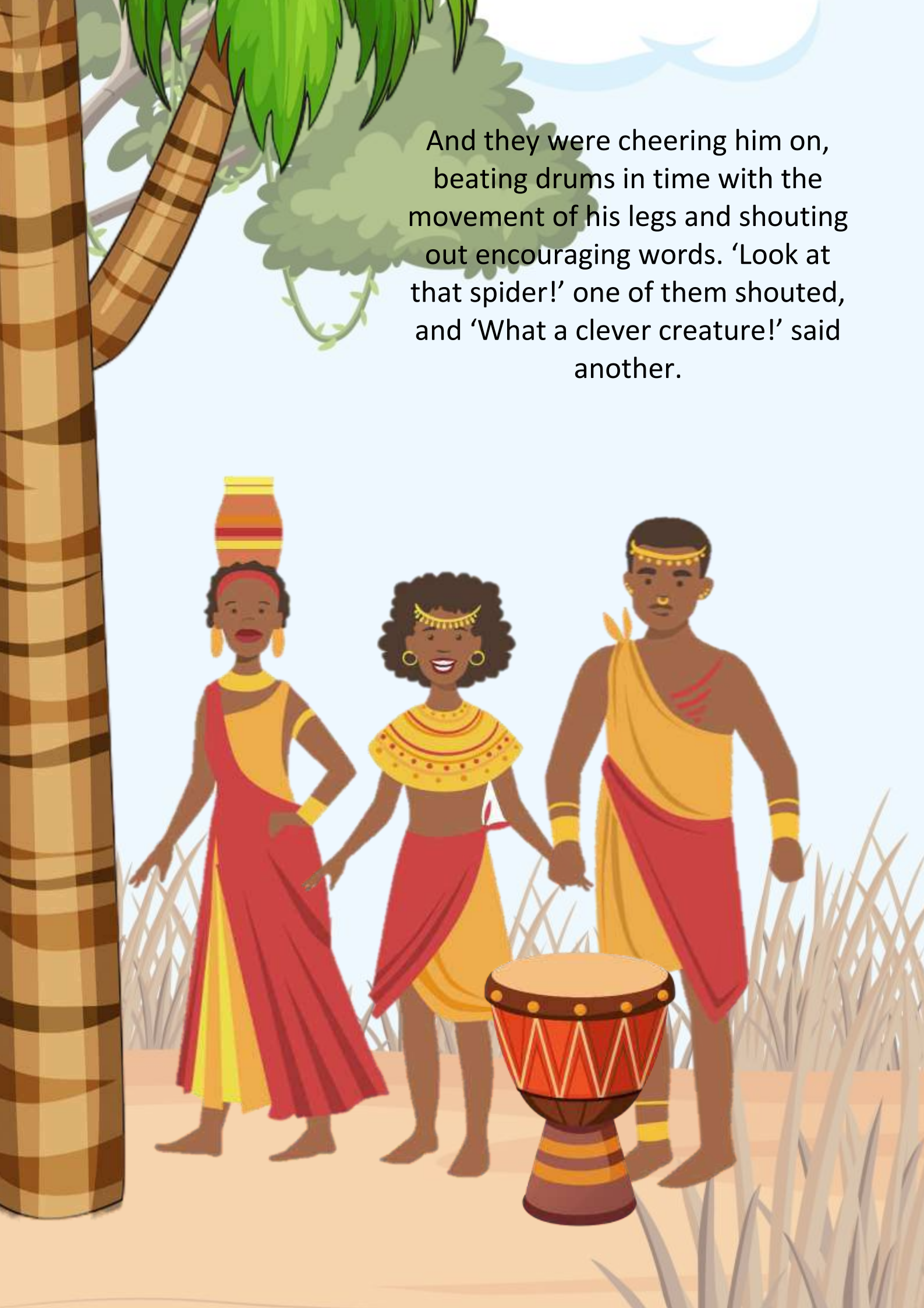
Eventually, Anansi arrived at the tallest palm trees in the village, the one that he had heard other people say they had used to climb all the way up into the sky where Nyame lived. He tied the calabash pot to his back so that all eight of his legs were free to climb.

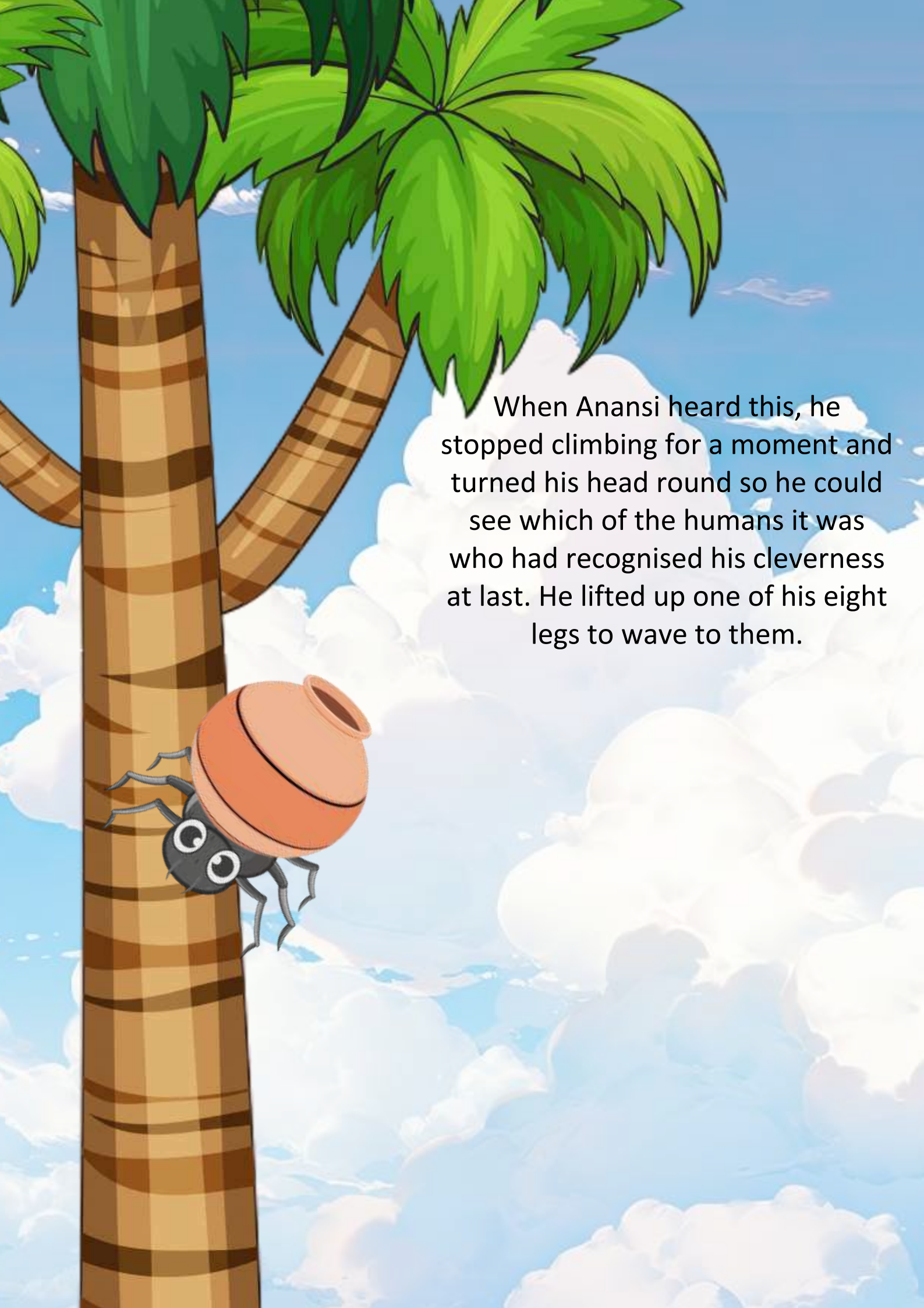


Then, slowly but surely, he began to climb to the treetops. By the time he reached the level of the rooftops, a crowd was staring to gather at the bottom of the tree. Humans were watching the spider climb with the enormous calabash pot on his back.



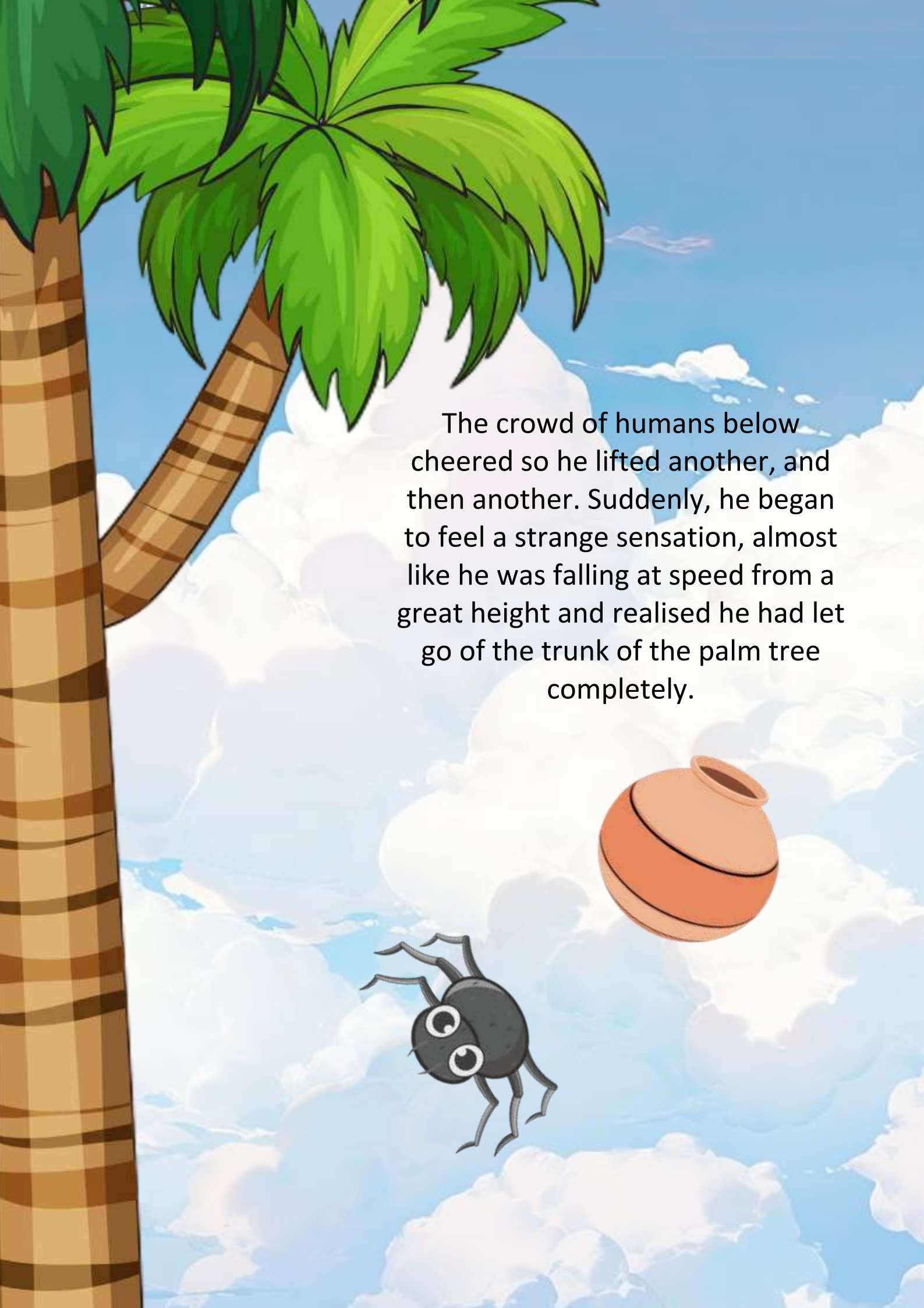
And they were cheering him on, beating drums in time with the movement of his legs and shouting out encouraging words. 'Look at that spider!' one of them shouted, and 'What a clever creature!' said another.





When Anansi heard this, he stopped climbing for a moment and turned his head round so he could see which of the humans it was who had recognised his cleverness at last. He lifted up one of his eight legs to wave to them.



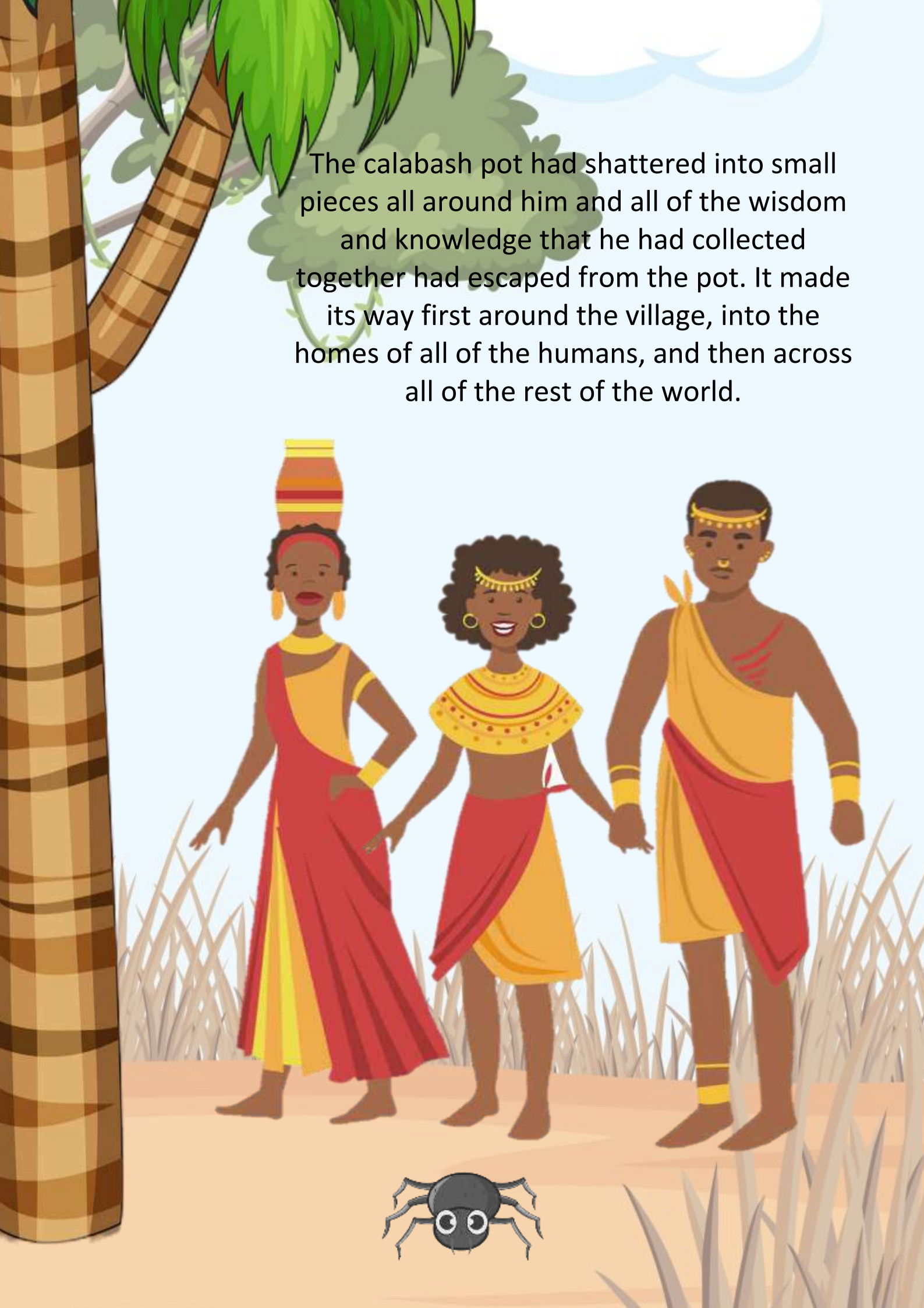


The crowd of humans below cheered so he lifted another, and then another. Suddenly, he began to feel a strange sensation, almost like he was falling at speed from a great height and realised he had let go of the trunk of the palm tree completely.

Anasi landed with a thud in the dust and when he opened his six eyes, he saw each of the humans who had been cheering only moments ago gazing at him from above, with a mixture of worry and disappointment on their faces.



The calabash pot had shattered into small pieces all around him and all of the wisdom and knowledge that he had collected together had escaped from the pot. It made its way first around the village, into the homes of all of the humans, and then across all of the rest of the world.



From the sky, Anansi heard a rumbling that sounded a little like thunder – Nyame was laughing. ‘So, you didn’t have all of the knowledge in the world then, Anansi! After all, if you knew all that there is to know, you would surely have known not to lift your legs from the trunk of a palm tree when you are trying to climb it.’ Nyame laughed again.



Anansi learned that day that he would never know everything there was to know. But although his pride was dented, he soon returned to trying to be the cleverest creature in the whole world.





THINK

DIGITAL ACADEMY