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The Talking Stick

Drummers begin to enter from edges of audience down the isles

Dancers enter onstage with large puppets.

1st dance

Begin with animal entrances with the percussion underneath.

5: Meet . . . Elephant

Elephant puppet dance and drumming.

4: Meet . . . Cat and Rat

Cat and Rat dance and music

7: Come Hippo and Tortoise!

They enter music and dance

5: Don’t forget me!

1: Of course, please . . . Dance Anansi!

Spider dances and music.

1: Now it is time.

2: Time to begin

3: Time to show.

4: To show what is drawn.

5: To show what is written.

6: On the Talking Stick

7: The tales of Cats and Rats

6: The Hippo and Tortoise

7: Mice and Kings
And the Spider too!

Because it is time my friends. Time for the talking stick to speak again.

For the drums to sing and the stories to live.

The wisdom is here for the taking.

Ready to jump into your ears and feed your mind.

But where should we begin . . . where to start?

I know! Here on the talking stick are all the stories we tell. We’ll start and the bottom and work our way up. That way we can share all that the stick has to say.

So what is the first story?

Let’s see. Ahh, the story of “The Cat and the Rat.” These people all know what cats and rats are. Don’t you?

The children may respond “yes” “no”. Hopefully yes.

Well, did you ever notice how some cats are always ready to chase rats? There is a reason for that. You see Cat and Rat didn’t always fight and chase. Actually, they used to be very good friends.

Cat and Rat Dance Onstage

They were great fans of music and dancing.

They dance some more

They shared fine dinners together.

Rat: That was some terrific stew there Cat.

Cat: Well you know, I always use only fresh curry. You can’t make it right without it.

And they were, for the most part, very good companions. That was until the day she arrived.

Flamingo enters the scene. Cat and rat are having a conversation as she walks by. Cat does not notice her, but rat can not take his eyes off of her. He is smitten.
Cat: So the elephant says . . . What do you mean there’s no lunch? I packed it in my trunk! My trunk! *(He laughs and laughs)* Get it . . . hee, hee. Rat?

Rat: Huh?

Cat: What’s up with you? What’s goin’ on?

Rat: Didn’t you see her? Wasn’t she the most beautiful thing you’ve ever seen?

Cat: Who? What? Come on . . . You’re loosing it. We’ve got to get to work anyway. We’re running late.

*Cat and rat run off stage and put on aprons, they come back on and are miming moving around barrels and baskets. Cat has a small chalkboard.*

7: Rat and Cat worked for the King Ansa, taking care of his royal pantry. Once a month Cat would count all the grain and fruit to make sure there was enough to last until the next harvest. And Rat would help with the counting.

*Rat and cat have been pantomiming counting bags or barrels of grain. Cat writes numbers on the chalkboard. He can have the audience help him with the equations.*

Cat: Well that’s sixty baskets of grain and thirty six baskets of fruit. So, the king usually needs five baskets of grain each month, and three baskets of fruit. So next month we should have at least . . . let’s see . . . sixty minus five is fifty-five. Ok fifty-five baskets of grain-and . . . thirty-six . . . minus three equals . . thirty three baskets of fruit. Great. The king will have plenty of food to last us until next fall.

Rat: Yeah, great . . . great. So when is lunch?

Cat: That’s about the fifth time you’ve asked me. What’s going on?

Rat: Oh Cat. It’s that lovely flamingo. She’s always walking around the garden at midday, and I was hoping to get up the nerve to talk to her. Maybe, if I took her a pear, or an apricot-

Cat: Now Rat you know we can’t do that. This isn’t our food to give away.

Rat: But the king would never know. We could change the numbers around . . .

Cat: No Rat. It would be wrong. The King is good to us. He pays us well and makes sure we’ve got plenty to eat. He trusts us not to lie to him.

*Rat sulks*
Cat: Why don’t try talking to her?

Rat: No, no. A bird like that—talk to a rat like me?

Cat: Suit yourself. Hey! Why don’t you do one of your dances, or sing one of your songs?

Rat: No that’s okay Cat. I’ll figure it out myself.

*Cat leaves. Rat sits and thinks. He sees Flamingo nearby. He looks at the fruit and he thinks. He takes a piece of the fruit and offers it to the Flamingo. She likes the gift but seems indifferent to the Rat.*

7: And so the days went on. Each day Rat would wait until Cat had left the pantry, and then take a piece of fruit and give it to the flamingo. This went on for one month, until Cat had to count the food again and report to the King how much there was left.

*Cat and Rat are counting the food. Cat has the chalkboard with the equation.*

Cat: Thirty, thirty one. Thirty two? That can’t be right? But I’ve counted the baskets three times already. Rat!

Rat: Yes Cat?

Cat: Do me a favor and count these baskets for me.


Cat: Thirty two? But according to the board (he gets the chalk board) there should be thirty three .. I know there should be thirty three. The numbers have never been wrong.

*Flamingo walks past and sits down. She opens her basket and begins counting the fruit inside.*

Cat: Oh no you didn’t . . . 

Rat: Let me explain . . . She’s really a good conversationalist ..

*Cat chases Rat off the stage*

7: And with that Cat began to chase Rat to teach him a lesson. And he is still chasing him to this very day.
Cat and Rat run past again.

3: So, they will never be friends again?

7: Perhaps, someday. But the story warns us not to lie to our friends, because when they find out, you may lose their friendship, forever.

Dancer who played the flamingo has walked onstage and is still admiring her feathers. Actor 2 sees her preening.

5: But what does the story say about pride. That flamingo wouldn’t even give that poor rat the time of day. But she sure acted like she was “the cat’s meow.”

2: More like “the rats cheese.”

5: Either way, what does the talking stick say about that?

4: Well, the next story is called “The Fortunate Trap.” You know they say good fortune and bad fortune are handed out equally.

5: That’s right. You can have good luck or bad luck for no reason at all. . .

4: And even when you are lucky, that can all change in the blink of an eye.

5: Some people, when they are lucky, forget what it was like when they didn’t have it so good.

4: And they can make a real mess for themselves if they start to think they are better than others because of their good fortune.

5: And that, my friends, is “The Fortunate Trap.”

6: Like the one Hippo fell into!!

4: That’s right!

The cast sets the scene for the story of Hippo and Tortoise

4: You see, a long time ago Hippo was one of the most fortunate and powerful animals in the land. He had a great house on the top of the best hill and was very successful in his work. He and his wife would throw extravagant parties with wonderful food and music for a very elite guest list. The animals in the land were always very honored when they were finally invited to attend one of Hippo’s parties.
Scene of the Hippo's party. They Greet the guests. Hippo tells a couple awful jokes. The guests laugh anyway.

4: The Hippos got used to all the attention and one night decided to tease their friends.

Hippo: So you are all here to enjoy all this find food and drink. But you know what? There is a small fee tonight. No one eats or drinks unless they know my first name! Ha ha. You don’t know it do you? Ha Ha. Well, you know what . . I do!

Hippo begins to eat in front of his guests.

Hippo: Oh this is so good. You guys would love this. Want some. Ha you can’t.

4: And so all the guests left the party. They were all very hungry, disappointed, and angry with Hippo.

Hippo: Thanks for coming. You know what? This was fun! Why don’t ya’l come back next month and we’ll do this again. Hey . . if any of you do guess my name well me and my wife we’ll (he begins to laugh at his own idea) I tell you what . . . We’ll go and live in the muddy river at the bottom of the hill! Ha Ha!. (to himself) Like that would ever happen.

An1: How could he do that to us! That was so humiliating.

An2: And to think I saved up to buy a new feather to wear.

An3: This stinks. That Hippo just thinks so much of himself. He used to be a decent guy, but now he’s just a bully. If only we knew his first name. That would sure catch him off his guard.

A1: And then he could never tease us again!

Tort: Friends . . .I think I have an idea. And if it works, not only will Hippo never bully us again, but I think he will have to keep his word too.

4: So the next day tortoise walked to the path that ran alongside the muddy river. He pulled his legs and his head and his tail inside of his shell so far, he simply looked like one of the many rocks along the path. He didn’t have to wait long until the Hippo’s came walking by . .

Mr Hippo passes first, he does not notice the tortoise and keeps walking

Hippo: Now honey, lets get to the watering hole before Elephant. You know how he likes to splash all that mud around and I do not want my fine new hat getting all dirty.
Mrs. Hippo enters. As she is walking she is looking through her beach bag

MHipp Yes dear. You know that Mrs. Elephant has just about driven me crazy talking about her new grandson. “Oh Dumbo does this, and Dumbo does that.” I think she thinks that little thing can fly too—woops

She trips over Tortoise

MHi: Oh Insantim! Insantim!! I think I turned my ankle or broke my foot or something? Come on baby.. I’ve fallen and I can’t get up!

Hippo: Alright dear, alright. Here I am . . Let’s get you up.

Tort: Oh Insantim, let me help you there.

Hippo: Oh thanks there Tortoise. You . . you . . you know my name . .

Tort: That’s right . . Insantim.

Hippo: Well, well. You know what Tortoise . . why don’t you just come over to our place tonight. We’ve got some great food and I’ll get my special drummer to play! It’ll be great.

Tort: Well I don’t know about that Hippo . .you see I live here on the land and believe, if I am correct, today you are moving?

Hippo Moving?

Tort: Yes that’s right. I may be paraphrasing here . . but I believe your exact words were “Hey . . if any of you do guess my name me and my wife we’ll go and live in muddy river at the bottom of the hill!” And look, here we are!

4: And with that all the animals helped the Hippos move into their new muddy home, and they have lived there from that day till now.

2: That’s great! That Hippo learned his lesson.

1: Yes he certainly did. But not all lessons are learned by what one does wrong. Some are learned by what one does that is right.

2: For example . .

1: Well the Talking Stick tells us the story of “The King and the Mice.”
The scene begins with the actors taking the “King” and throwing him into the middle of the stage. The King paces in a circle, showing by his movement the size of the room he has been left in. He tries to jump up to see out, but can not. He tries to open the door but can not. Finally he gives up and sits on the floor.

3: A long time ago a mighty and powerful king was attacked by his enemy and taken away from his kingdom. He was stripped of his fine ornaments, left to wear rags and thrown into a hut without any food or water. It was the intent of his enemies that he stay there to die.

6: That’s a terrible way to start a story.

3: Nonetheless, the king was left there in the dark, becoming hungrier and hungrier. The days went by and one day . . .

Puppeteer comes onstage with mouse on rod. Goes past the king. The king grabs the mouse.

King: Why what is this? Ahh a mouse. Well, well. You may be small but you will give me a break from this terrible hunger.

He grabs the mouse and dangles it by the tail over his mouth, ready to eat it. He thinks about this and changes his mind.

King: Oh no brother mouse. I can’t do this. You are too small to defend yourself. And eating you will not end my hunger. I will starve anyway. There you go.

He places the mouse back on the ground.

King: Go on to your family. Go.

Mous: Oh Mighty King! I am grateful for your kindness. You have spared my life, and in return I will spare yours.

King: What? What can a tiny mouse do for me? Thank you but I fear my fate is set.

Mous: Do not despair King, I will return.

Puppeteer with the mouse exits.

3: And with that the tiny mouse ran away from the King and scuttled under the wall.

King: Ah well mouse, good luck on your journey, but I don’t think you’ll be back.
King sits. Actors offstage begin to make sounds with percussion of the mice coming back. King follows the sound around until the finds the “hole” downstage. The puppeteer with the mouse re-enters.

3: The king sat next to the wall and could feel that the day was ending since it was getting cooler inside of his hut. Then he began to hear something. It started as a scratching, then a rustling and then finally a scuttling. The king walked around the floor of the hut until he saw where the sound was coming from. Just as he knelt down to get a better view, the mouse ran through the hole carrying with him a grain of corn.

King: Oh little mouse! It’s you!

Mouse: Mighty King, I have brought you a present of this corn.

King: Thank you little mouse. I humbly accept your gift.

*The king picks up the grain of corn, toasts the mouse and eats it.*

King: Well that was . . . filling.

Mouse: Mighty king . . . I know you are much larger that I. I know that grain wasn’t nearly enough food to fill your belly. So I have brought friends.

*Two puppeteers enter with mice on rods. They have small “gifts” for the King.*

3: And with that the King looked at the hole and dozens of mice ran in. Each of them was carrying a piece of grain, or a small fruit or seed to give to the King. Once all the mice had come in and placed their gifts, the King had a nice pile of food to eat.

King: Oh my tiny friends. Your kindness it is – it is so great. I am deeply moved. Thank you.

Mouse: Do not despair King. As long as you are to stay in this hut, we will continue to take care of you.

3: And so it happened. Each day the King remained in the hut, the dozens of mice would come and bring him some food to eat. And it was that way the King was able to survive.

*Mouse puppeteers enter with mice, carrying “treasure” for the King.*

Mouse: Mighty King! While going through the forest today, my tribe and I found some treasure we wish to share with you.
King: Dear friends, you have done enough for me. The food is plenty.

Mou: Oh no King. This treasure is of no use to us, but we think it will be very useful to you.

*The puppeteers leave the “treasure” on the floor and the king begins to dress with his back to the audience. Once he is done he turns and faces the audience for all to see how “royal” he looks.*

3: And with that the dozens of mice ran in and dropped coins, pieces of jewelry and ornaments in front of the King. The king was amazed by what he saw. He felt he could not accept such generous gifts, but the mice again urged him to take them and put them on. The King dressed and looked very noble indeed.

King: Well how do I look?

Mice: Great! Super! Shiny!

3: Several weeks went by and the mice continued to feed and cloth the king. Finally the day came when the King’s enemies came to look in the hut. They were sure that they would find him dead on the floor. But to their amazement they found the King, not only alive, but healthy and dressed again in his royal clothes.

*The King’s enemies return. The enter the hut only to find the King standing and smiling. He looks very regal and royal. They are amazed and back away leaving and entrance between themselves for the king to exit through. He walks out very proud.*

3: When they saw the King like this, they were convinced he must have had some special powers to help him. Being afraid of this, they released him and told him to run away to his country where they would never seek him again.

King enters carrying a basket of “gifts” for the little ones. The mice come out one more time and eat.

3: The king departed and returned home. But from that day forth, he showed great thanks to all the small animals in his country, making sure that his people would treat them with kindness and appreciation.

7: So great things can happen when both the little and the big work together.

3: Yes. And good deeds can be repaid back to you for a lifetime.

2: Yes, yes, yes. But enough with these sweet stories. I want to hear something a bit more fun.

Anansi enters. The percussion announces his entrance.
Ana: Yes . . .

_The actors ignore him. He tries harder to get their attention._

6: A story about begin clever and witty

Ana: Yes . . .

_The actors ignore him some more until they can’t deny he is there._

7: A story about Anansi.

1: Yes let’s have a story about Anansi.

Ana: Yeah how about ME!

2: Alright, alright. No talking stick would be complete without a story about you .

Ana: That’s right brother. The best for last. So hit it.

2: Well, as you’ve already probably noticed, Anansi is quite the character.

7: Yes indeed. He is very clever, but he sometimes uses his smarts to take advantage of the other animals.

6: He’s a tricky one. Gotta keep and eye on this guy.

Ana: That’s why they call me the trickster Silly.

6: And you really should choose a better role model.

2: But, the Talking Stick knows a lot can be learned from him. And that is why his story is set at the top. Now, to tell this one we are going to need your help. This story is about the number “nine. Now, whenever anyone says “Nine” I want all of you to clap your hands and say “Boom. Down he Went!” Let’s try that together. “Nine” ( _clap “Boom down he went!”_ ) Great! So now we begin the story of “Anansi and the Number” ( _actor shows nine fingers_ ) One day, Anansi was walking through the forest when he met up with Tortoise.

_Music begins to play and Anansi dances onstage. Tortoise enters from the other side of the stage and they meet up._

Ana: Good morning to you Tortoise.

Tor: Good morning Anansi.
Ana: Well where are you off to in such a hurry?

Tor: Well, Anansi, Nyame, God of the Sky, has commanded that no one say the number between eight and ten.

Ana: That’s crazy. Why can’t you say the number between eight and ten?

Tor: Because that is how many months Nyame had to wait before the animals thanked her for the rain that brought the harvest.

Ana: That is true. We did wait a long time.

Tor: So, if any of us say the number between eight and ten, then Nyame will make us wait that many months before she will drop the rain again. Nyame also warned that the person who says that number would fall fast asleep until the rain comes.

Ana: I see. Fast asleep until the next rain.

Tor: I’d best be going. It is market day and I need to tell all the animals before they see one another.

Tortoise exits the stage

Ana: Well that’s funny? Sending a tortoise out to spread the word. I am much faster than he is. I know! I will run ahead of Tortoise and stop the animals before he sees them. I think this new law will fill my belly before the day is through.

2: And so Anansi made a short cut through the forest, as only a spider can, and he was soon way ahead of Tortoise and the other animals on their way to the market.

Ana: And now it begins. Here we go. One, two, three,

As he counts he sets out the nine “yam mounds” They can be bundles of fabric, tied together, or soft sculpture dirt mounds. Whatever they are the audience must be able to see there are nine. Once he is done he sits on one.

2: So Anansi got to work. He made (actor almost says the number and then put up nine fingers instead) mounds of dirt. Once he was done he sat on the last one and then waited for his first passerby. It wasn’t long until Elephant came by carrying her bundle of bananas.

Anansi begins to cry. Louder and louder.

Ele: Why Anansi, what is the matter.
Ana: Oh Elephant. I have been working all morning trying to count how many yam mounds I have planted, but I keep getting mixed up. I thought I planted more, but I only count eight. You see.

*He counts the ones next to himself but not the one he is sitting on.*

Ana: You see. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. There should be one more!!

Ele: Oh. But Anansi, there is! You’re just sitting on it is all. You see.. one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight and nine!

_Elephant passes out. Actor on side of the stage leads the audience in “Boom! Down she went.”_

2: Poor Elephant fell fast asleep. Anansi helped himself to the bananas and ran off to his hut. And poor Elephant was left there, sleeping in the path.

_The Actors come out and cover up Elephant so she looks like a rock or pile of dirt. Anansi enters again._

Ana: Hehe. Bananas. I love bananas. Let’s see what else is coming this way today.

2: Anansi didn’t have to wait long until Hippo came by.

_Anansi begins to cry again. He bawls louder and louder._

Hippo: Why Anansi, what on earth are you crying about, so loud?

Ana: Oh Hippo. I have been trying to plant my yams today, like the lovely ones you take to the market. But I am lost. I have planted my yam hills and I can not count them. I only counted eight and I thought there were more! You see

_Anansi counts to eight and neglects to count the one he is sitting on._

Ana: One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight! Oh what will I do!

Hippo: Oh well Anansi. That’s no matter. I’m sure I can figure this out for you. You see there is one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight and the one you are sitting on makes Nine!

_Hippo passes out. Actor on side of the stage leads the audience in “Boom! Down he went.”_

2: Poor Hippo fell fast asleep. Anansi helped himself to the yams and ran off to his hut. And Hippo was left there, sleeping in the path.
The Actors come out and cover up Hippo so he looks like a rock or pile of dirt. Anansi enters again.

Ana: He he. Yams. I love Yams. Let’s see what else is coming this way today.

2: So Anansi waited by the path to see who might come next. He didn’t have to wait very long until Lion came by. He was carrying a whole bushel of wheat. When Lion passed Anansi, Anansi began to cry yet one more time.

Ana: Oh me oh my! Oh poor, poor me!

Lion: Why Anansi, what is wrong?

Ana: Oh Lion, I too have been trying to get my food ready to take to the market. But I can’t keep count of how many yam mounds I have. I’ve counted and counted but it just doesn’t add up. You see, one, two, three four, five, six, seven, eight. Only Eight! I’m sure there were more.

Lion: But Anansi there are. Don’t forget the one you are sitting on.

Ana: The one I am sitting on? What do you mean?

Lion: Here you see. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine.

Lion passes out. Actor on side of the stage leads the audience in “Boom! Down he went.”

2: Poor Lion fell fast asleep. Anansi helped himself to the bushel of wheat and ran off to his hut. And Lion was left there, sleeping in the path.

The Actors come out and cover up Lion so he looks like a rock or pile of dirt. During the next passage Spider Monkey peeks out and moves about the stage. She checks on each of the animals who are sleeping to make sure they are alright and then decides she has seen enough.

2: Anansi thought that he had a pretty good scheme going. He would just trick animals on their way to the market and not have to do any work himself. What he didn’t know was that all the time, from way up in the trees he was being watched by the little spider monkey. Spider monkey is very small, and very quick, but also very fair. She knew what Anansi was doing to the others was wrong and decided it was time to teach him a lesson. But she knew she couldn’t do it alone. So she went to Nyame herself to ask for her help.

Nyame settles herself in the middle of the stage. Monkey enters and calls to her.
Mon:  Nyame, God of the Sky I have come to you for your help.

Nay:  Well hello Monkey.  What brings you to see me today?

Mon:  Well Nyame, I’m sure you know that several animals have said the number between eight and ten.

Nay:  That’s right Monkey.  They have, and now you must all wait a long time for the rain to fall.

Mon:  Well Nyame, I thought you should know that the animals were tricked into saying the number.

Nay:  Tricked, by who?

Mon:  Anansi.

*During this passage Monkey acts out the story quickly for Nyame. She then whispers into Nyame’s ear. Nyame agrees by nodding her head.*

2:  Monkey then told Nyame how Anansi had used the yam hills to trick all the animals, and that once they fell asleep he helped himself to the food they were carrying to market. She then told Nyame her plan for teaching Anansi a lesson and hoped that Nyame would help agree to help.

Nay:  Well Monkey. If you are able to get Anansi to fall for your plan, then I will agree to do my part as well.

*Nyame exits the stage. Monkey mimes picking fruit and putting it into her basket. She exits the stage. Anansi enters and then Monkey enters to walk past him.*

2:  So Monkey left Nyame and went through the forest trees collecting fresh fruits. Once she had a basket full she headed down the path right towards where Anansi was already waiting. When Anansi saw her he began to cry again . .

Ana:  Oh me oh my! I will never, never be able to do this!

Mon:  Why Anansi? What is wrong?

Ana:  Oh monkey, I have sat here all day trying to count my yam hills and I can not find them all. I can only count eight, but I am sure there were more.

*He is sitting on one as he counts . .

Ana:  You see? One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight! Oh only eight.
Mon:  Hmm.  More??  Well let’s see.  I see, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven . . . eight.  Yep only eight.

*Anansi did not expect this.*

Ana:  Now Monkey . . are you sure?  I mean there are more.  Try again.

Mon:  Well, okay.  One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight!  I see eight.

Ana:  Oh??  Oh... Oh!  Well lookie here.  There is one under me.  Please count again.

  *Monkey stands on one in the middle and counts again.*

Mon:  Well Okay.  One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight.

Ana:  Monkey you are standing on one.

Mon:  Oh I am!  How silly of me!

*She jumps to one on her side and counts again.*

Mon:  One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight.

*Anansi begins to become angry.*

Ana:  No you are still missing one.

Mon:  Anansi what ever do you mean.  See?  One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight!

Ana:  NO.

Mon  One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight

*She continues to count, making sure she is on top of one each time as she moves around. Anansi becomes more and more angry until . . .*

Ana:  No Monkey NO!  Don’t you see?!  There are one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, Nine, NINE!!

  *As he says this he is jumping on top of the ninth hill.  After he finishes saying Nine, he falls to the ground fast asleep.*

Mon:  Ha ha.  You’re right!  And there you are Anansi.  Fast asleep.  Nyame, Nyame do you see?
Nyame speaks from offstage

Nay: Good work monkey. You have succeeded. I will send you what I promised.

Percussionists then make the sound of the rain falling. All the animals that have been sleeping slowly wake up and get up. The soon find Anansi sleeping downstage, shake their heads at him and walk away.

2: And at that Nyame let the rain fall. All the animals that had fallen asleep woke up and knew all that had happened, all except for Anansi. He was left to sleep by the path until Nyame decided to drop the rain again.

The music at the end of the story leads into the final dance.

1: And so my friends, we hope your ears are full of wisdom.

6: Your hearts are full of kindness.

7: Your souls are full of courage.

5: Your bellies full of laughter

3: And your feet are full of adventure as the Talking Stick leads us on-

4: to the day we share our tales again. Until then . .

2: let the drums continue to sing as the animals dance to their songs.

The puppeteers, storytellers and percussionists cheer. They finish the final dance.

The End.