

# **UKS2 Topic: Early Islamic Civilisation**

Block F:  
Scheherazade

Session 3  
Resource pack

## 'Recurring Themes' activity sheet

Theme	✓	Write an extract from the story, or a description in your own words, as evidence.
<b>A 'frame story'</b>		Story: Evidence:
<b>A 'quick-witted' hero</b>		Story: Evidence:
<b>Rise to riches</b>		Story: Evidence:
<b>Luck and good fortune</b>		Story: Evidence:
<b>Adventure</b>		Story: Evidence:

<b>'Fantastic' elements, e.g. monsters, spirits, magic...</b>		Story: Evidence:
<b>Greed</b>		Story: Evidence:
<b>The power of storytelling</b>		Story: Evidence:
<b>A moral or lesson to be learned</b>		Story: Evidence:

## Examples of other stories of moralistic/allegorical nature

A story featuring *Nasreddin Hodja*: Turkey's (and perhaps all of Islam's) best-known trickster. His legendary wit and droll trickery were possibly based on the exploits and words of a historical imam. Nasreddin reputedly was born in 1208CE in the village of Horto near Sivrihisar.

### IF IT IS UP TO THE TURBAN AND THE ROBE

An Iranian gave Hodja the letter he had received from a friend back home and asked Hodja to read it to him. Hodja looked at the letter. It was in Persian and the handwriting was terrible. So, he told the man,

"Have somebody else read it."

The man insisted.

"Listen! I don't know Persian. Even if it were in Turkish, the writing is so bad that I still wouldn't be able to read it," Hodja explained.

The Iranian got mad,

"You are wearing a huge robe and a turban but can't read even a simple letter. You should be ashamed of yourself!"

Hodja took off his turban and robe, and gave them to the Iranian.

"If one can do anything by wearing a robe and a turban, then here, you wear them and read the letter yourself," he added.

<http://u.cs.biu.ac.il/~schiff/Net/t12.jpg>

*Aesop's* famous fables and scripts are all short so keep the attention of children, often feature familiar animals loved by children and of course a moral to learn from.

A slave named Androcles once escaped from his master and fled to the forest. As he was wandering about there he came upon a Lion lying down moaning and groaning. At first he turned to flee, but finding that the Lion did not pursue him, he turned back and went up to him. As he came near, the Lion put out his paw, which was all swollen and bleeding, and Androcles found that a huge thorn had got into it, and was causing all the pain. He pulled out the thorn and bound up the paw of the Lion, who was soon able to rise and lick the hand of Androcles like a dog.

The Lion took Androcles to his cave, and every day used to bring him meat from which to live.

But shortly afterwards both Androcles and the Lion were captured, and the slave was sentenced to be thrown to the Lion, after the latter had been kept without food for several days. The Emperor and all his Court came to see the spectacle, and Androcles was led out into the middle of the arena. Soon the Lion was let loose from his den, and rushed bounding and roaring towards his victim. But as soon as he came near to Androcles he recognised his friend, and fawned upon him, and licked his hands like a friendly dog. The Emperor, surprised at this, summoned Androcles to him, who told him the whole story. Whereupon the slave was pardoned and freed, and the Lion let loose to his native forest.

<http://www.taleswithmorals.com/aesop-fable-androcles.htm>

## Another 'Hodja' story...

### Full House

One of Nasreddin Hodja's neighbours asked the Hodja for some advice on how to manage his large family in his tiny little house.

'Hodja Effendi\*', he lamented, 'our quarters are so small, we can't all fit in. Me and my wife, my mother-in-law, 3 kids... We are cramped up in our puny cottage. You are a wise man, you would know of a solution, please tell me what to do!'

'How many chickens do you have in the barn?' Hodja asked.

'Why, Hodja Effendi, I have 5 chickens and a rooster.'

'Take them all into the house!'

'Mercy!' the poor peasant protested, 'Hodja Effendi, the house is small without the chickens.'

'Try it!' Nasreddin Hodja insisted, 'You will be grateful to me.'

The neighbour was not convinced but he didn't dare question the wisdom of the Hodja. He took the chickens and the rooster inside the house. The next morning he ran to Hodja's house.

'Hodja Effendi, it is worse now. Me, my wife, my mother-in-law, 3 kids, 5 chickens and a rooster! We can't fit in at all!' he bemoaned. However, Nasreddin Hodja was not moved.

'You have a donkey, don't you?'

'Yes, Hodja Effendi, I have one old donkey.' answered the man.

'Take the donkey in!' said the Hodja. No matter how much the neighbour objected, Nasreddin Hodja maintained that it was for his best and the hopeless man did as he was told. The next morning, he ran back to Hodja's house, this time more despairingly than ever.

'Hodja Effendi! It is not possible. The wife, the mother-in-law, the kids, the chickens, the rooster and the donkey! We had a terrible night. There is no room to breathe.'

'If I remember correctly, you had two lambs, did you not?'

'Oh, no! Hodja Effendi, don't tell me to take the lambs in. There is no room!'

'Don't worry, my friend,' the Hodja assured the desperate man, 'You will thank me in the end.' The neighbour, hoping the Hodja knows something that he doesn't, took the two lambs in that night. The next morning, he was at Hodja doorstep, wretched.

'Hodja Effendi, what are you doing to us? The house is packed full. My mother-in-law is threatening to kill me, my wife is threatening to leave me. This is not working at all.'

Nasreddin Hodja considered for a moment, then he said:

'Now, take all the livestock out of the house. Chickens, rooster, donkey and lambs; all back to the garden, back to the barn, back to the shed. Take them all out!'

Next morning, the neighbour was once again at Hodja's house.

'Ahh, Hodja Effendi, you are indeed a wise man. You solved my problem. Now, our house is so large, so roomy, so much space for everyone, kids can play, we can sleep, everyone is happy.' he said,

'Thank you and may Allah bless you!'

\* **Effendi**: a man of high education or social standing in an eastern Mediterranean or Arab country; Historically, a title of respect or courtesy in Turkey.

<http://www.readliterature.com/h010502.htm>

*Anansi* stories are part of an ancient mythology, rooted in West African folklore that has spread to the Caribbean. As well as being portrayed as a man, the trickster-hero often takes the form of a spider. These stories continue to provide a moral foundation for the communities in which they are told.

Anansi does not always finish with the upper hand...

Once upon a time, there lived a spider called Anansi. Though Anansi's wife was a very good cook, the greedy spider loved nothing more than to taste other people's food.

One day, Anansi stopped by to visit his friend, the rabbit. 'Hmm!' exclaimed the greedy spider as he entered the kitchen. 'Those are really lovely greens you are cooking, Rabbit.'

'Why don't you stay for dinner?' replied the friendly rabbit. 'The greens are not yet cooked, but they will be soon.'

Anansi knew that if he stayed while the meal was still cooking, then Rabbit would surely give him chores to do, and the greedy spider did not visit his friend in order to do chores. So Anansi said to Rabbit, 'Please forgive me, dear friend, but I have some things I must do right away. Why don't I spin a length of web and tie one end around my leg and the other end around your cooking pot. That way you can tug on the web when the greens are cooked and I will come running back for dinner.'

Rabbit agreed that this was a very good idea, and so he tied Anansi's web to his pot and waved his friend goodbye.

Moments later, the greedy spider found himself walking past the house of his good friend, the monkey. And it just so happened that Monkey was also in the middle of preparing his dinner.

'Hmm!' exclaimed the greedy spider as he entered the kitchen. 'That is a lovely meal of beans and honey you are cooking, Monkey.'

'Why don't you wait until they are cooked and then stay for dinner,' replied the friendly monkey.

Once again, Anansi knew that if he stayed while the meal was still cooking, then Monkey would surely give him chores to do, and the greedy spider had no desire to do chores. So Anansi said to Monkey, 'I am very sorry, dear friend, but I have some things I must do right away. Why don't I spin a length of web and tie one end around my leg and the other end around your cooking pot. That way you can tug on the web when the beans and honey are cooked and I will come running back for dinner.'

Monkey agreed that this was an excellent idea, and so he tied Anansi's web to his pot and waved his friend goodbye.

On his way home Anansi visited six more friends, all of whom were busy preparing their evening meals.

He visited the tortoise, the hare, the squirrel, the mouse, the fox, and last of all he visited his good friend, the hog. And on each visit, Anansi spun the same old story. And for each friend he spun a length of web for their cooking pot. And so it was that all eight of Anansi's legs were attached to different cooking pots by long lengths of web.

The greedy spider simply could not resist tricking each of his friends so that he might eat from every pot while avoiding any chores along the way.

Anansi was very much looking forward to all of the food, especially the hog's sweet potato and honey dish which was always cooked to perfection. 'I have really outdone myself this time,' thought the greedy spider. 'So much lovely food to eat and I even avoided doing any chores in return! I wonder which pot of food will be ready first.'

Just then, Anansi felt one of the lengths of web tug at his leg. 'That must be the rabbit with his tasty dish of greens,' thought the greedy spider.

But then another length of web tugged at another of Anansi's legs. 'Oh dear!' he exclaimed out loud, 'That must be the monkey with his pot of beans and honey.'

Then another leg was tugged! And another! And another! Until all eight of Anansi's legs were being pulled in different directions at once!

Anansi dragged himself towards the river and jumped into the water so that all of his webs would be washed from his legs. One by one the webs released their grip on his legs until the greedy spider was

finally able to climb back onto the riverbank.

When Anansi had recovered and managed to dry himself off, he noticed something very strange. All eight of his legs had been stretched. Where once they were short and wide, now they were thin and long! 'How could I have been so greedy?' thought Anansi. 'Now look at what has become of me. Not only do I have eight skinny legs, but now I must even cook my own dinner!'

And that is why Anansi has eight skinny legs.

<http://www.worldstories.org.uk/stories/story/73-why-anansi-has-eight-skinny-legs>

Uncle Remus tells stories of the Southern United States, often featuring *Br'er Rabbit* as his trickster-hero. The majority of these stories originated in Africa. The stories were told and retold in the Americas by enslaved Africans, evolving with the changing times and the circumstances. The stories spread quickly on southern plantations and caught the interest of several writers, like Robert Roosevelt, Alcée Fortier, and Joel Chandler Harris. Harris created the Uncle Remus character to narrate the tales.

### **Brer Fox Catches Old Man Terrapin**

Well now, Brer Rabbit had made friends with Old Man Terrapin, a big turtle that lived in the pond near his house. Brer Rabbit and Old Man Terrapin liked to pull tricks on Brer Fox, and that rascally fellow got pretty mad about it.

Since he couldn't catch Brer Rabbit no-how, Brer Fox decided that he'd get even with Old Man Terrapin instead. He started walking beside the pond every day, hoping to find the turtle out of the water.

One morning, as he was taking his daily stroll, Brer Fox saw Old Man Terrapin sitting right in the centre of the road. The old turtle looked hot and bothered about something. He kept shaking his head back and forth and he was panting like he was out of breath.

"Howdy, Brer Terrapin," said Brer Fox, stopping beside the old turtle. "What's the matter wid you?"

"I was a-strolling in the field beside my pond when the farmer came along and set it on fire," Old Man Terrapin gasped. "I had to run and run, but that ol' fire was faster than me, so I curled up in my shell while it passed right over me! My shell is hotter than the noon-day sun, and I think I done singed my tail!"

"Let me have a look," said Brer Fox. So Old Man Terrapin uncurled his tail and poked it out of his shell. Immediately, Brer Fox grabbed him by the tail and swung him right off the ground.

"I gotcha now, Brer Terrapin," cried Brer Fox. "You ain't gonna bother me no more!"

Well, Old Man Terrapin begged and begged Brer Fox not to drown him. He'd rather go back into the fire in the field on account of he'd kind of gotten used to being burned.

Brer Fox swung the poor old turtle back and forth by his tail, trying to decide what to do. Putting Old Man Terrapin into the fire was a tempting idea, but then he remembered how the old turtle had curled up into his shell so the fire couldn't touch him. Brer Fox frowned. Fire was no good, then. Brer Fox decided to drown Old Man Terrapin instead. He tucked the turtle under his arm and carried him down to the springhouse by the pond.

"Please, oh please don't drown me," Old Man Terrapin begged.

"I ain't making no promises," Brer Fox retorted. "You've played too many tricks on me, Brer Terrapin." Brer Fox thrust him into the water and began bouncing him up and down.

"Oh, I is drowning," shouted Old Man Terrapin when his head bounced out of the water. "Don't let go of my tail, Brer Fox or I'll be drowned for sure!"

"That's the idea, Brer Terrapin," Brer Fox yelled back and let go of his tail.

Immediately Old Man Terrapin splashed down and down into the water and thumped onto the mud on the bottom, kerplicky-splat.

That's when Brer Fox remembered that Old Man Terrapin lived in the pond, and there was never any fear of him drowning, no-how! He could hear him laughing from the bottom of the pond: "I-dare-ya-ta- come-down-'ere".

Brer Fox jumped up and down in fury. Old Man Terrapin had escaped him!

From the other side of the pond, Brer Bull Frog called out: "Knee-deep! Knee-deep!"

Brer Fox glared at the pond, and then looked back at Brer Bull Frog. "It's only knee-deep?" he asked suspiciously.

"Knee-deep, knee-deep!" Brer Bull Frog said again.

All the little frogs joined in the chorus then. "Better-believe-it! Better-believe-it!"

Well, thought Brer Fox, if it was only knee deep, then he'd have no trouble catching Old Man Terrapin.

"Wade-in, wade-in!" croaked Brer Bull Frog.

"Knee-deep, knee-deep!" agreed all the little frogs.

Brer Fox didn't much like water, but he really wanted to catch Old Man Terrapin. He approached the edge of the pond cautiously. From underneath the water, Old Man Terrapin laughed at him, and his words bubbled up to Brer Fox: "I-dare-ya-ta- come-down-'ere! I-dare-ya-ta- come-down-'ere." Well. That did it. Brer Fox ran right up to the edge of the pond. Leaning over, he looked into the water and saw another fox staring at him.

"Dat's-your-brother! Dat's-your-brother," Brer Bull Frog told Brer Fox.

Brer Fox was thrilled. He didn't know he had a brother. Now that there were two foxes, catching Old Man Terrapin would be a cinch! Brer Fox leaned down to shake hands with his new-found brother, and toppled right down into the deep water of the pond.

All of the frogs laughed and laughed at the trick they had played on Brer Fox, and Old Man Terrapin started swimming up from the bottom of the pond, his red eyes fixed on Brer Fox's tail. Brer Fox knew that the old turtle wanted to pull him down under that water and drown him, so he learned to swim mighty quick! With much splashing and squirming and kicking, Brer Fox made it to the edge of the pond, where he jumped out and ran away as fast as he could, while Brer Bull Frog laughed and the little frogs shouted with glee.

The last thing he heard as he rounded the corner was the voice of Old Man Terrapin calling: "I-dare-ya-ta- come-down-'ere".

Brer Fox never messed with Old Man Terrapin again!

## Teacher checklist: common themes in '1001 Nights' stories

Have the children spotted recurring themes or story structures, as follows:

### **The 'frame story'**

An example of the frame story, or framing device, is employed in the One Thousand and One Nights, in which Scheherazade narrates a set of tales to the King Shahryar over many nights. Many of Scheherazade's tales are also frame stories, such as the *Tales of Sinbad*: a collection of adventures related by Sinbad to various other characters.

### **Rise to riches**

Many of the Arabian Nights stories tell of men who rise from poverty to wealth and prosperity, as seen with Aladdin, Ali Baba and Sinbad. In each of these stories, the protagonist begins with very little to show for himself, but manages to rise in society both through luck, quick wits and perseverance.

### **Luck and good fortune**

Often, a character finds success in these stories through some rare stroke of good luck. Ali Baba just happened to be in the vicinity of the robbers when they opened the cave, so he knew how to access it and take the treasure...

### **Adventure**

A common theme of adventure and daring is present throughout nearly all of these stories. In *The Seven Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor*, Sinbad has a thirst for adventure on the open sea that cannot be quelled with merely a voyage or two. Other major characters regularly face obstacles that test their wits, strength, and agility, all elements of adventure tales.

### **Greed**

In a collection of stories that focuses so strongly on wealth and riches, greed often arises as a vice that characters must counter in themselves and others. The *magician* in Aladdin and *the forty thieves* are some of the characters met who cause trouble in order to satisfy their own greed.

### **The Power of Storytelling**

Storytelling is possibly the collection's most enduring theme. In the frame story of The Arabian Nights, Scheherazade believes that the power and intrigue of her stories will be able to keep her husband from killing her or any more of his wives. Sinbad believes that his stories will help lead the impoverished porter to a better understanding of the world. Stories are very often used as a means of persuasion, such as in *The Three Apples* and *The Fisherman and the Jinni*.