

# Teacher Owl's Class

**Frank Meintjies**



**T**hey were all gathered in the classroom. The learners sat on two logs under a blue sky with flecks of white cloud. It was not far from a stream. Teacher Owl looked at the class.

Snail looked left and right on her log. She was just trying to see what Miss Owl saw. There was Hare, Leguaan, the Honeyguide and Daliso the cat. "Learners", said Teacher Owl, to the class, "Settle down. I know it's nearly the end of the school day. I want to give you your homework for tomorrow. It's about knowing where you and your family come from."



Teacher Owl explained what they needed to do. She usually tried to make sure the learners understood everything. She wanted to tell them one more time, so they would remember. But some of the learners were already sliding off the logs to go home. "Goodbye," Teacher Owl said. "Have a safe journey home". Snail was still on the log. She wondered if anyone even heard Teacher Owl say goodbye.

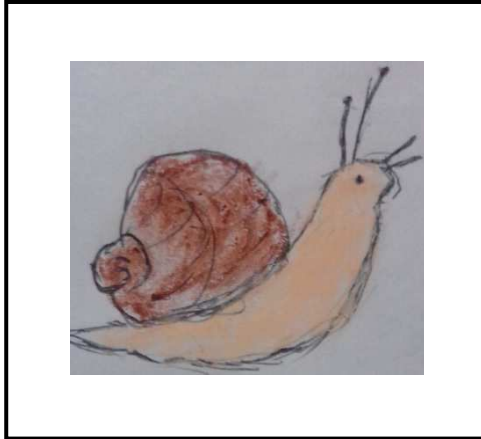
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The next day, in the morning, the learners gathered in the class. Daliso the cat arrived just as everyone was saying: "Good morning teacher".

Then they sang one of their favourite songs:

"We are the learners from the valley  
We like to learn  
We are the learners  
It's our turn"

"We the learners of the valley  
do 'words' and 'sums'  
for us learning and passing  
is so much fun."



Snail was the last to arrive. The learners had finished singing the song when snail arrived. She was sweating. "This morning is hotter than usual. I left early; but because of the heat I could not walk as fast as I usually do," Snail said.

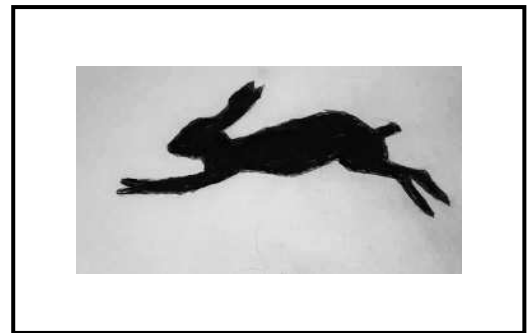
Hare laughed. "Did you say you normally walk fast. Surely you mean ... 'less slow' ". Teacher Owl said: "Be nice to snail. Walking all the way to school is harder work for her. She is smaller than

you and she does it all on one foot."

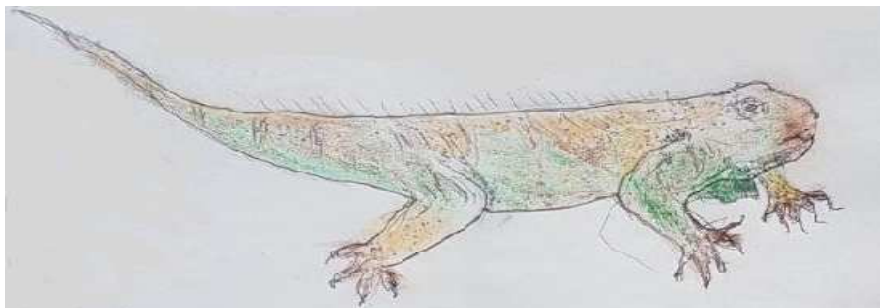
Everyone took their seats on the logs. Some went to their favourite spots. The two logs were side by side so the learners rubbed shoulders with each other. The far end of the logs were pulled inward, so those sitting on the end could also hear what Teacher Owl said.

"Did you do your homework?", Teacher Owl asked.

Hare said: "I raced towards home, but along the way I got tired and fell asleep".



Leguaan said that on its way home it smelt some crocodile's eggs. The big strong lizard spoke in a soft voice. "It was at the sandy part near the large pond. I could not see the crocodile anywhere. So I thought I would dig in the ground for some crocodile eggs." Teacher Owl went to stand near Leguaan, to hear better. "I then got home too late to do my homework," Leguaan said.



Honeyguide said she also had a problem.

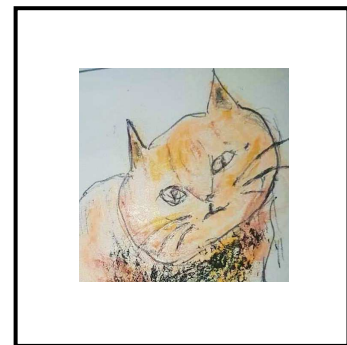
She was flying home when she saw a bee hive. She then flew off to find Raccoon



who lived in another part of the valley. She needed Raccoon to open the hive for her. She told the class: "Yesterday was hot and we worked hard in class. I needed some honey." Honeyguide explained how the she and Raccoon set off to the bees' home. When they got there, they spent a while with the honey and the wax. Raccoon enjoyed the honey. Honeyguide enjoyed the beeswax. "I got home too late to do the homework," said Honeyguide. "I was also covered in wax. I had to try to tidy my feathers before I went to bed. It was far too late to start thinking of

homework", she said.

Daliso the cat blinked his eyes. "I am sorry teacher. On my way home, I found a ball of wool. I stopped to play with it. It was such fun. Very soon I was covered in threads. At last I decided to go home. But it took me some time to untangle myself. When I got home, I asked my mother to help me with the homework. But she said: "It's late. Have some milk and go to bed".



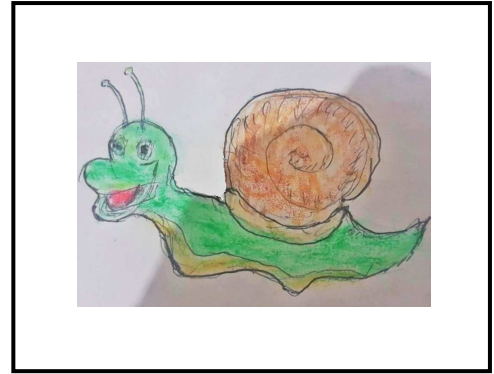
"And, Snail, did you do your homework?" teacher Owl asked. Snail cleared her throat. Snail was always a bit nervous. She looked this way and that way. Then she nodded. "Teacher, It took me a long while to get home. Along the way, I passed Hare sleeping. At one point I saw Raccoon and Honeyguide crossing the pathway in front me. They seemed to be in a hurry."

But, yes, I did get home in time to do my homework," Snail said.

Teacher Owl stepped closer to the group. "I am glad to hear that one of you made sure they did their homework . Good. Snail, come forward and present your homework."

Snail went to the front. She was not used to standing in the front of the class and speaking to everyone. She looked just above everyone's heads. Maybe if she pretended to talk to the trees and grass behind the learners, she would not be so nervous. She coughed and then started: "My ... my homework: where I come from."

"I asked my mother and she told me this story. My grandmother and grandfather used to live in a rainforest somewhere in the middle of Africa. They felt there were too many snails there so they decided to journey south. They crossed the Zambezi river by getting on to a piece of wood, just before the river water rose. On this side of the big river, they found a nice place to live. It was under a small tree. It was a place with lots of rain. That is where my mother met my father. I was born in this valley."



The teacher asked questions. Snail replied: "I heard the story for the first time yesterday. I think my grandparents were brave. I am happy to know where I come from -- it makes me proud."

"That is a very good story. Well done." said teacher Owl. She turned to speak to the other students: "We can learn from Snail."

"It is important to have a story. It is good to know where you come from."

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