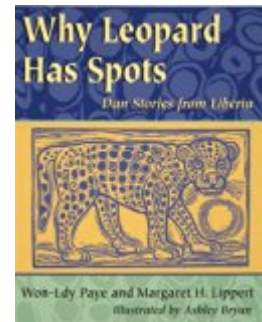


Won-Ldy Paye, Margaret H. Lippert. *Why Leopard has Spots: Dan Stories from Liberia*. Golden, Col.: Fulcrum Books, 1998. xiii + 50 pp. \$15.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-55591-344-1.



Reviewed by Kathryn Z. Weed

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Six of the oral tales that Won-Ldy Paye (pronounced One Day Pay) heard from his story-teller grandmother are presented in this collection. Three of them, including "Why Leopard Has Spots," "Mrs. Chicken and the Hungry Crocodile," and "Why Spider has a Big Butt" are *pourquoi* tales explaining the reasons for phenomena such as the leopard's spotted coat, chicken's bathing in puddles, and spider's distinctive shape. The other three--"The Talking Vegetables," "The Hunger Season," and "Spider Flies to the Feast" feature the trickster Spider and his (mis)adventures. Some of the stories have morals, others are for entertainment. Each story is about three pages long, except for the 8-page "Spider Flies" which, as Won-Ldy explains in the afternotes, is a story that has "no head and no tail" because it can go on forever. Each story is dramatically illustrated by Ashley Bryan's black-and-white linoleum prints.

For anyone interested in African tales, this book is a "must-have." The stories in themselves are delightful to read both silently, and, since they spring from the oral tradition, aloud. But in addition to the stories, the book is a treasure-trove of

information. Won-Ldy presents himself in the Introduction and briefly takes us through his life growing up in Tapita in northeastern Liberia. He introduces us to his family, the "tlo ker mehn" (story-tellers), and specifically his grandmother. There is a map which locates Liberia in Africa and Tapita in Liberia. After the stories, Won-Ldy again talks to us, giving general information about Dan stories and then information about each story individually. The following Glossary not only includes definitions, but also provides explanations of elements of the Dan culture, for example, the "Great Spirit", the most important spirit to the Dan, and her role in the community is described, accompanied by a photograph. "Ma kpon", a Dan counting game, is not only described but is also explained so that readers could try it out themselves. Palm nuts play an important role in the community as evidenced by the explanation of their harvest and procedures to make palm oil. For further reading about the Dan, Liberia, and African-American games for children, a Bibliography is provided. Lastly, there are interesting biographies of the two authors and the illustrator.

I highly recommend this book. It is appropriate for elementary and middle school readers, although high school readers interested in branching out to new cultures would find this an excellent beginning for background in a specific African group.

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