

Name: _____

Class: _____

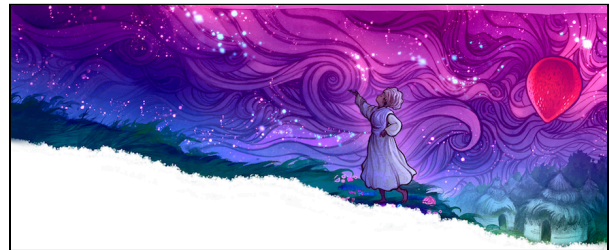
Why the Sky Is Far Away

By Tina Tocco
2017

Tina Tocco has written for Highlights. In this story, Tocco retells a Nigerian folktale about why the sky is so far away. As you read, take notes on how the people treat the Sky.

- [1] The Sky was born close to the Earth, and for years it remained¹ close to the Earth and to all people everywhere.

Gazing² down on the people, the Sky said, "I will feed you. I can nourish³ every generation. You may take all that you need from me."



"The Sky gladly gave, and the people gladly took." by Cory Godbey is used with permission.

The Sky was barely an arm's stretch away, and people reached into it, pulling their daily meals from its vastness. They did not need to plow or sow⁴ or harvest. The Sky gladly gave, and the people gladly took. They took spicy morsels⁵ of high noon, cold scoops of white winter morning, and sharp snippets of starlight.

They took and took — until soon they were slicing off colossal chunks and tossing aside what they did not need.

- [5] "What's a little waste?" they'd say. "The Sky can spare it."

The Sky gladly gave, and the people gladly took.

But one day, the Sky fumed⁶ with clouds. It crashed with thunder and tore itself with lightning. "I have offered you the greatest gift!" the Sky roared. "And you thank me by wasting it! You throw me away into ditches and streams! If I am of such little value, I will leave forever."

1. **Remain (verb)** to stay in the same place
2. **Gaze (verb)** to look with great interest
3. **Nourish (verb)** to provide someone with what is necessary for life, health, and growth
4. to plant the seeds of a plant
5. a small amount of food
6. to show anger

The people listened. They promised to take from the Sky only what they needed.

And they kept their promise.

- [10] They kept it even during the Great Festival. They danced around plates of cold evening plum and beat drums around bowls of thick chocolaty storms. All the people shared and ate, but they ate only their share.

All but Osato.

Osato was never satisfied. Her wrists jangled⁷ with the most beautiful brass bracelets, yet she haggled⁸ in the marketplace for the brightest coral. She draped herself in the most exquisite⁹ cotton robes, yet she wanted ones of scarlet silk. Whatever she had, she always wanted more.

So while her neighbors played and sang, Osato continued nibbling from every platter and throwing away what she didn't want. She took no notice as she dribbled blobs of tart cherry sunrise on the grass, sprayed flecks of coconut stars across the soil, or allowed sour gooseberry twilight to puddle at her feet.

As Osato walked home, she looked up. The Sky was so big! There was so much to take! Would the deep night taste of currants?¹⁰ Would the moonlight feel like a lemon zing on her tongue?

- [15] *Just a taste!* she thought. Osato sank her fingers deep and plucked a great wedge from the Sky's sweet center — molasses and berry and fudge.

Osato chewed and gulped and chewed and gulped. Then, she stopped. She could not eat one more bite. She was about to drop the rest to the ground when the Sky gave a low roll.

Osato hurried home. "Husband!" she squealed. "You must help me eat this Sky!"

"Eat?" he replied. "I am stuffed!" But, remembering the Sky's threat, he ate.

"Children!" she squealed. "You must help me eat this Sky!"

- [20] "Eat?" they replied. "We are stuffed!" But, remembering the Sky's threat, they ate.

"Neighbors!" she squealed in the streets. "You must help me eat this Sky!"

-
- 7. to make a ringing sound
 - 8. to argue about the price of something
 - 9. **Exquisite** (*adjective*) extremely beautiful
 - 10. a small dried fruit

"Eat?" they replied. "We are stuffed!" But, remembering the Sky's threat, they ate.

And they ate.

And they ate.

[25] Yet one piece of Sky remained on the ground. "It's just a smidge,"¹¹ said Osato with a smile.

"It won't matter!"

But Osato lay awake that night, gazing through the window at the deep hole she had made in the blackness. The next morning, the Sky did not offer itself. It rumbled and darkened and clashed. People stood hungry in the streets and fields.

"I am sorry!" Osato cried.

But the Sky flew up above the tallest trees.

[30] "We'll become hungry!" Osato cried.

But the Sky flew up above the tallest mountains.

"We will starve!" Osato cried.

But the Sky continued until not one fingerful was within reach.

Osato's tears poured down her face and into the Earth. Finally, the Earth said, "I will feed you. But you must learn new ways. You must plow and sow and harvest. And you must take only what you need. If you do this, I will feed you forever."

[35] "I promise!" said Osato. "I will never break my promise again!"

And she never did.

All Highlights material is copyrighted by Highlights for Children, Inc., and/or various authors and illustrators. Any commercial use or distribution of material without permission is strictly prohibited. Please visit www.highlights.com for more information.

Unless otherwise noted, this content is licensed under the [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/)

11. a small amount of something

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which sentence describes the theme of the folktale?
 - A. The Earth has endless gifts to give the humans that inhabit it.
 - B. Whenever you take something, it's important to also give something in return.
 - C. If people are not careful with nature's gifts, they will eventually disappear.
 - D. It is not polite to take something without expressing your thanks.

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "the Sky said, 'I will feed you. I can nourish every generation. You may take all that you need from me.'" (Paragraph 2)
 - B. "the Sky roared. 'And you thank me by wasting it! You throw me away into ditches and streams! If I am of such little value, I will leave forever.'" (Paragraph 7)
 - C. "Osato sank her fingers deep and plucked a great wedge from the Sky's sweet center — molasses and berry and fudge." (Paragraph 15)
 - D. "Osato's tears poured down her face and into the Earth. Finally, the Earth said, 'I will feed you. But you must learn new ways. You must plow and sow and harvest.'" (Paragraph 34)

3. Which of the following describes what motivated Osato to eat from the Sky in paragraph 15?
 - A. She was still hungry.
 - B. She didn't eat at the festival.
 - C. She didn't believe the Sky's threats.
 - D. She wanted to taste more of the sky.

4. Why is it important to the story that the Sky moves away from the people?

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. The story taught us to be more thankful and less wasteful with the Earth's resources. What is something you could change about your habits to be less wasteful with the Earth's resources? Think about the food you eat and what you throw away.
2. In this folktale, the Sky and the Earth are responsible for feeding humans. Do you think this proves that nature is in control over humans? Why or why not? What would happen if the Earth could no longer feed humans?
3. Why do the people in the story continue to waste the Sky, despite the Sky's warning? Do you think humans continue to waste the Earth's resources today? Why or why not?