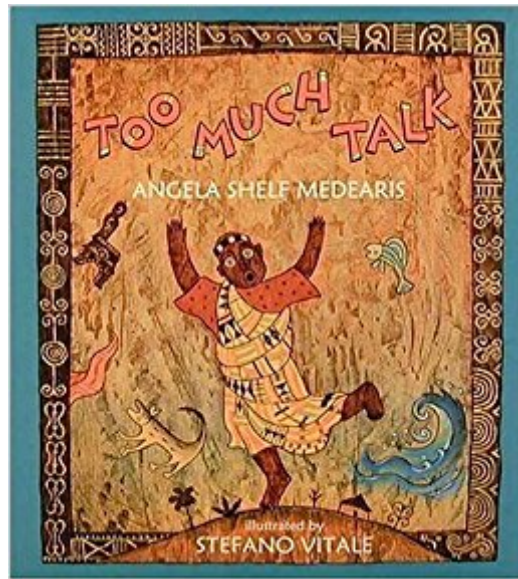




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# Too Much Talk: A West African Folktale



## Synopsis

A brightly illustrated retelling of a folktale from Ghana concerns the fun that starts when everything starts talking, including the farmer's yams, the fisherman's fish, and the weaver's cloth.

## Book Information

Age Range: 3 and up

Lexile Measure: 400L (What's this?)

Hardcover: 32 pages

Publisher: Candlewick; 1st edition (October 2, 1995)

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Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 7 customer reviews

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## Customer Reviews

PreSchool-Grade 3-In this retelling of a Ghanaian folktale, a yam talks to the farmer digging it up, as does his dog. Frightened, the man shrieks "Aiyeee!" and runs away. He encounters a fisher, a weaver, and a swimmer, each of whom scoffs at his collective report until addressed by, respectively, a fish, some cloth, and the water. The four take their tale to the chief, who dismisses them as fools-until his throne talks. Medearis's narrative is especially well suited to reading aloud. The simple, repetitive language makes it a natural choice for story time, and the text provides ample opportunities for participation. The tale is attributed to Ghana; no further sources are given. Vitale's oil paint on wood illustrations are vibrant, lively, and attractive, reflecting his interest in African art. He copies ritual masks for the heads of his characters, an intriguing and original idea that works well when the heads are disembodied, but less successful when they are attached to human figures, creating an unsettling impression of caricature. He incorporates the art of several different African tribes into what is essentially an Ashanti story. The effect is similar to what would result if one took a Greek god and a Norse god and put them in Celtic dress. It's unfortunate that there's no source note recognizing the different elements combined in the paintings. This is a good effort, but basic

information is missing. Donna L. Scanlon, Lancaster County Library, PA Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Ages 4<sup>+</sup>-7. Italian illustrator Vitale, who attracted notice with his beautiful paintings on wood for *When the Wind Stops*, uses a similar style to illustrate an appealing West African folktale. When the yam he is digging up talks back, the farmer can't believe it. His fisherman neighbor is equally skeptical until his catch gives him some lip. The pattern is repeated with other members of the community. However, when the group tells its collective tale to the chief, he dismisses it until he is taught a lesson by his talking throne. Despite an ending that is a little too brisk, this brief, cumulative tale has a simple style, strong rhythms and repetition, and zesty humor. Surrounded by patterned borders, the subtly colored spreads have stylized figures that evoke the region and flowing lines that echo the cadence of the text. Hints for telling the tale appear on the back dust jacket. Julie Corsaro

I have been looking for this book for years. We originally bought it for my daughter, and it was her favorite book as a child. Recently my niece was born and I was on the mission to find it again.

Kids 2 and up will love this African folktale! It's funny and has wonderful illustrations. The tale is simple and repetitive and the kiddos will be reciting some lines along with the readings in no time. Great for story times.

An excellent story to read, tell, dramatize, etc. with second through fourth graders. My students love it and want it read to them again and again!

I purchased this item thinking that it was an African folktale that I used to read when I was a child. It was not, however, I did give it to one of my nieces.

Talking yams are only the beginning of this simple and hysterically hyperdramatic retelling of an old Ashanti tale. When a farmer encounters a talking yam and runs and tells a fisherman, the fish talks, assuring him such a thing can't happen. Panic and hilarity ensues in the brief text and stylized pictures. This is one of those folktales that can be introduced to children of any age, and lends itself especially well to read-aloud for groups of children. Read-aloud works especially well with plenty of movement on the part of the reader, and encourages participation. Each talking creature or object invites the children to respond with a heartfelt "Aiye!" as the growing number of people run on,

until they reach the king, for the inevitable conclusion. The story isn't meant to be a serious one, and the method of telling and illustrations support this humorous, almost comic strip kind of storyline. The large text on each page is short and to the point, making it accessible to even very young children. The art is lovely to look at--and you can see the African styling of it. Stefano Vitale has crafted a very vivid collection of images for this story. However, there does seem to be some mixture of African styles, according to some professional reviews, and this may be less well received by those familiar with regional African art styles. In my case, however, the stylized art and various elements of African imagery allow for children to get some exposure to this sort of art and style. As to the story itself, it appears to be an old folktale from Ghana, and an amusing one at that. I've seen another version of this story in "Anansi and The Talking Melon" by Eric Kimmel--one of the trickster tales where the cunning spider causes havoc by making a melon seem to talk. I'm not quite certain if these stories have the same origin, but I wouldn't be surprised if they did. Folktales are an important part of a balanced book diet, and it's often hard to find extremely simple ones for the youngest readers and listeners. This book is ideal on both counts. If you enjoy this, I recommend checking out other Trickster tales such as *Raven: Trickster Tales from the Pacific Northwest* by Gerald McDermott and *The Monkey and the Crocodile: A Jataka Tale from India* by Paul Galdone. Happy Reading! ^\_^ Shanshad

The artwork is rich, detailed, amusing, and simultaneously illustrates different lines of the story--that is, in the background, are shown the line about the characters running up hill and down, while in the foreground the next phase and character of the story is depicted. Also each of the talking items floats in the background space, so you have lots of things to point out and talk about with the little ones--or just go for the story, it's fun. The colors and the dress of the people match what we see in W. Africa. My child enjoyed an animated reading from the age of 18 months. The story is a traditional one as well, which lends to the overall richness. I have a number of children's books depicting W. Africa, and this and Trina Schart Hyman's *Fortune Teller* are my favorites for their beauty, detail, and their faithfulness to the scene here. *To the Sweet Shores of Africa*, is another beauty as well---this one is poems with beautiful pictures.

I am an elementary art teacher, and I read this book to my first graders when we were talking about African art. They absolutely loved the story! By the end of the book, they were reciting the repeating phrases with me. Then they wanted me to read the whole story all over again. I seldom get such an enthusiastic response from my students when I read to them. The artwork in the book is very

reminiscent of African art and goes along very well with an art project we make when talking about Africa. This book is a wonderful addition to a unit on Africa.

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