

The following is a Liberian folk tale called “Head, Body, Legs.” Read this story to your children as part of the “Liberian Folk Tales” activity.

Head, Body, Legs

Once upon a time... (the class should repeat, “time!”)...

Long ago, Head was all by himself. He had no legs, no arms and no body. He rolled everywhere. All he could eat were things on the ground that he could reach with his tongue.

At night, he rolled under a cherry tree. He fell asleep and dreamed of sweet cherries.

One morning, Head woke up and thought, “I’m tired of grass and mushrooms. I wish I could reach those cherries.” He rolled himself up a little hill. “Maybe if I could get a good head start I can hit the trunk hard enough to knock some cherries off,” he thought. He shoved with his ears and began to roll down the hill. “Here I go!” he shouted. Faster and faster he rolled. CRASH! “OWWWWWW” he cried.

“Who’s there?” someone asked.

Head looked up. Above him swung two Arms he had never seen before.

“Look down here,” Head said, “and you’ll see.”

“How can we look?” asked Arms. “We don’t have eyes.”

“I have an idea,” said Head. “Let’s get together. I have eyes to see, and you have hands for picking things to eat.” “Okay,” said Arms. They dropped to the ground and attached themselves to Head above the ears.

“This,” said Head, “is perfect.”

Hands picked cherries, and Head ate every single one.

“It’s time for a nap,” said Head, yawning. Soon he was fast asleep.

While Head slept, Body bounced along and landed on top of him. “Help!” gasped Head. “I can’t breathe!” Arms pushed Body off. “Hey,” said Body. “Stop pushing me. Who are you?” “It’s us, Head and Arms,” said Head. “You almost squashed us. Watch where you’re going!” “How can I?” asked Body. “I can’t see.”

“Why don’t you join us?” said Head. “I see some ripe mangoes across the river. If you help us swim over there, I’ll help you see where you’re going.” “Okay,” said Body. So Head attached himself to Body at the belly button.

“This,” said Head, “is perfect.”

They bounced down the bank into the river. “Pull right....Pull left,” Head shouted to Arms, who paddled frantically against the current.

Soon they reached the far bank and bounced up against the mango tree. “Pick some,” Head ordered. Arms stretched as high as they could, but they couldn’t quite reach. Head looked around for a stick. Standing near the tree were two crossed Legs with feet on the ends. “Get those,” Head said to Arms.

Arms grabbed them. “Let us go!” shouted Legs.

“Who are you?” asked Head. “We’re Legs. We were walking but we bumped into this tree.”

“Join us,” said Head. “I have eyes. I can show you where to go, and you can help us reach those mangoes.”

“Okay,” said Legs. So Legs attached themselves to the hands.

“No there,” said Arms. “The hands need to be free to pick mangoes.”

“I should be in the middle,” said Body, “because I’m the biggest.”

“That’s right,” said Head. “You should be at the bottom, Legs. I’ll swing around on top of Body so I can see everything. And Arms, you move to the shoulders.”

Everyone slid into place. Legs stood on tiptoe. Body straightened out. Arms stretched up, and the hands picked a mango. Head took a bite, and smiled.

After some time together, Legs thought about what it was like walking around on his own, but he realized that without Head he couldn’t see where he was going and thus could not move around very well. Arms and Body also noticed that while they could not move any longer on their own as they did previously, it was much better this way—when they were by themselves they couldn’t accomplish much. And Head especially appreciated being able to reach those delicious mangoes and cherries that he couldn’t reach before. Together, Head, Body, Arms and Legs could travel anywhere, do almost anything, and most importantly they were safer together, able to outrun and outthink any big animals that might try to eat them.

“I think we should stay this way,” said Head in between juicy mouthfuls of mango.

“I agree,” said Arms as he picked more fruit from the tree.

“Absolutely,” agreed Body, stretching to help Arms reach the mangoes.

“Me too,” replied Legs, standing on tiptoes.

“Mmm, delicious,” Head said. “Now THIS is perfect!”