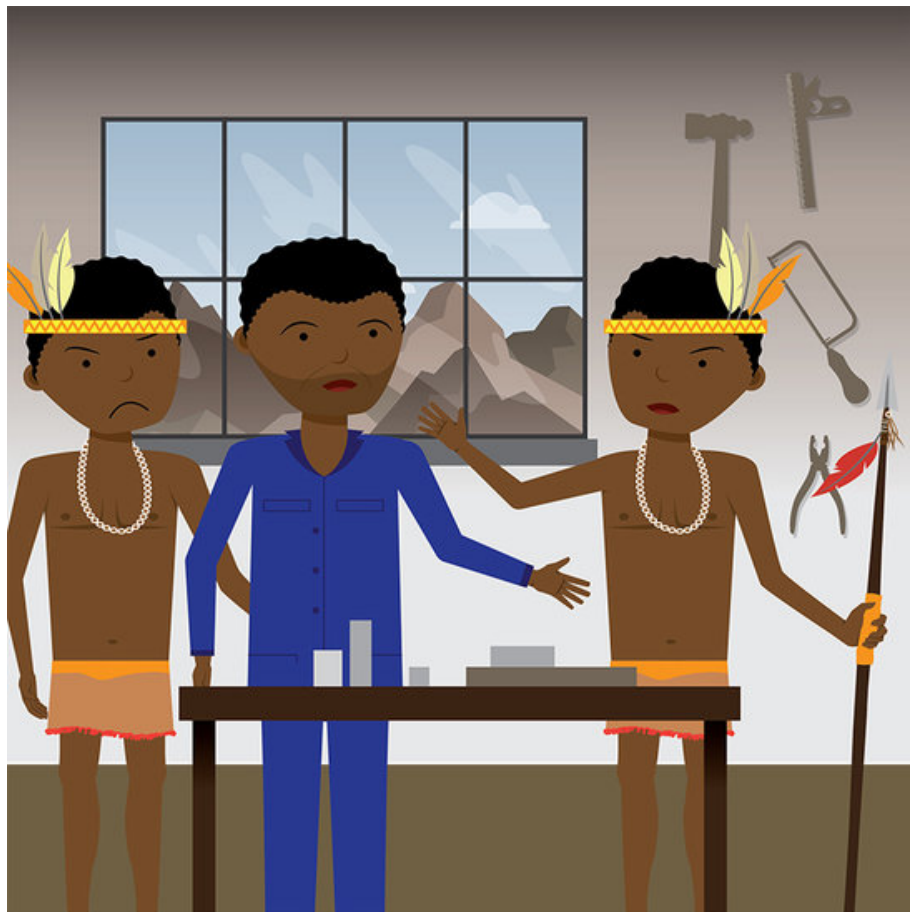
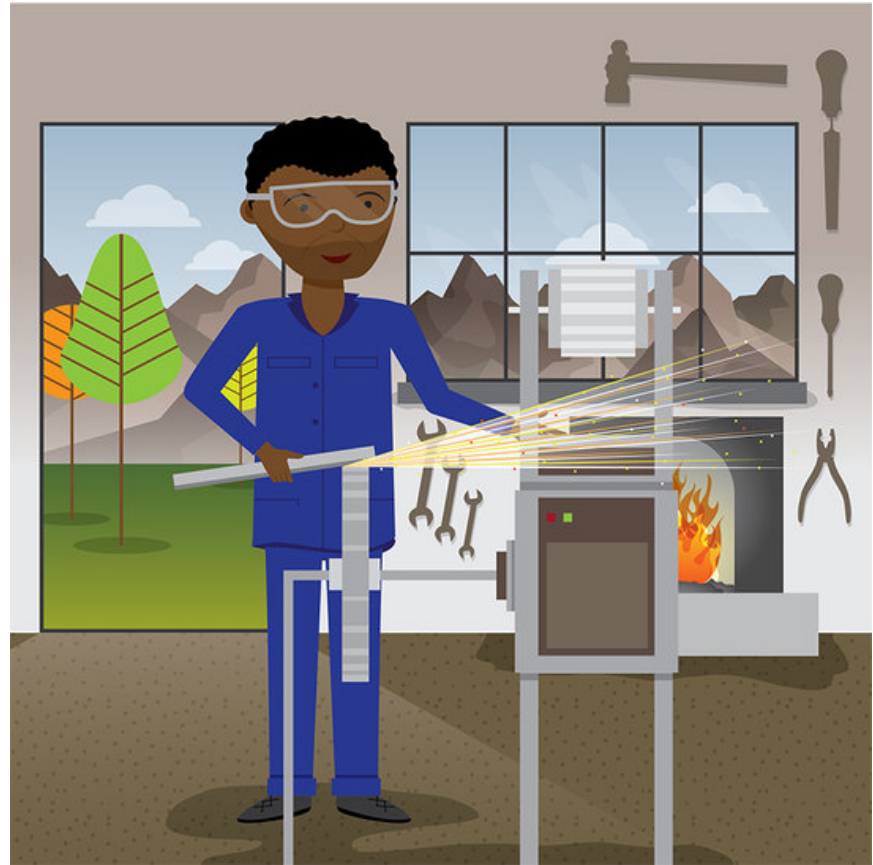


The blacksmith's dilemma

Ugandan folktale
English



Once upon a time in a mountainous African village there lived a famous blacksmith. The villagers called him Ratshipi - the man of iron and steel.





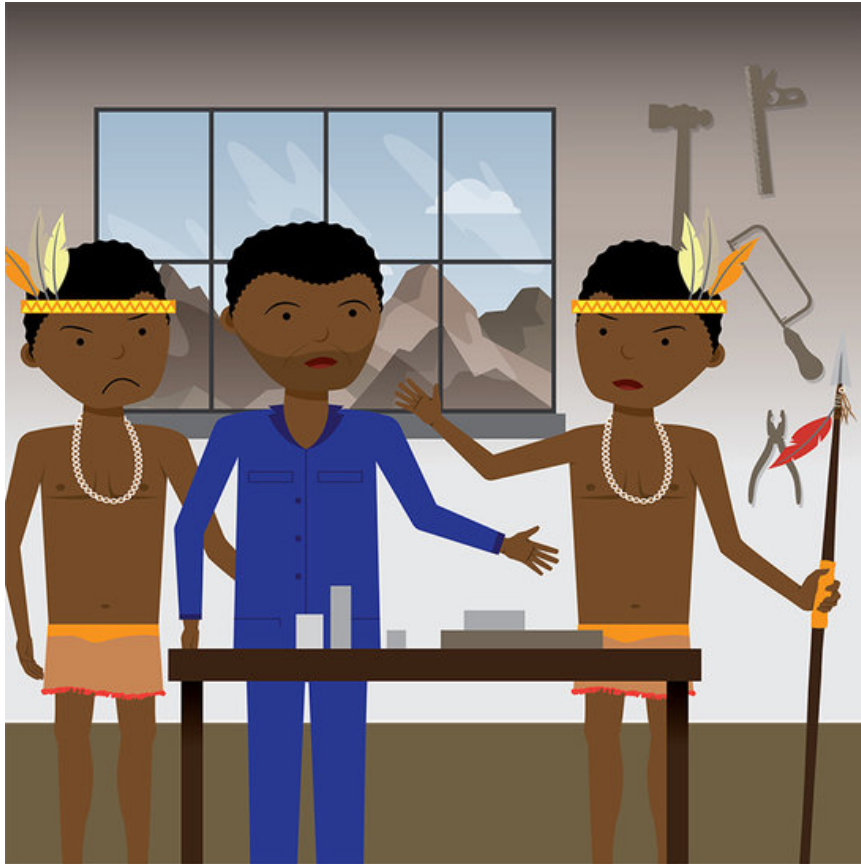
Ratshipi was known by everyone in the village.

They went to his shop every morning to watch him work.

He seemed to be able to make anything with his iron and steel.

Kgosi Mogale, the village chief, heard about Ratshipi's work. He sent his servants to bring Ratshipi to the palace.





Ratshipi was happy to hear that Kgosi Mogale wanted to see him.
“I will be very happy to work for the chief,” he said.

So Ratshipi went to the palace.
“Ratshipi, I have heard about your good
work,” said Kgosi Mogale.
“I want you to do a very special task.”





“With your iron and steel, I want you to build a man who can walk, cry real tears and bleed real human blood.”
“Impossible!” thought Ratshipi. But no one could say no to the king in this village.

Ratshipi could not sleep that night.
How was he going to do this impossible
task?
He was very scared and very worried.





Suddenly Ratshipi remembered a wise old man Rapule. Perhaps he could help.

But where was Rapule? He had disappeared from the village. People said that it was because he had displeased the chief.

The next morning Ratshipi did not go to his shop.

He went up the mountains to think.

While walking there, he saw an old man sitting under a tree.



It was old Rapule!

“I am so pleased to see you,” said Ratshipi.

“I have a big problem.”

He told Old Rapule the whole story.

Old Rapule thought carefully, and then he said...





“Tell the chief that you will need a thousand buckets full of tears and a thousand African pots full of hair. With the water, you will make blood. With the hair, you will make a fire to strengthen the steel man.”

“Thank you, thank you!” Ratshipi said, running back to the palace.

Ratshipi said, “Kgosi Mogale, to do what you ask, I will need two things. A thousand buckets full of tears; and a thousand African pots filled with hair from the heads of the villagers.” Kgosi Mogale agreed. He asked his headmen to tell the villagers.





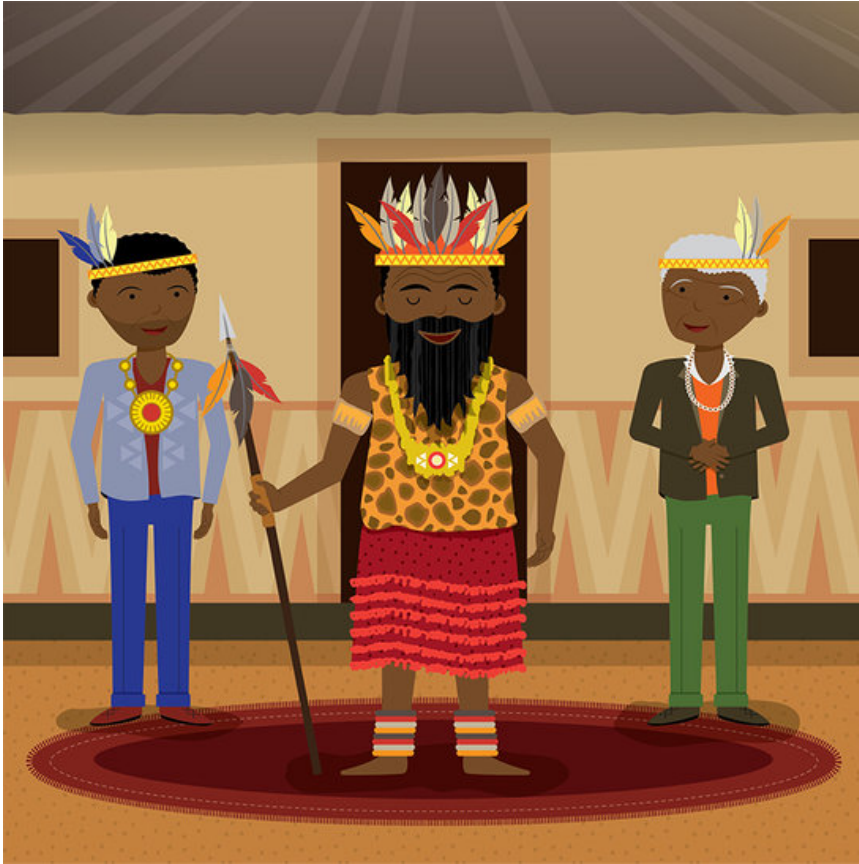
Cries were heard from every corner of the village. Young and old people cried day and night to fill a thousand buckets with tears.

Every villager's head was shaved off and thrown into the pots.

But the tears and hair of all the villagers were not enough to fill the buckets and pots.

Eventually Kgosi Mogale gave up and called Ratshipi back to the palace. “Ratshipi, you are a wise man, the wisest in the village,” said Kgosi Mogale. “Will you do me the honour of being my chief headman?” Ratshipi smiled.





“Only if you let old Rapule come back to the village,” he replied.

So Ratshipi became chief headman. And he and old Rapule were the advisors of Kgosi Mogale.

The blacksmith's dilemma

Writer: Ugandan folktale

Illustration: Wiehan de Jager

Language: English



© African Storybook Initiative, 2014



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution
(CC-BY) Version 3.0 Unported Licence

Disclaimer: You are free to download, copy, translate or adapt this story and use the illustrations as long as you attribute or credit the original author/s and illustrator/s.