

How the Tiger got his stripes

Category	Yarn
Time to allocate (mins)	10
Story	<p>A long time ago, when animals still had the power of speech, a white, stripeless tiger, crept to the edge of the jungle and looked out at the paddy fields where the rice grew. He saw a man sitting under a banana tree eating his lunch. Not far away stood a buffalo who was also taking a rest from his work ploughing the fields. The great beast swished his tail to swipe away the flies.</p>
	<p>The tiger crept forward on his belly, using his powerful arms to pull himself through the grass, and when he was just behind the buffalo he whispered, "Do not be afraid. I do not come to satisfy my hunger, but to seek your advice. Do tell me the answer to my question – for I am so curious to know. I have been observing the puny little man who is your master. He has no strength, no sharp sense of smell. His hands are not strong and his teeth are not sharp, yet he rules you and makes you work for him. You, on the other hand, are a magnificent beast of great and wonderful strength. You are twenty times his weight and size, and I know to my cost that you can put up a fair fight with the best of the beasts of the jungle. I have heard that the source of man's power is something called wisdom. So tell me, oh buffalo, what is wisdom? Where does the man get it from?"</p>
	<p>The buffalo munched slowly on his grass for a while before answering, "Beats me, I've no idea. Why don't you ask him?"</p>
	<p>The tiger saw that he would not get a sensible answer from the buffalo, and so he sprang over to the man in one great bound, and as he stood before the trembling farmer he said, "Have no fear little man, for I have not come to satisfy my hunger. I am here in search of wisdom. Do answer my question, please, for it perplexes me. What this thing that men call wisdom? What does it look like? Where does it come from? Will you not share some of it with me?"</p>
	<p>The man wiped the sweat of fear from his forehead and said as calmly as he could, "Wisdom is very precious. Must I really give some of it to you?"</p>
	<p>"The choice is yours," said the Tiger, "But do you hear that sound? It is my stomach rumbling. I have not slept or eaten for three days, so perplexed have I been by this question, but now I am starting to feel like I could do with a bite to eat. "</p>
	<p>And the man could indeed hear a low rumbling sound. He replied to the tiger, "Well of course I will gladly share my wisdom with you. But I'm afraid I have left it at home today. I must go and fetch it for you. If you come back with me, I am afraid the villagers will take fright. Will you wait here a while?"</p>
	<p>The tiger walked around the man menacingly before giving his reply, "I will wait, but be sure to come back, or I will visit you in your field again tomorrow, and next time I might be more hungry than than inquisitive."</p>
	<p>The man started to walk out of the field, but he had taken only a few steps when he turned back and said, "Please forgive me. I am troubled by the thought of leaving a hungry tiger here with my animals. Will you let me tie you to this tree while I am away fetching the wisdom? That way my fears will be at rest."</p>

The tiger was afraid that the man would change his mind about sharing his wisdom. He thought of the great power that only a little wisdom would give him — how with his strength, and with just a little of man's wisdom, he would rule every creature that walked, slithered, swam or flew across the world. He wanted this prize so much that he agreed to let the man coil a rope around his body and his legs, and tie him to the trunk of the banana tree.

A little later, the man returned to the field with his three sons. Each carried armfuls of dry straw.

"Here, I have kept my side of the bargain. I have brought you wisdom" said the man, and he and his sons laid the straw on the ground beneath the tiger. Then the man set alight to it. Bright orange flames leaped up and burned the tiger. He roared with pain, until at last the fire seared through the ropes, and he sprang to freedom, and bounded for the river where he soothed his burnt fur in the cooling waters.

In time the wounds of the tiger healed, but for ever more his body bore orange stripes where the flames and burned him, and black ones where the ropes had bound him.