

THE EATING CONTEST OF ELEPHANT AND SQUIRREL

A Folktale from Africa

Told by Laura Gibbs / LauraGibbs.net

[web version](#) - [document version](#) - more at Scripts.LauraGibbs.net

Adapted for reader's theater from "How the Squirrel Outwitted the Elephant" in Among Congo Cannibals by John Weeks, [online at the Internet Archive](#).

[CC-BY license](#). This license allows reusers to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon the material in any medium or format (CC) with author attribution (BY).

PREVIEW: In this story, Mrs. Squirrel challenges Mr. Elephant to a peanut-eating contest, and Mr. Elephant is going to be very surprised by the outcome!

GENRE: Folktales

CULTURE: Loki (Congo, Africa)

THEMES: trickster, contest

LENGTH: 12 minutes

READERS: 4

ROLES: Narrator, Elephant, Mrs. Squirrel, Mr. Squirrel

[Mr. Squirrel will also read the voices of the other squirrels.]

NOTES: **spoilers; read afterwards** The type of substitution trick used here resembles the substitution trick used in a different kind of contest: the footrace between the slow trickster and their faster opponent, like in the story of [Cheetah Races Tortoise](#). In the

original story, the animals were eating palm-nuts, but I changed that to peanuts.

NARRATOR: You might not know this, but Mrs. Squirrel and Mr. Elephant used to be friends. Not best friends, not really even good friends exactly... but they were friends, so when Mrs. Squirrel ran into Mr. Elephant one day, she said:

MRS. SQUIRREL: Hello, Elephant, my friend! How are you doing today?

ELEPHANT: I'm doing fine, Squirrel, my little friend. I'm glad you said something! You're so small down there, I might not have noticed you. Even worse, I might have squished you under my big feet!

NARRATOR: To make his point, Elephant pressed one of his big feet down into the ground:

ELEPHANT: Squish squish squish: just like that, ha ha.

NARRATOR: Mrs. Squirrel knew she was smaller than Mr. Elephant, but she did not like being teased.

MRS. SQUIRREL: I know I'm smaller than you are but don't forget: in some ways, I'm bigger than you.

ELEPHANT: Bigger than me? [laughing] I think that's the funniest thing I've ever heard!

MRS. SQUIRREL: But I'm not joking. It's true!

ELEPHANT: Tell me more, little Squirrel. Just how do you think you are bigger than me?

NARRATOR: Mrs. Squirrel hadn't planned for the conversation to go this way, but she shouted:

MRS. SQUIRREL: MY APPETITE is bigger than yours! And I'll prove it: we'll have an eating contest, and I'm going to win! Come to the big peanut field tomorrow at high noon and we'll see who can eat the most peanuts.

ELEPHANT: (laughing) If you insist, little Squirrel, yes, I will go to the peanut field tomorrow at noon and we'll see who can eat the most palm-nuts. That will be my pleasure!

MRS. SQUIRREL: Good! See you tomorrow, Elephant!

ELEPHANT: And I'll see you tomorrow, little Squirrel!

NARRATOR: Every time Mr. Elephant called her "little Squirrel," Mrs. Squirrel got madder and madder. As she scampered back home, she said to herself:

MRS. SQUIRREL: That big fat Elephant is going to be sorry that he ever teased me. I'll show him! Mr. Elephant may have a bigger stomach than me... but I've got bigger ideas! I'm going to trick that

Elephant, and I'm going to trick him GOOD. That's how I will win the contest.

NARRATOR: Can you guess what Mrs. Squirrel was planning? She went home and told her husband what had happened.

MRS. SQUIRREL: I've had enough of Mr. Elephant and his insults, husband! So I challenged him to an eating contest tomorrow.

MR. SQUIRREL: An eating contest? I'm tired of Mr. Elephant and his insults too, but that doesn't sound like a very good idea. Mr. Elephant is the biggest eater in the forest. How will you ever beat him in a contest?

NARRATOR: As you can see, Mr. Squirrel hasn't guessed what Mrs. Squirrel is planning. Can you guess what she is going to do?

MRS. SQUIRREL: Now you go away, Narrator: I want to talk to my husband in private now. The plan is top secret!

NARRATOR: Okay, Mrs. Squirrel. We'll leave you two alone. While we're waiting, I'll tell our audience about peanuts. Peanuts are actually related to peas, which is how they got the name peanut, but people also call them ground-nuts, because they grow on the ground, unlike nuts you harvest from trees. Another name for peanuts is goobers, or goober-peas. Goober is a word that comes from the Congo in Africa, where the word for peanut is nguba. And have you heard of George W. Carver? He was an African American scientist, born into slavery in South Carolina in

1864. When he was only a week old, George, his mother, and his sister were stolen by night raiders and sold in Kentucky...

MR. SQUIRREL: Excuse me, Narrator!

NARRATOR: Yes, Mr. Squirrel, what is it? I was just telling the audience all about George W. Carver...

MR. SQUIRREL: Oh, all us squirrels know about George Carver: he taught the people of America all about peanuts!

NARRATOR: That's right, Mr. Squirrel!

MR. SQUIRREL: Well, I just wanted to let you know that my wife has told me what to do, and she's gone to explain the plan to all the other squirrels so everyone knows what they need to do tomorrow. You can carry on with the rest of the story now.

NARRATOR: That sounds good. Mr. Squirrel! Thank you for letting me know, and I'm sure everybody is curious to find out what you have planned, so I'll start the story again.

MR. SQUIRREL: Perfect! I'm going to go hide in the bushes by the riverbank with all the other squirrels now. I'll see you later! Mrs. Squirrel is on her way to meet the Elephant, and she said that's where you should go too!

NARRATOR: Alright, Mr. Squirrel, we'll go catch up with Mrs. Squirrel and the Elephant now. And there they are, I see them now: Mr. Elephant has just arrived at the peanut field.

ELEPHANT: Mrs. Squirrel, where are you?

MRS. SQUIRREL: Here I am, Elephant my friend. Are you ready to eat some peanuts? I've come here with my BIGGEST appetite, and I am ready to show you just who can eat the most.

ELEPHANT: You go right ahead and show me, little Squirrel. Let's start eating on my signal. One two three: EAT.

NARRATOR: Then the Elephant and the Squirrel started eating. Elephant ate and ate and ate, and Mrs. Squirrel ate and ate and ate. And when Mrs. Squirrel could feel her stomach was getting full, she said:

MRS. SQUIRREL: Oh, I need a drink of water to wash down all these peanuts I've eaten. I'm going to go to the river and get a drink; I'll be right back.

ELEPHANT: Okay, Mrs. Squirrel. We sure have eaten a lot of peanuts already. I'm going to take a break while you go down to the river.

MRS. SQUIRREL: That sounds good, Mr. Elephant. We can start eating again when I come back.

NARRATOR: So Mr. Elephant waited for Mrs. Squirrel to come back. She wasn't gone long, and when she came back, she shouted:

MR. SQUIRREL: Okay, Mr. Elephant, let's eat some peanuts!

NARRATOR: But what Mr. Elephant didn't know was that it wasn't Mrs. Squirrel who had come back from the river. It was MR. SQUIRREL. He had an empty stomach and he was hungry for peanuts.

ELEPHANT: Little Squirrel, I have to say: you really DO have a big appetite.

MR. SQUIRREL: That's right, Mr. Elephant! I told you I would win this eating contest.

ELEPHANT: Hey, I was just being nice. That doesn't mean you're going to win the contest.

MR. SQUIRREL: We'll see, Mr. Elephant, we'll see.

NARRATOR: After a while, that Squirrel got full, and so she told the Elephant she had to go get a drink at the river. Then, just like before, a DIFFERENT Squirrel came back, but Elephant couldn't tell the difference. To the big Elephant, all the little Squirrels looked just alike.

ANOTHER SQUIRREL: Mr. Elephant, it looks to me like you're slowing down.

ELEPHANT: Not at all, Mrs. Squirrel, not at all. I'll show you! There's no way you are going to win this contest.

NARRATOR: And then that Squirrel went and got a drink, and another Squirrel came back, and another and another. By that time, Mrs. Squirrel was ready to come back and eat some more, so she returned to the peanut field and found Mr. Elephant lying down on the ground.

MRS. SQUIRREL: Mr. Elephant! Mr. Elephant! Are you alright? I had a nice good drink, and I'm ready to keep eating. It's time for you to get up and eat some peanuts! Let's go!

ELEPHANT: [groaning] Oh, little Squirrel, I don't know how you can keep eating. I'm done, I'm finished, I'm stuffed. I can't eat even one more peanut.

MRS. SQUIRREL: So does that mean you admit I won the contest?

ELEPHANT: You won the contest! I concede. You are the winner! Your appetite really is bigger than mine.

MRS. SQUIRREL: Then maybe next time you'll think twice before you call me little Squirrel.

ELEPHANT: I promise, Mrs. Squirrel. You may be small in size, but you have the biggest appetite I have ever seen.

MRS. SQUIRREL: Thank you, Mr. Elephant! That means a lot. And now I'm going to eat just a few more peanuts, if you don't mind.

ELEPHANT: [groaning] Go right ahead, Mrs. Squirrel. But no more for me, thank you. I don't know how you do it!

MRS. SQUIRREL: Well, we squirrels just love peanuts. We always have! And while you rest, and while I keep eating, maybe that nice Narrator will tell us some more about George W. Carver.

NARRATOR: I'm glad to do that, Mrs. Squirrel! George Carver eventually became a professor at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, and he taught farmers all over the United States of America about how to grow peanuts and about all the different things people could make from peanuts. One of the peanut bulletins he published was called "How to Grow the Peanut and 105 Ways of Preparing it for Human Consumption."

MRS. SQUIRREL: Well, you humans sure do like to complicate things. We just eat the peanuts right out of the ground, and they sure do taste good that way, don't they, Elephant?

ELEPHANT: Just speaking for myself, I think I ate enough peanuts today to last me for the rest of my life. I'm just going to roll over here and take a nap.

NARRATOR: Sweet dreams, Elephant! And now that Mr. Elephant is asleep, I can say: well done, Mrs. Squirrel! Your plan worked: the Elephant has no idea that you tricked him.

MRS. SQUIRREL: And the main thing is that he learned a good lesson: you shouldn't judge people by their size. Sometimes they can surprise you!

NARRATOR: You definitely surprised the Elephant today, Mrs. Squirrel, and I bet you surprised some of the audience members too. Thank you for sharing your story with us today, and thank you, audience, for listening to our little play!