



Refilwe

About the story

Title: Refilwe

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Illustrations: Tamsin Hinrichsen

Publisher: Jacana Media

Available in English, Afrikaans, isiXhosa and isiZulu

This retelling of the fairy tale Rapunzel has a uniquely South African twist. It is the story of young Refilwe who is locked away in a cave by a witch. This version of the classic tale will have the children chanting, "Refilwe, Refilwe let down your locks, so I can climb the scraggy rocks!"



Possible themes and topics

- My family/People who care for us
- What is special to us?
- Honesty and dishonesty
- Promises
- Fruit and vegetables (growing vegetables)
- Safety
- My body
- Taking care of babies
- Ancestry and sangomas (offerings and returns)
- Healthy eating
- Heritage
- Bedtime and dreams
- Wedding celebrations
- Measurement (length)

Ideas for activities

Here are some ideas for using *Refilwe* with young children aged four to six years. Choose the activities that best suit the particular ages and interests of the children in your class.

You could use the story and activity ideas to tie in with your weekly theme and/or as part of the children's afternoon free-play sessions to enhance their play and their literacy learning.

Introducing and sharing the story

Create an atmosphere of anticipation linked to the main theme of the story. Stimulate the children's curiosity. Encourage thinking and imagining.

Activity suggestions

- ★ Pretend to find a basket, a pair of garden scissors, a torch and a note that says, "Please help me when its dark." Ask the children to suggest what this could be about. Encourage them to share their ideas with the group.
- ★ Show the front cover of the book. Ask the children if they think the story might have anything to do with the above mysterious things that have appeared in the classroom. Why?
- ★ Then read the title and ask for ideas of what the story might be about. Allow some time for sharing ideas and then say, "Let's find out!"
- ★ Read the story aloud to the children, allowing them to comment if they want to, but be sure to keep the story alive all the way through to the end.

Thinking and talking about the story

Choose from the suggested discussion questions – try ones that you think best match the children's interests and add your own questions too! Only continue for as long as the children are involved.

Encourage the children to give reasons for their answers. When they aren't able to, you can help them by saying, "I wonder if..." and suggesting a reason to them. Share your own ideas with the children too. Children often feel encouraged to contribute when they also hear your thoughts.

Discussion questions

- ★ What would you have done if you were the husband and your wife wanted the witch's morogo?
- ★ Was he a bad man because he took the morogo?
- ★ What do you do when you really want something badly but it is not yours? Is there a difference between things we want and things we need?
- ★ What is the most precious thing that you own? Would you ever give it away? How would you feel if you had to?
- ★ Why do you think the witch decided to take the baby away from her parents?

- ★ Would you rather live in an underground cave or high up the mountain like Refilwe?
- ★ Would you rather have a house with no windows or no door?
- ★ What do you think the witch did when Refilwe was gone?
- ★ Poor Tumi had a terrible accident and couldn't see. What kind of special attention might someone need if they can't see?
- ★ Would you rather be Refilwe or Tumi? Why?
- ★ What is a sangoma? What does a sangoma do?
- ★ Who takes care of babies? What care do babies and young children need? Do some of you have younger baby brothers or sisters? How does it feel to have a new baby brother or sister?

Playing with the story

Offer different materials and ideas for the children to retell or "play" parts of the story, and/or to make up new stories that connect with their own lives. Take the opportunity to observe the children's language and conceptual development as well as the interaction between them as they take control of their own learning.

Activity suggestions

- ★ Turn the pretend-play area into a space where the children can pretend to be babies and parents looking after their babies.
- ★ Draw Refilwe, Tumi or the witch or make cardboard dolls from card and other scrap materials.
- ★ Provide children with scrap pieces of material, beads and feathers for them to dress up as sangomas.
- ★ Plan a wedding for Refilwe and her prince and then role-play the wedding.
- ★ Make a cosy reading area for Refilwe in the mountain cave.
- ★ Play hairdressing games.
- ★ Make Refilwe's dreadlocks out of wool or long newspaper strips twisted together and then measure them. (Remind the children that Refilwe's hair stretched from the cave on the top of the mountain right down to the ground!)
- ★ Make a little playdough garden for Refilwe.
- ★ Make a garden in a cardboard box using natural materials like leaves, twigs, sand/soil, flowers and pebbles.
- ★ Play the game, "Who stole the morogo?". Sit the children in a circle. Let them take turns to be the player who walks around the outside of the circle holding a piece of pretend-morogo and saying, "Who stole the morogo from the witch next door? Was it you? Was it you?" while pretending to put the morogo down behind each child each time. When the player says, "It was you!", that child must get up and chase the player around the outside of the circle trying to catch him/her. As soon as the player gets to the child's place, he/she sits down and the game begins again with a new player.

Shared reading and writing

Focus children's attention on how we compose a piece of writing and how letters and sounds combine to make words. Write on the chalkboard or on large sheets of paper with groups of children, so that they compose with you and watch you as you write. Read out what you have written to them afterwards, pointing to the words.

Activity suggestions

- ★ Brainstorm and write a list of stories you all think Refilwe might enjoy.
- ★ Plan and write down a way to deliver letters and stories to Refilwe in the cave.
- ★ Write an invitation to Refilwe's marriage to the prince.
- ★ Brainstorm and record the children's ideas for making the book corner look like the witch's "cave on the rocks".
- ★ On the chalkboard or a large sheet of paper, write "Refilwe, Refilwe let down your locks, so I can climb the scraggy rocks!". Read this to the children and invite them to suggest what Refilwe might have said in response. Together choose the best suggestion and write this on the chalkboard or a large sheet of paper too.
- ★ Invite the children to make drawings of the story characters on the chalkboard or on paper and to suggest what the characters could be saying. Write the characters' words in large speech bubbles for the children then read these together.
- ★ Write the word "Refilwe" on the chalkboard or a large sheet of paper. Read it and ask the children: Does anyone's name also begin with an R or end with an E? Can you see a letter in the word that is also in your name? Does anyone have two E's in their name like Refilwe does? As the children answer these questions, write up their names, pointing to and sounding the letters as you go. When you've written up the name, read it aloud with the children.

Emergent reading, writing and drawing

Make time and space available for the children to initiate drawing and writing. Spend time sitting with them, sometimes writing and drawing too. In this way you are able to role model conventional practice and give help if the children ask for it. Show that you value the children's own attempts at reading and writing.

Activity suggestions

- ★ Offer one or more copies of Refilwe to the children so that they can retell or "read" it alone and/or with friends.
- ★ With the children, look at a map of Africa and show them where Lesotho is. Ask the children to draw their own maps and send directions to the Prince so that he can find Refilwe.
- ★ Put out recycled materials like cardboard boxes, different coloured paper and newspaper, and scissors and pens. Help the children to make cardboard characters from the story and use these to retell the story.

- ★ Suggest that the children write postcards from Refilwe to her parents. Ask: What would you say on your postcard if you were Refilwe?
- ★ Remind the children that Refilwe had very few stories or books in her cave. Invite them to compose and illustrate some stories for her.
- ★ Let the children write magic spells that Refilwe can use to set herself free from the cave.
- ★ Invite the children to write down some of their favourite songs for Refilwe to sing.
- ★ Use props the children find and/or make to turn the book corner into the cave on top of the mountain.
- ★ In the book corner, include fiction and non-fiction books that tie in with the themes of the story – witch’s babies, fairy tales and magic spells, food and vegetable gardens. Introduce these books to the children, read them or explore them with the children if they ask.

Dictating, scribing and acting out stories

As part of *Storyplay*, PRAESA offers and supports a specialised technique for dictating, scribing and acting out stories, called the magic carpet. To find out more about this, contact info@praesa.org.za and see www.praesa.org.za for training and mentoring opportunities.

Activity suggestion

- ★ Invite the children to dictate their own stories. These might relate to *Refilwe* but they don’t have to. Write down the children’s stories for them and make time for acting them out.

Taking the story home

Encourage the parents or other caregivers to do all or some of the activities below at home with their children.

Activity suggestions

- ★ If their child brings home a magic carpet story to share, read it to him/her or ask someone else to read it aloud.
- ★ Ask their child to retell the story or tell them about the storybook they are reading at “school”.
- ★ Borrow *Refilwe* (or a version of the fairy tale *Rapunzel*) from the library. Then read it to their child or look through it together, talking about the illustrations.
- ★ Look at pictures their child draws and read any writing he/she shows them, asking “What did you draw/write?”.
- ★ Ask the parents to write down stories that their children tell them and then to send the stories to “school” so that they can be shared with the other children.

- ★ Suggest that they remind their children how Refilwe let the witch up into the cave using her dreadlocks. Together discover the heaviest thing their child can lift by tying objects to a piece of string or rope and then asking their child to lift them.
- ★ Together with their child, make a baby doll or puppet from an old sock. Then encourage their child to look after the “baby” and tell it stories.
- ★ Tell their child stories about when they were babies, showing him/her photos if they have some.