



How the Leopard Got His Claws

Chinua Achebe , Mary GrandPré (Illustrator) , John Iroaganachi

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In the beginning, all the animals lived as friends. Their king, the leopard, was strong but gentle and wise. Only Dog had sharp teeth, and only he scoffed at the other animals' plan to build a common shelter for resting out of the rain. But when Dog is ? ooded out of his own cave, he attacks the leopard and takes over as king. And it is then, after visiting the blacksmith's forge and knocking on Thunder's door, that the angry leopard returns to regain his throne by the menace of his own threatening new claws. In a riveting fable for young readers about the potency and dangers of power taken by force, Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, author of THINGS FALL APART, evokes themes of liberation and justice that echo his seminal novels about post-colonial Africa. Glowing with vibrant color, Mary GrandPré's expressive and action filled paintings bring this unforgettable tale to dramatic life.

From Chinua Achebe, father of modern African literature, comes a vivid fable about power and freedom.

How the Leopard Got His Claws Details

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From Reader Review How the Leopard Got His Claws for online ebook

Mary Lou says

Chinua Achebe tells this tale of the animals of the jungle and how they went from being friends, living together, to enemies, one and all. It is a very interesting reasoning of what happens when there is not loyalty to friends and when power is the ploy. If you've read some of my other reviews, I don't like books that teach wrong lessons. I don't like rudeness and disrespect. And some may think this book is one of them. However, I think in the reading of this story, there are many good lessons to be pulled from it. I also enjoyed the fact that Achebe didn't try to make everything "okay" in the end, but let the lessons stand. It is kind of a sad, regretful ending. Because of this subject, I believe this book is better to read with older children, not the young ones. The pictures are quite capturing and well done.

Mary Lee says

Yes, this is a fable about the danger of power taken by force, and the destructive results of power being removed by force--the destruction of a culture, of a way of life, of peace. One who does so is shown to be weak and base (dog) and the other (cheetah) is shown to be vicious.

Here is one adult writer who has done a good job crossing over into children's literature. This long picture book would make a good read aloud in grades 4-12.

Melissa De Wever says

The anthropomorphizing of the animals and giving them a realistic conflict is very intriguing. Additionally, giving a background to the qualities of the creatures makes for a unique story. I enjoyed the story. The different cultural perspective from mine made it an interesting tale. The illustrations were also lovely, somewhat reminiscent of woodcuts.

Victoria says

This African folk tale begins with a King Leopard who rules using kindness and is always fair. As the story continues King Leopard realizes that everyone likes Dog better, and he has something Leopard does not, claws. Eventually Dog takes the throne from King Leopard and he is so mad that he finds a way to get claws himself. He regains the throne, but must use violence to do so.

I felt that the moral of this folk tale may be too much for young children, but then again that can be a common theme in this genre. The illustrations were beautiful and very colorful. This could teach children to not let people take advantage of them for being nice, but it could also teach them that violence is the answer to that problem, and that is why I am unsure of this book.

Gphatty says

Fantastic illustrations and a very wonderful, modern fable combine in this excellent book. I would probably bump it up to 5 stars if I was confident that some of the allegorical themes would be understood by young children, to whom this book is obviously aimed. However, I bet that even elementary school kids will be able to understand some of the basic concepts of sticking together; overcoming adversity; and selling out your friends. Recommended.

Kirstin LaBelle says

This story is about a Leopard who rules using kindness and is always fair, but as the progresses, the Leopard realizes that everyone likes dogs better. Leopard quickly realizes that dog has claws, which Leopard doesn't have. Eventually Dog takes the throne from Leopard because he is more liked. The Leopard gets super mad that his throne was taken from him, so he decides he should get claws too. He regains the throne, but uses violence to do so.

Although the illustrations were great and the story itself was very good, I'm not sure I would want to read this to a child, because it seems rather dark.

I gave it a 4 star rating because I thought it was a good story and wasn't too graphic, but I'm also an adult.

Steph says

Again, my review is based on student reaction. The ISD students worry for leopard, express their outrage at his treatment. They question why "dog cheated on the leopard" and why "dog kills the other animals". They react to injustice and ask what words mean. They don't want to misunderstand the story.

Five stars every time I read it to children.

Jessie says

I just... didn't like it.

My main problem with it is that I tend to dislike stories about actual stuff that isn't true... is that all fables? Some are more palatable to me because they're cutesy or have a really good moral. In this story, the cheetah didn't have claws or sharp teeth. None of the animals had sharp teeth except for the dog. So the other animals made fun of the dog for having sharp teeth in his mouth (okay, that part was funny, because clearly sharp teeth are going to come in handy...foreshadowing)

The story itself was dark. The dog was a lazy evil villain... but at least the leopard is this benevolent ruler... until he's crossed by the animals and then he turns vicious, too. Everything the animals had worked together for was destroyed. The story seemed to be ruled by laziness, cowardice, and violence.

Talia Smart says

How the Leopard Got His Claws chronicles the breakdown of peace and harmony in the forest kingdom triggered by a power struggle between the leopard and the dog.

Although the illustrations are absolutely GORGEOUS, I can't look past this story's narrative faults. Achebe's/Iroaganachi's writing did not particularly impress me—it was inconsistently formal, and the writers seemed to struggle in terms of adhering to the folktale format. I failed to understand the necessity of the intermittent songs within the story.

Additionally, it really bothered me that Achebe chose to adapt such a dark, grim story for a childhood audience. It's violent, depressing, and it does NOT have a happy ending. As a kid I would have been traumatized by this book. Plus, it portrays dogs in a really nasty light.

Cosette says

This is like the horror picture book for kids. Do you remember when *Nightmare on Elm Street* came out on HBO and everybody was like, "Don't watch it! It's so terrifying!" So, of course, I watched it and thought, is that spaghetti sauce on the ceiling? Or chocolate sauce? And did it stain?

Ok, so this book presents some really nasty things about human nature (under the guise of that's what life's like in the animal kingdom folks) that I'd rather not explain to my kid but, because it's in a picture book, I just became the provider... I am HBO.

Amy says

I sort of have mixed feelings about this one. On one hand, the story has some meat to it. The personalities of the characters were well developed. The story took its time and set itself up to make the climax impactful. King Leopard sort of had a Shakespearean transformation from being a wise and benevolent king, to getting really pissed off and losing his higher self and his kingdom to anger and revenge. There are some intense passages in this story, and I really think those passages took the kids aback a bit.

But, boy, while the story was intense (which made it interesting), I was kind of uncomfortable with the message that was coming across. That message was if someone hurts you, or sells you out, you A) treat them with with contempt, and then B) choke on your hurt and anger until you can't stand it any longer. Then you take your anger *and some weapons* to the object of your hate and cut loose. Hm.

Because I wasn't down with this message, I asked the kids what they thought of the way King Leopard dealt with the problem before him. I was relieved that they didn't think his reaction was the appropriate way to go. Initially the kids were advocating for King Leopard, but when he went off the rails they lost some respect for him. Although they did kind of embrace "you reap what you sow," I was pleased to hear that their ideas of what good leadership is did not include rage, weaponry, and ruthlessness. I also specifically chose to read this book to the kids just so we could have this discussion.

Joshua says

I pulled this off my parents' shelf to read to my youngest niece because I thought "Hey, Chinua Achebe. I love his writing." My oldest niece read it first and said that I shouldn't read it to the youngest and that it was kind of sad. It is a sad story though there is some hope. Because of that it is the kind of real story that is worth reading to kids; the world is often a sad place, though there is some hope out there. (I didn't read it to my youngest niece yet, but that's more because she's only 2 so she wouldn't understand too much and her attention had already moved on from reading books to other things by the time I got to read it).

Aprilleigh says

This sounds a lot like some modern governments and the people they govern. They follow the strongest "leader" out of fear, regardless of his ability to lead or his concern for his people. Then they all persist in praising their misery and mercilessly tormenting anyone who dares to speak out. And don't ever try to leave a tyrannical government, because it's not allowed.

A truly wise and kind king wouldn't have turned on his people the way the leopard did. They may be cowardly sheep, but a true leader forgives these weaknesses.

Arlene says

I really liked this one, it was a little dark, but I like the stories that came from it. Like why the Dog is known as man's best friend and why the Leopard is King. It was a great story. I was entertained even when I thought that my daughter might not have gotten it all the way.

I liked this one so much, I'm putting on my list to buy.

Lindsay Niebuhr says

This book is about how the leopard got his claws and the effects of power. I would give this book 3 out of 5 stars because of the author's multiple great books and the important message it carries.
