

The Big Race: Stories with Mongoose and Friends

Anya A. A. Lorde

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Featuring a mischievous mongoose, The Big Race is a children's collection of short stories that pair vibrant elements of Barbadian culture with Bajan proverbs.

Anya A. A. Lorde's colorful early reader *The Big Race* gathers Barbadian tales and their corresponding proverbs for young audiences.

On a Caribbean farm that's flush with spaces to explore and good food to eat, Mongoose and her domesticated friends (including a dog, a goose, and a sheep) get into constant scrapes, arguments, and general mayhem. They steal fruit; they have raucous parties. Six short tales detail these misadventures, each beginning with a traditional Bajan saying followed by an accessible translation and a brief explanation.

Through their troubles and thanks to the help of a wise sheep who shares classic Bajan proverbs with them, the creatures develop wisdom when it comes to making good choices. The lessons they learn are always practical, including warnings that "pleasant" does not always equal "healthy", examples of the importance of finding good influences, and reminders that actions have consequences.

Most of the situations are lighthearted, with Mongoose getting into harmless scrapes like falling into a pond and getting a stomachache. While their consequences are not serious, the fact that the selected proverbs focus on the negative outcomes of actions or inaction means that any good or supportive behavior on the part of the animals is muted, making their friendships seem shallow. With the exception of Ole Black Belly Sheep, it is rare to see the animals help each other. Indeed, they are often downright mean to each other, as when they laugh at Mongoose for eating addled eggs or when they scheme against her in a race. And when Plumpy the pig gets drunk on the farmer's whiskey and is abandoned by his friends, leaving his wife to struggle to care for him, it's a sharp deviation from the lighthearted, child-friendly stories that precede the incident.

The book's illustrations are vibrant and expressive. Some are softened by fuzzy lines and brush strokes. In one illustration, Green Monkey cries over a lack of bananas. In another, Mongoose enjoys a luscious orange pawpaw fruit. These images, paired with the proverbs, highlight the beauty of Barbadian culture and the rich landscape of the Caribbean. A glossary at the book's front is an easy reference point, introducing terms like *gine* ("going") that are used throughout.

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VIVIAN TURNBULL (February 9, 2023)

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