

The Fig Tree
J. T. Ngugi



Taking a Sneak Peek

Have you heard of stories of creatures or spirits living in trees or plants? How about people befriending or worshipping these creatures or spirits?

Quite often, because of their beauty, usefulness, or fear-inspiring quality, trees and plants are considered either as holy in themselves or as the haven of spirits. It comes as no surprise then that worship of plants and trees is widespread and has been observed in many countries such as Guinea, Malaysia, and Africa. Interestingly, in many societies, a plant or tree is often regarded as a helper and companion with supernatural powers. Because of this, plants and trees are often respected or venerated.

In what ways do you think can a plant or tree be a helper and companion with supernatural powers? Write down your thoughts below.

In the story that you are about to read, you would see that our character found out the answer to the question above quite unexpectedly one night while wandering in the woods. See how her customs and beliefs affected her decision making that night and led to her discovery of the much-needed answer. Read on!



Packing for the Journey

Guess the meaning of the underlined word in each sentence. Choose from the meanings provided in the box below.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| a. shameless boldness | f. opposition |
| b. to lament | g. hated |
| c. undisturbed | h. faults due to weakness of character |
| d. in severe pain, grief, or regret | i. ghosts |
| e. rude speech or conduct | j. a holy or sacred place |

1. Mukami must keen all the way to her husband's house. She must continue waiting for a week because it was a part of her tribe's tradition.

CTJan27 School of English and Mathematics
Unit 3/64 Hallam Road, Hampton Park, VIC 3976

2. She did not mind her neighbor's insolence. Their offensive remarks meant nothing to her.
3. She forgave her husband. What he did was just one of the frailties of man.
4. The tree was a place of sanctuary. It was believed that the god Murungu lives there.
5. Mukami was too embittered to notice her surroundings. The suffering she went through was too much to bear.
6. One of the men had the cheek to pinch her though he was a total stranger.
7. Her father's strong remonstrance did not stop her from marrying Muthoga.



Picking Up Bits and Pieces

What is a fig tree? How does it look? What are its uses? Why is it important to some tribes in other countries? Your teacher will show you a photo. If you have a mobile phone or handheld device with Internet, do some research and share the information you found with your classmates.



Getting Ready for Take Off

Share with the rest of the class the information you found regarding the fig tree. After your class sharing, read the selection below and find out what benefit/ the main character got from the fig tree.



Heading Toward New Frontiers

The Fig Tree **J.T. Ngugi**

1 Mukami stood at the door; slowly and sorrowfully she turned her head and looked at the hearth. A momentary hesitation! The smoldering fire and the small stool by the fireside seemed to be calling her back. No! She had made up her mind. She must go! With a smooth, oiled upper-garment pulled tightly over her otherwise bare head, and then falling over her slim and youthful shoulders, she plunged into the lone and savage darkness, eerie yet still.

2 All was quiet and a sort of magic filled the air. Yet she felt threatened by it. She felt overcome and overawed by the darkness that enveloped her. Quickly, she moved across the

courtyard that she knew so well, fearing to make the slightest sound. There was not a sound to be heard. The courtyard, the four huts that belonged to her *airu* (co-wives), the silhouette of her man's hut and even her own, seemed to have joined together in one eternal chorus of mute condemnation of her action.

3 'You are leaving your man! Come back!' They all pleaded in their 'dead' silence of contempt and pity. Defiantly, she crossed the courtyard and took the path that led down the left gate. Slowly, she opened the gate and then shut it. She stood a moment, and in that second Mukami realized that with the shutting of the gate, she had shut off a part

CTJan27 School of English and Mathematics
Unit 3/64 Hallam Road, Hampton Park, VIC 3976

of her existence. There would be no return. Tears were imminent as, with a heavy heart, she turned her back on her rightful place and began to move.

4 But where was she going? She did not know and she did not very much care. All she wanted was to escape and go! Go! go anywhere - Masailand or Ukambani. She wanted to get away from the hearth, the courtyard, the huts, and the people - in a word, everything that reminded her of Muhoroini ridge and all its inhabitants. She would go and never return to him, her hus-. No! not her husband but the man who wanted to kill her, who would have crushed her soul. He could no longer be her husband though he was the very same man she had adored so much. How she loathed him! But did she?

5 Thoughts of him came into her head like a mighty flood. Her young married life came back to her: Muthoga, Muthoga, her husband, a self-made man with four wives but with a reputation for harsh treatment of his wives; her father's reluctance to entrust her into his hands and her dogged refusal to hearken to his remonstrance. For Muthoga had completely cast a spell on her. She wanted him, longed to join the retinue of his wives and children. Indeed, since her initiation, she had secretly but resolutely admired this man--his gait, dancing movements, and above all his deep voice and athletic figure. Everything around him smacked of mystery and power. And the courting had been short and strange. She could still remember the throbbing of her heart, his broad smile, and her hesitant acceptance of a string of oyster shells as a marriage token. This was followed by beer-drinking and the customary bride-price.

6 But people could not believe it and many young warriors whose offers she had scornfully brushed aside looked at her with scorn and resentment. 'Ah' Such youth and beauty to be sacrificed to an old man.' Many a man declared in whispers that she had been bewitched. Indeed, she was for her whole heart had gone to this man.

7 No less memorable and sensational to her, was the day they had carried her to this man's hut--a new hut that had been specially put up for her. She was going to the *shamba* when, to her surprise, three men approached her, apparently from nowhere. Then she knew! They were coming for her. She ought to have known, to have

prepared herself for this! Her wedding day had come. Unceremoniously they swept her off the ground and for a moment she was really afraid. She put up a real struggle to free herself from the firm yet gentle hands of the three men who were carrying her shoulder high. And the men! the men! They completely ignored her frenzied struggles. One of them had the cheek to pinch her, 'just to keep her quiet,' as he carelessly remarked to one of his companions. The pinch shocked her in a very strange manner, a very pleasant strange manner.

8 The first season was wonderful! All his love and attention lavished on her. And, as in her youth, she became a target of jealousy and resentment from the other wives. A strong opposition grew. Oh, women! Why could they not allow her to enjoy what they had enjoyed for years--his love? She could still recall how the eldest had been beaten for refusing to get fire for her hut. This ended the battle of words and deeds. It was now a mute battle. Mukami hardened towards them. She did not mind their insolence and ostracizing in which they had managed to enlist the sympathy of the whole village. But why should she mind? Had not the fulfillment of her dream, ambition, life, and all, been realized in this man? She adored him, loved him, and fully gave herself to him--body, soul, and all. After all, what is life? Is it not giving and receiving?

9 Three seasons passed and the world she knew began to change. She had no child!

10 A theta! A barren woman!

11 No child to seal the bond between him and her.

12 No child to dote on, hug and scold!

13 No child to perpetuate the gone spirits of her man's ancestors and her father's blood.

14 Oh! She was defeated. She knew it. The others knew it. They whispered and smiled! Oh! how their smiles of mute insolence and pride pierced her! But she had nothing to fear. Let them be victorious. She had still got her man.

15 Alas poor woman! So this was your hope? And without warning, the man began to change and

CTJan27 School of English and Mathematics
Unit 3/64 Hallam Road, Hampton Park, VIC 3976

in time completely shunned her company and hut, confining himself more to his *thinker*. She felt embittered and sought him with her soul and body. Her heart bled for him, yet found him not. Muthoga, the warrior, the farmer, the dancer had recovered his old hard-heartedness which had been temporarily subdued by her, and he began to beat her. He had found her quarreling with the eldest wife, and all his fury, resentment, and frustration seemed to find an outlet as he hit her. Oh! the beating; the crowd watched and never helped! But that was just the beginning to such torture and misery that it almost ended in her death that very morning.

16 He had called on her early and without a warning or explanation beat her so much that he left her for dead. She had not screamed--she had accepted her lot. And as she lay on the ground thinking it was now the end, she realized that perhaps the others had been suffering as much because of her. She could see them being beaten and crying for mercy. But she refused to let such beating and hallucinations overcome her. She must conquer, and with that realization she quickly made up her mind. This was no place for her; neither could she return to her place of birth to face her dear old considerate father again. She could not bear the shame.

17 The cold night breeze brought her back to her senses. Tears, long suppressed, flowed down her cheeks as she hurried down the path, down the valley and through the forest. It was so dark that she could hardly pick her way through the labyrinth of thorn and bush. The murmuring stream, the quiet bush and trees that surrounded her seemed to sympathize with her. Or did they join with the Kraal in silent denouncement of her action? But could they understand the frailties of men?

18 She followed the stream, and then crossed it. She was still too embittered, too grieved to notice her surroundings. Her thoughts did not let her realize her grave danger! For was this not the place where the dead hovered through the air, intermingling with trees, molesting strangers and intruders? She was angry with the world, with her husband, above all with herself. Could she have been in the wrong all the time? Was this the price she must pay for her selfish grabbing of all the man's soul? But she had also sacrificed her own soul, youth, and beauty for his sake. There were

more tears and anguish of soul.

19 Oh, spirits of the dead, come for me!

20 Oh, Murungu, god of Gikuyu and Mumbi,

21 Who dwells on high Kerinyaga, yet is everywhere,

22 Why don't you release me from misery?

23 Dear Mother Earth, why don't you open and swallow me up?

24 Even as you had swallowed Gumba—the Gumba who disappeared under Mikongee roots?

25 She invoked the spirits of the living and the dead to come and carry her off, never to be seen again.

26 All of a sudden as if in answer, she heard a distant, mournful sound, pathetic yet real. The wind began to blow wildly and the last star that had so strangely comforted her, vanished. She was alone in the gloom of the forest! Something cold and lifeless touched her. She jumped and at last did what the beating could not make her do—scream. The whole forest echoed with her scream. Naked fear now gripped her whole being and she shook all over—even her soul. And she realized she was not alone.

Here and there, she saw a thousand eyes that glowed intermittently without any order all along the stream, while, to and fro, she felt her self being pushed by many invisible hands. The sight and the sudden realization that she was in the land of ghosts, alone, and far from home left her stone dead. She could not feel, think, or cry! It was fate—the will of Murungu. Lower and lower she sank onto the ground as the last traces ebbed from her body. This was the end of her dream and ambition. But it was all unreal. She did not really want to die. Life was sweet. She only wanted a chance to start life anew—a life of giving and not only of receiving.

27 Her misery was not an end, for even as she lay on the ground, and even as the owl and hyena cried in the distance, the wind blew harder. The mournful sound grew louder and nearer—and it began to rain! Thunder! Lightning! The earth

CTJan27 School of English and Mathematics
Unit 3/64 Hallam Road, Hampton Park, VIC 3976

looked as if it would crack and open beneath her.



Source:
http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/bb/Fig_Tree.jpg

But even as the lightning came and thunder struck, she saw a tree in the distance—a huge tree with the bush growing gently but reverently, bowing all around the trunk. And she knew—she knew, this was THE TREE—the sacred Fig Tree, that is called *MUKUYU*—the altar of the all seeing Murungu. ‘Good lightning—you have revealed this to me. Here at last is a place of sanctuary.’

28 She ran, defying the rain, the thunder and even the ‘Ghosts.’ Her husband and all the people of Muhoroini ridge vanished into insignificance. All the load that had weighed upon her heart seemed to be lifted as she wearily ran through the thorny bush, knocking against the trees falling and waking. Her impotence was gone. Her worries were gone. Her one object was to reach the Fig Tree. It was a matter of life and death—a battle for life. She would find sanctuary and peace there under the sacred Fig Tree. There, Mukami would meet her God, Murungu, the God of her tribe.

29 The rain fell in torrents and the lightning

became sharper and more frightening. But she would conquer. She must win. Her old defiance and determination had come back.

30 Not rain, not thunder, not lightning.

31 But woe, Oh, creator.

32 So she ran despite her physical weakness. And she could feel her soul burning, a pleasant burning that made her womb dance. Now she was near the place of sanctuary—the altar of the most High, the place of salvation. She ran toward the altar—No, not running but flying. At least her soul must have been flying for she felt as light as a feather. She felt like a little bird! She had wings! Wings! Wings. At last, panting and breathless, she searched the tree.

33 In the distance, the owl screamed! The piercing lightning came and threatened, and the thunder struck with a might that shook the earth.

But she did not hear. She had lain asleep under the protecting arms of God’s tree. The spell was on her again.

34 Mukami woke up with a start. Was there nobody? Surely that had been Mumbi, who standing beside her husband, Gikuyu, had touched her—a gentle touch that went right through her body. She must have been dreaming. What a strange beautiful dream. And Mumbi had said, I am the mother of the tribe.

35. . . . She looked around. It was still dark. And there was the ancient tree, strong, unaging. How many secrets must you have told!

36 ‘I must go home! Go back to my husband and my tribe.’ It was a new Mukami, humble yet full of hope, who said this. Then she fell asleep again. The spell...

37 The sun was rising in the east and the rich yellowish streaks of light diffused through the forest to where Mukami was sitting, leaning against the tree. And as the streaks of light touched her skin, she felt a tickling sensation that went right through her body. Blood melted in her veins and she felt warm—very warm, happy, and light. Her soul danced and her womb answered. And then she knew—knew that she was pregnant, had been

CTJan27 School of English and Mathematics
Unit 3/64 Hallam Road, Hampton Park, VIC 3976

pregnant for some time!!!

38 As Mukami stood up to go, she stared with unseeing eyes into space, while tears of deep gratitude and humility trickled down. Her eyes went beyond the forest, beyond the stream as if they were seeing something, something hidden in the distant future. And she saw the people of Muhoironi, her *airu* and her man—strong, unaging—standing amongst them. That was her

rightful place, there beside her husband amongst the other wives. They must unite and support the tribe, giving it new life. Was Mumbi watching?

39 In the distance a cow lowed. Mukami stirred from her reverie!

40 “I must go! She began to move. And the Fig Tree—huge, mysterious, unperturbed—still stood and watched, sending forth a rich sympathizing warmth...



Learning along the Way

1. What benefit did Mukami get from the fig tree?

2. In what way do you think did the tree change Mukami and her life?

3. What factors made Mukami decide to go back? Do you think she made the right decision?

4. If you were in her place, would you have done the same? Why or why not?

5. Were there events in your life when your decision was affected by your beliefs and traditions?

6. Based on Mukami's experience, what is the significance of the fig tree in her tribe?

7. What were some of the African terms used in the story? How did these terms affect the story? What was

the effect of the use of these terms on you as a reader?



Looking at Souvenirs

Playing up **local colour** is a technique used by writers, usually in works of fiction, in which the setting (refers to the time and place the story occurred) is given much importance to showcase the characteristics of a country or region, as well as the traditions, beliefs, and culture of the people in a given area.



Squeezing Out Creative Juices

1. What could have happened upon Mukami's return to the tribe? **Write a sequel to Mukami's story through a five-frame comic strip.** Try playing up local colour by using the African terms mentioned in the story in your own work. Use short bond paper. Make your work colourful.
2. a. **Do a research on the tribal practices of the Aborigines or any ethnic tribe from your parents' home country in terms of its betrothal and marriage, religion and worship, or family life and recreation.** Look for appropriate illustrations and photos as well if possible.
 - b. Using the information and materials you have gathered, create a "pictionary" or illustrated dictionary of terms for the different tribal practices of your chosen ethnic tribe. You may refer to a real dictionary for possible formats, but you can also just do the following: cite the term; identify the part of speech to which it belongs; give the meaning of the term based on all the descriptions you got in your research; use it in a sentence; and lastly, illustrate the term or provide a photo of it if possible.
 - c. Use **MLA** to cite your sources properly.



Knowing More

The Simple Present and Past Tenses

I. Presentation

Now that you know how to gather and organize information, it is time to start giving oral or written reports on the information you found. However, you must make sure that you know how to use your tenses properly, or else, you might just find yourself lost and confused like Mukami!

What can you remember from your past lessons on the simple present and past tense?

Well, let's see by reading the paragraph on the next page and answering the questions that follow. Make sure to take note of the tenses of the verbs used in each sentence.

Animism Defined

¹ Animism comes from the Latin word *anima*, which means *soul* or *life*. ² It is the belief in the existence of souls or spirits in plants, animals, and other beings aside from humans. ³ Shinto, Hinduism, Neopaganism, and the African traditional religion are among the religions that have animistic beliefs.

⁴ The early Filipinos' religion was animistic, too. ⁵ Their religion featured worshipping of kind spirits for favors or giving offerings for pacification of angry spirits. ⁶ The natives knew of Islam Christianity only much later.

II. Comprehension Questions

- What is animism? _____
- What are the examples of religions that have animistic beliefs? _____
- In what ways was the original religion of early Filipinos animistic? _____
- Which religions were practiced much later? _____

III. Guide to Generalization

- Which sentences use the simple present tense? _____
- Which sentences use the simple past tense? _____
- Complete the table on the below. A sample is given to guide you.

Sentence	Verb	Tense	Time Expression
1	<u>comes</u>	<u>simple present</u>	<u>none</u>
2	_____	_____	_____
3	_____	_____	_____
4	_____	_____	_____
5	_____	_____	_____
6	_____	_____	_____

1. What **action/condition** does the **present tense** state/express?

2. What **action/condition** does the **past tense** state/express?

IV. Generalization

A. The simple _____ tense is used to state/express any of the following:

1. **a known fact or generalization**
 Example: *The sun rises in the east.*
2. **a repeated, usual, or habitual action**
 Example: *Muthoga beats Mukami every day.*
3. **present action or condition**
 Example: *Today, animism has millions of believers worldwide.*

Time expressions that may be used are _____, _____ often _____, _____, _____, etc.

B. The simple _____ tense is used to state/express a definite past action or condition.

Time expressions that may be used are _____, _____ yesterday _____, _____, _____ etc.

V. Exercises

A. The paragraphs on the next page are full of examples of verbs that are either in the simple present or simple past tense. Identify all the verbs then complete the table. If the verb is in the simple present tense, tell whether it is stating: a known fact or generalization; a repeated, usual, or habitual action; or a present action or condition.

Evolution of Animism

¹ Contrary to popular belief, animism is not a religion in itself. ² It is only a belief similar to polytheism and monotheism. ³ In fact, many religions around the world still believe in it. ⁴ Theorists even consider it as the basis for the later evolution of religions.

⁵ According to theorists, early humans worshiped local deities of nature in a form of animism. ⁶ This belief eventually grew to become polytheism with the worship of several larger deities, such as gods of the moon and sun. ⁷ Later on, this belief evolved into monotheism--a belief in one, monotheistic God.

Simple Past Verbs	Simple Present Verbs	Action/Condition Expressed/Stated

CTJan27 School of English and Mathematics
Unit 3/64 Hallam Road, Hampton Park, VIC 3976

B. Write the correct tense of the verbs enclosed in parentheses.

Animism and Death

Believers of animism (1. hold) _____ that the spirit lives on even after the death of the body. Some (2. believe) _____ the spirit passes on to a world abundant with animals or crops. Others (3. think) _____ the spirit remains on earth as a ghost, often angry. Still many others (4. combine) _____ these two beliefs, holding that the soul should go on a trip to the spirit world without losing its way or else become a ghost. Those surviving the deceased often (5. consider) _____ funeral, mourning ritual, and ancestor worship necessary for the successful completion of this trip.

Experts (6. say) _____ the practice of offering food, lighting fires, and performing other rituals at the grave could have originated from the belief that the soul remains alive. This (7. arose) _____ at first, perhaps, as a friendly act or filial devotion, but (8. develop) _____ later on as an act of ancestor worship. The shedding of blood at the grave, on the other hand, (9. evolve) _____ into a detailed system of sacrifice. The desire to provide a loved one with comforts in the future life unsurprisingly (10. lead) _____ many others to the sacrifice of wives, slaves, animals, and properties as well.

C. Read the passage carefully to get its idea. Then fill in the blanks with the appropriate verb from the box below. Make sure to rewrite your chosen verb in its right form or correct tense.

show	seem	refers	observed	be
serve	believe	feature	contribute	

Tree worship

Tree worship _____ to the inclination of many societies throughout history to worship or otherwise mythologize trees. Early human beings _____ the growth and death of trees, the physical attributes of their branches, and the sensitivity, annual decay and revival of their foliage. This _____ to the creation of numerous stories that show man's belief in a close connection between humans, trees, or flowers.

Some of these stories _____ that a man's life depends upon a tree and he suffers when it withers or is injured. Other stories _____ a tree that shows its sympathy with a man by weakening or dying as he falls ill or loses his life. These stories _____ to prove the mysterious bond between trees and humans, which, in fact, often appears in recorded beliefs and customs of various cultures.

In some cultures, trees _____ famous for oracles. Many people _____ that these trees are inhabited by gods who give responses. In other cultures, important sacred trees _____ as the object of pilgrimage or a place of sanctuary. Tree-spirits are also thought to take over the surrounding forest or area, making the animals in the locality sacred and untouchable.

Objectives

At the end of the lesson, the students should be able to

1. Realize that an individual's customs and beliefs affect his decision making
2. Appreciate the author's craftsmanship by pointing out the words that show local colour and analyzing their effects
3. Appreciate the uniqueness of each culture by doing a research on tribal practices and beliefs
4. Report and give factual information using the simple tenses effectively

Materials Needed

Short bond paper and coloring materials for the creative outputs

Procedure

Motivation

1. Let students do the **Picking Up Bits and Pieces**.
2. Do the **Packing for the Journey** activity. Have the sharing of the students' research then proceed to **Getting Ready for Take Off**.

Learning Activities

1. Discuss the questions in **Learning Along the Way**.
2. Proceed to the learning activities in **Knowing More**.

Enrichment

Have the students do the activities in **Squeezing Creative Juices** for homework.

Answers to Knowing More

V. Exercises

A.

Simple Past Verbs

Simple Present Verbs

Action/Condition Expressed/Stated

	is	a generalization
	is	a generalization
	is	a known fact
	consider	a generalization
worshiped		
grew		
evolved		

B.

- | | |
|-------------|--------------|
| 1. hold | 6. said |
| 2. believe | 7. arose |
| 3. think | 8. developed |
| 4. combine | 9. evolved |
| 5. consider | 10. led |

C.

refers, observed, contributed
showed, featured, seemed
are, believe, serve

CTJan27 School of English and Mathematics
Unit 3/64 Hallam Road, Hampton Park, VIC 3976

The Fig Tree

**Teacher's
Guide**



Source: http://www.treepicturesonline.com/fig_tree_pictures.html