



From oral to animated: Reconstructing African folktale fantasy in the digital age

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how digital technology serves as a medium for reimagining and repackaging African folktales. The analysis focuses on a case study of ten selected episodes from *Tinga Tinga Tales*, including *Why Hyena Has Short Hind Legs*, *Why Bat Hangs Upside Down*, *Why Bush Baby Has Big Eyes*, *Why Leopard Has Spots*, *Why Tortoise Has a Cracked Shell*, *Why the Vulture Is Bald*, *Why Cheetah Has Tears*, *Why Parrot Can't Keep a Secret*, *Why Snake Has No Legs*, and *Why Bat Hangs Upside Down*. The study adopted a qualitative descriptive design, which entailed a critical textual analysis of animated episodes. This involved participatory observation of preschool children's responses during viewing sessions at Logitech Academy in Kakamega County, Kenya. Data were collected through viewing guides, informal interviews, and observation notes. Guided by semiotics and children's literature theory, data was analyzed thematically to explore how digital animation enhances fantasy and engagement among children. Findings show that animation transforms African oral narratives into visually immersive experiences that heighten imagination, emotional engagement, and moral understanding. Children responded with belief, curiosity, and empathy, indicating that digital storytelling not only sustains the cultural and didactic functions of folktales but also adapts them to the visual expectations of digital-native audiences. The study concludes that *Tinga Tinga Tales* exemplifies how African oral traditions can be revitalized through digital media to preserve heritage and foster imaginative learning among children.

Keywords: African Folktales, Animation, Child Audience, Children's Literature, Digital Technology, Fantasy, Semiotics

I. INTRODUCTION

African folktales are inherently fantastical, featuring surreal elements like talking animals and magical transformations. Digital media, especially television and film, enhances these fantasies by visually rendering them, making the unbelievable appear real (Houston, 2011). Platforms such as satellite TV, internet streaming, and animated films immerse audiences in these imaginative worlds, deepening engagement and interpretation (Nodelman, 2017). This paper explores how digital technology, through works like *Tinga Tales*, expands the fantasy dimension of Africa's oral traditions by transforming them into visually compelling, contemporary narrative.

Historically, literature was primarily created for adults. Children's literature emerged around the 18th century, recognizing that children perceive, feel, and imagine differently from adults (Hannabuss, 1989). Today, literature for children is not only intentionally produced but also accessible through diverse formats; written, audio, and audio-visual, thanks to digital technology. Despite achieving literacy, many children prefer audio-visual narratives over print, drawn by the immersive experiences digital media offers.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by semiotics and the theory of children's literature. Semiotics, the study of signs and meaning-making, views texts as collections of signs, words, images, sounds, gestures, and objects, interpreted through genre conventions and media forms. It helps analyze how *Tinga Tales* constructs meaning using visual and auditory elements such as music, movement, and imagery. The theory of children's literature, as developed by scholars like Hourihan (2005) emphasize that children's texts should entertain and educate through imagination and fantasy. It recognizes that children perceive the world differently from adults, requiring simple plots, language, and relatable characters. This theory supports the analysis of how *Tinga Tales* engages young audiences by creating imaginative escapes through stylized storytelling and fantastical visual.



2.2 Empirical Literature

Digital technology encompasses a wide range of multimedia tools used to collect, process, store, retrieve, and transmit information through electronic signals; voice, images, video, and multimedia presentations. It has revolutionized communication in the 21st century, reshaping oral literature from its traditional, face-to-face format into a dynamic digital experience (Tagg, 1993; Ruffell, 2003; Metzger, 2024). According to De Kock (2012), digital communication has profoundly transformed literary studies, with screen-based media increasingly replacing the Gutenberg text. Houston (2011), in *Digital Books for Digital Natives*, observes that children born after 1980, whom she calls "digital beings", gravitate toward digital formats for learning and entertainment. She writes:

“This generation uses Facebook or MySpace to socialize, bookmarks favorite sites with Delicious, and turns to Wikipedia and Google for answers. For Digital Natives, the Internet is familiar territory. They read online for school and leisure, preferring digital resources over traditional reference materials.” (Houston, 2011, p.39)

In an effort to shield children from harsh realities, parents often turn to folktales, considered ideologically neutral and suitable for young audiences. Digitalization has reshaped these tales, altering their narrative techniques, mediums, performance styles, and venues. In *Tinga Tales*, television replaces traditional storytellers and print, becoming a key medium for sharing African etiological folktales. These stories now incorporate dramatic elements such as music, color, lighting, and voice-over, enhancing emotional engagement and narrative depth. Dialogue and visual settings enrich the storytelling, making digital formats feel more lifelike than symbolic written texts.

Children perceive the world differently from adults. Digital media, with its vibrant visuals and layered meanings, engages them through a fusion of image, sound, music, and video. *Tinga Tales*, an animated series based on African animal folktales, targets children aged three to six. It vividly brings to life stories explaining how animals came to be, allowing repeated viewing without loss of detail and offering flexible access regardless of time or location. Rice (2005) emphasizes that children grasp visual information better than verbal narration.

A scene like Mama Cheetah racing the wind becomes more fantastical and engaging when the wind is animated with personality, rather than described abstractly in text. Print narratives often compress plots, simplify settings, and limit emotional depth. Characters are one-dimensional, and humor is frequently lost in transcription (Burmark, 2002). In contrast, digital storytelling uses visual grammar—patterns of signs and images—to convey meaning without losing nuance (Ruffell, 2003). Characters express thoughts and emotions directly, through action and dialogue, rather than through a narrator's summary.

Scholarly evidence shows that children aged three to six are naturally drawn to fantasy and exploration. According to Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory, during the "Play Age" (ages 3–5), imagination flourishes, and children initiate fantasy, motor, and language activities. *Tinga Tales* aligns with this developmental stage, engaging children through imaginative storytelling and vibrant visuals that stimulate curiosity and creativity (Soyinka, 1990; Saleh, 2012). Watching requires no reading skills, allowing children as young as two to engage with stories through colorful visuals and motion. Images also transcend language barriers, enabling communication across cultures. Unlike written texts, which require literacy, visual media can be understood universally. This inclusivity makes digital storytelling a powerful tool for preserving and sharing African heritage.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive design to explore how digital animation reimagines fantasy in African folktales and how children respond to these narratives. This design was chosen because it enables rich, contextual analysis of qualitative content. For the present case, visual symbolism, and children's interpretive responses can be best examined through qualitative methods. The focus was on ten purposively selected episodes from the *Tinga Tinga Tales* series, including *Why Hyena Has Short Hind Legs*, *Why Leopard Has Spots*, *Why the Vulture Is Bald*, *Why Bush Baby Has Big Eyes*, *Why Cheetah Has Tears*, *Why Parrot Can't Keep a Secret*, *Why Snake Has No Legs*, *Why Bat Hangs Upside Down* and *Why Tortoise Has a Cracked Shell*. The episodes were chosen for their strong representation of fantasy and moral instruction.

Data were gathered through textual and semiotic analysis of the animations, supplemented by observation and informal interviews with twenty-five children aged three to six years at Logitech Academy in Kakamega County, Kenya.

The children viewed the episodes in small groups, and their spontaneous reactions, gestures, and comments were recorded alongside their post-viewing reflections. The collected data were analyzed thematically and semiotically to interpret how sound, image, color, and movement construct meaning and how these elements shape children's imaginative



and moral engagement. Observation and interview data were read repeatedly to identify patterns such as belief, empathy, curiosity, and moral awareness, which were then triangulated with insights from the textual analysis. Ethical considerations were strictly observed through informed consent, confidentiality, and the use of pseudonyms. This methodological approach enabled a holistic understanding of how *Tinga Tinga Tales* revitalizes African oral storytelling through digital media while nurturing children's imaginative participation and moral reflection.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Digitalized Folktales and Fantasy

Film producers use style and visual storytelling to create imaginative worlds that appeal to children. In this study, *fantasy* refers to presenting the impossible as plausible; stimulating mental images and daydreams that transport audiences into speculative realms shaped by narrative cues.

Animation as Narrative

Tinga Tinga Tales employ surrealism to convey meaning beyond the literal, using symbols, imagery, personification, and animation to depict talking, flying, and shape-shifting animals. The series uses traditional hand-drawn animation by African artists, later digitized to create motion through sequential image display. This technique, combined with music and voice-overs, crafts a vivid fantasy world where animals and objects come to life. To simulate movement, multiple drawings of the same character are created with slight variations. These are captured and sequenced digitally to produce fluid motion. When paired with synchronized sound, the result is a believable illusion of talking and action, drawing children into a magical, imaginative experience as illustrated below.



Fig. 1

A Zebra

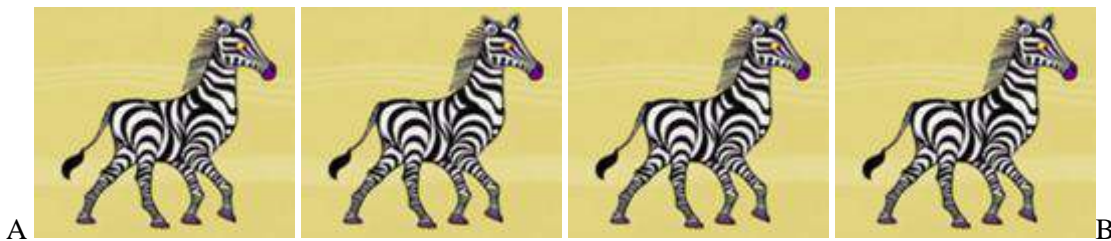


Fig 1.1 to Fig 1.4

A Zebra Traveling from Point A to B

An illusion of movement, such as a zebra traveling from point A to B, in *Fig.1.1 to Fig.1.4* is created by rapidly displaying sequential images (typically 24–30 frames per second). Each frame shows a slight change in position, producing fluid motion. In *Why the Tortoise Has a Cracked Shell*, animation depicts a flying tortoise by progressively illustrating its ascent: starting grounded with wings spread, then hovering, rising into the sky, and finally reaching a heavenly realm filled with food. These frames, played in rapid succession and paired with sound, create a believable fantasy of flight.

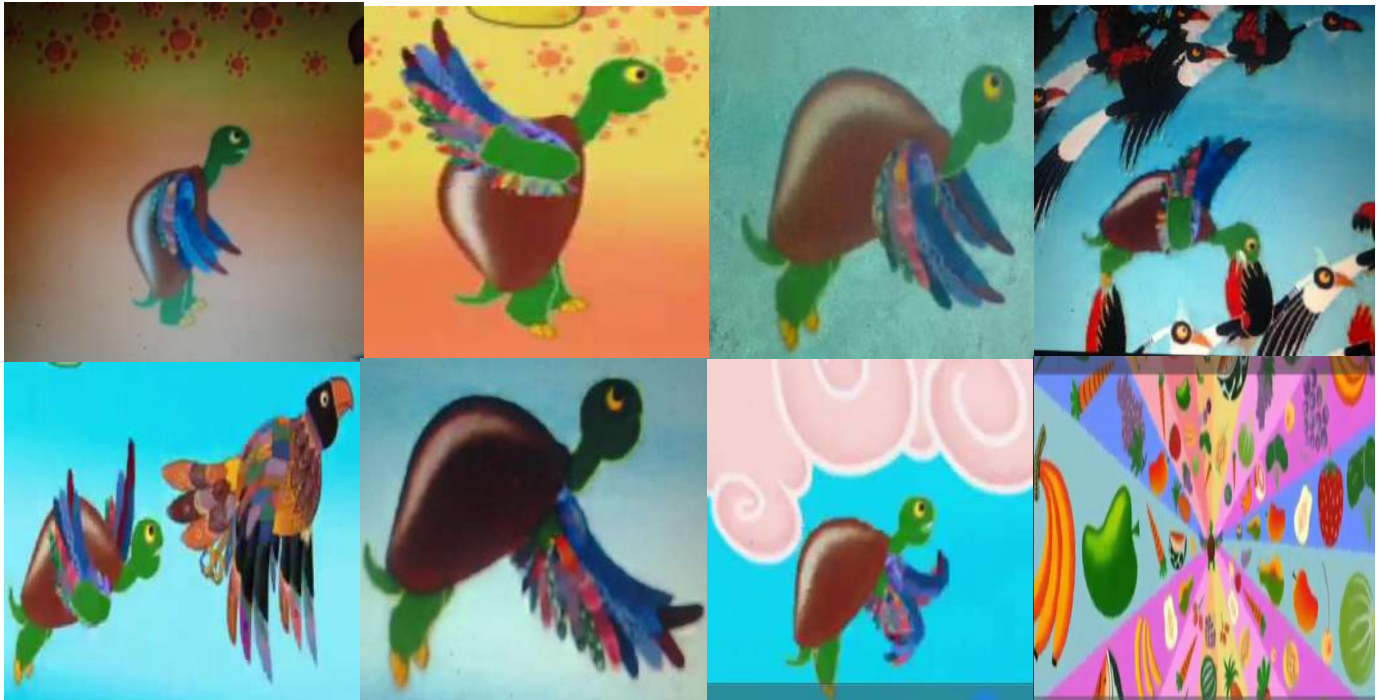


Fig 1.5 to Fig 1.12

Images of Tortoise in Different Positions Flying to Heaven

Children's Responses to Animated Fantasy

Rapid image sequencing in animation creates the illusion of motion, allowing children to see a tortoise flying faster than birds and believe it's possible. During a watching session with a selected group of children, this was evident in their reactions to *Why the Tortoise Has a Cracked Shell*. After watching birds attach feathers to the tortoise, Malia Angela (3yrs) remarked, "Tortoise has now become a bird so he can fly," showing belief through visual confirmation. Mbithe Marinda Daudi (3.7yrs) asked, "Who put the food in heaven?" while Shufaa Ali Mwabata (4 yrs) wondered if she and her classmates could also reach heaven, prompting others to suggest flying there by airplane. Amidst excited exclamations of "Tortoise is flying!", Natasha Rhina (3.6) asked why the tortoise at Haller Park doesn't fly, referencing a real-life visit to the park. These responses show how visual storytelling shapes children's understanding, making fantasy appear real and relatable. The tortoise's speed is achieved through animation timing, using more frames for its movement than for other characters like birds or the hare.

Animated Cartoons as Literary Texts

Animation, like traditional literature, constructs narratives through events, characters, and themes. It uses visual elements, images, sound, and voice, to tell complete stories. *Tinga Tinga Tales* employs hand-drawn images enhanced with music and voice-overs to explain why animals are the way they are. Animated stories contain literary features: plot, conflict, character development, and thematic depth. The plot in *Tinga Tinga Tales* follows a clear structure, from character introduction and conflict, through rising action and climax, to resolution, engaging children with suspense, surprise, and imaginative storytelling.

Narrative Structure in *Why Tortoise Has a Cracked Shell*

The episode follows a classic plot structure:

Exposition: The story opens with a smooth, shiny tortoise excited about a race. He meets the hare, and soon the parrot and flamingo discuss a feast in heaven for birds. This sets up the characters and introduces the central conflict, tortoise's desire to join the birds in heaven. Through dialogue, the tortoise offers to guide the parrot to heaven, claiming knowledge of the skies. The birds then donate feathers and stick them on tortoise using glue.



Rising Action: The tortoise joins the birds on their journey. Tension builds as he flies ahead, ignoring the eagle's calls to wait. He reaches heaven first and eats all the food meant for the feast.

Climax: Angered, the birds, led by the eagle, pluck off the tortoise's feathers. Unable to fly, he falls from the sky, cracking his shell.

Falling Action: The tortoise learns his lesson and vows never to be selfish again.

Characterization

Tinga Tinga Tales features animal characters with distinct personalities and roles. Though non-human, they express emotions, make decisions, and drive the narrative. Heroes and villains are clearly defined, making the stories relatable and engaging for children.

Main and supporting characters complement each other. Interestingly, the smallest characters—like Bush Baby and Tickbird—are often the wisest and most popular among children. During viewings with Logitech preschoolers, most favored these smaller animals, showing less enthusiasm for larger ones, as seen in their reactions and comments.

Character traits fuel the conflict. In *Why Hyena Has Short Hind Legs*, hyena's greed causes trouble, just as tortoise's selfishness drives the plot in *Why Tortoise Has a Cracked Shell*.

Themes and Conflict

Each episode conveys a moral lesson, a hallmark of folktales. Themes like selfishness, greed, and cooperation are explored through engaging narratives. Conflict—whether between characters, within a character, or with a supernatural force—is central to the storytelling.

Animation as Literary Narrative

Animation in *Tinga Tinga Tales* is a complete storytelling medium. Hand-drawn images, voice-overs, music, and sound effects combine to create vivid, imaginative tales. These elements work together to engage children's imagination, making animation as rich and serious a literary form as any other genre.

Image and Imagination

Imagination, defined by the *Pocket Oxford Dictionary* as the mental ability to form images or concepts of things not directly experienced, often arises from exposure to visual stimuli. To imagine is to mentally picture or conceptualize something beyond reality. Visualization blends perception with imagination. Visual communication not only conveys information efficiently but also evokes emotional responses and stimulates imaginative thinking. In the illustration below, for example, the impact of viewing the images in *Fig. 1.13* is far stronger than reading a textual description of the same scene.



Fig 1.13

Textual Description of Baby Rhina at the Beach

Visuals evoke stronger emotional responses than text, as they are processed more quickly and intuitively. During data collection for this paper, children showed greater excitement watching *Tinga Tinga Tales* on television than listening to oral narration of the same stories. Their reactions, exclamations, facial expressions, and questions, reflected deeper



engagement with the visual format. *Tinga Tinga Tales* combines hand-drawn illustrations with digital animation, creating rich visual narratives that stimulate imagination. Images activate the mind's eye, encouraging children to fill in gaps with fantasy, speculation, and mental imagery. Compared to verbal descriptions, visuals more effectively spark imaginative thinking. For instance, in *Why Hyena Has Short Hind Legs*, the hyena is consistently drawn from the rear, emphasizing his character and drawing focus to his actions.



Fig 1.14

Hyena Scheming from Behind the Other Animals

The hyena's rear-entry framing creates visual gaps that prompt children to speculate, why he approaches from behind, what his intentions are, and whether other animals are aware of his scheme, as reflected in their whispered reactions during viewing. Hyena is given longer shots, more dissolves, close-ups, and level angles, while other animals are shown from high angles, making them appear smaller and less significant. This contrast in camera techniques establishes binary oppositions, drawing focus to hyena and enhancing his perceived power. In *Why Tortoise Has a Cracked Shell*, the feast in heaven is shown from an aerial perspective, emphasizing abundance. The tortoise appears tiny amid the vast spread, reinforcing his insignificance and highlighting the scale of his greed.



Fig 1.15

Tortoise in the Middle of Plenty Food in Heaven

The illusion of realism in *Tinga Tinga Tales* is enhanced through varied focal lengths, camera angles, and zoom techniques. These visual tools make distant objects appear smaller and foreground elements more prominent, helping scenes like the tortoise's journey to heaven and the feast appear vivid and believable. The abundance of food appeals to children's senses, evoking excitement and emotional responses. During viewing, children exclaimed "Wow! Yummy!" and mimicked eating sounds like "nyam nyam," even competing with the tortoise by shouting "That's mine!" Their reactions show how visuals stimulate imagination and emotional engagement. During the tortoise falling and cracking his shell, effectively conveys the theme of greed, children responded with moral judgment, as seen when Anna Dominique (5) said, "Serves him right!" Others offered alternative actions tortoise could have taken, showing empathy and critical thinking.



Tinga Tinga Tales uses pictorial storytelling to depict journeys and landscapes. In the race between wind and cheetah, scenes shift across *Tinga Tinga* land, from the battery to mango grove, waterhole, flamingo lake, swamp, plains, and back, using cuts and camera movement to simulate travel.

These visuals transport children into an imaginative world where even abstract elements like wind are personified. During viewing, children reacted with surprise and excitement, cheering for wind as if the race were real.



Fig. 1.16

Wind Presenting Himself before the Tinga Animals for a Race

Character Design

Characterization in children's literature plays a vital role in shaping young minds. Children often internalize the traits of heroes and heroines, which can influence their behavior and values. E.M. Forster (1927) emphasizes that characterization engages both the intelligence and imagination of the audience, helping them connect with the story. Characters are crafted to resonate with the intended audience. Hawthorne (1985) notes that characters can serve various functions, driving the plot, symbolizing ideas, or embodying moral lessons. Children tend to identify with characters they find relatable or appealing. In *Tinga Tinga Tales*, intimidating faces like those of crocodile, jackal, and hyena are designed to evoke contempt, aligning with their negative traits, such as crocodile refusing to help cheetah or hyena biting other animals.

Conversely, characters like Bush Baby, with her soft voice and baby-like features, elicit sympathy. When frightened by Bat, her vulnerability invites emotional connection. The lead narrator, Red Monkey, also appeals to children through her playful nature and childlike voice, making the stories feel like they're told from a child's perspective. Children generally prefer small characters over large ones. After watching selected episodes, most children favored Tick Bird, Tortoise, Bush Baby, and the monkeys. Mercy Ochieng' liked Tick Bird for being "small and beautiful," while Shammah Rhone (6) chose Bush Baby because "she looks like a baby."

The producers skillfully use contrasting character traits, such as the large but foolish elephant versus the small but clever tortoise, to enhance storytelling and moral lessons. Elephant's exaggerated size, especially his large ears, is used to highlight his lack of wisdom, reinforcing the tale's humor and message.

**Fig 1.17**

Elephant Presented with an Emphasis on His Big Size

When *Tinga Tinga* animals are drawn together, elephant towers over all the *Tinga* animals making tortoise and monkey to look like dots in comparison to elephant.

**Fig 1.18**

Elephant Towering Over and Above Tinga animals

Tortoise's Characterization and Appeal

Tortoise's small size and cleverness make him relatable and appealing to children. Despite being physically small, he is consistently portrayed as wise and resourceful, often outsmarting larger animals. This contrast empowers young viewers, allowing them to imagine themselves as capable and intelligent, even in the face of bigger or older figures. In *Why Leopard Has Spots*, when Elephant panics after stepping on Puff Adder, it is Tortoise who calmly guides him through the situation. Children giggled at the irony of the large, frightened Elephant being helped by the small, composed Tortoise. Similarly, in *Why Snake Has No Legs*, Tortoise suggests Snake borrow Frog's eyes to attend the festival, showing empathy and problem-solving.

In *Why Cheetah Has Tears*, when Cheetah's paw gets stuck, Tortoise proposes building a bridge using trees, demonstrating leadership and ingenuity. His ideas are welcomed by the other animals, reinforcing his role as a wise figure. Tortoise is also portrayed as cunning. In *Why Tortoise Has a Cracked Shell*, he tricks the birds into giving him feathers to fly to heaven, only to eat all the food before they arrive. This magical flight captivates children, drawing them into a fantasy journey beyond the clouds. The series uses contrast to highlight character traits. Tortoise's intelligence is juxtaposed with



Elephant's confusion and forgetfulness. In *Why Parrot Can't Keep a Secret*, Elephant mistakenly counts Parrot as a mango, then admits, "Big head, tiny brain," reinforcing the humor and irony. In *Why Leopard Has Spots*, Elephant misunderstands the monkeys' statement, confusing the word "spotted" with having actual spots, prompting laughter from the child audience.

Children connect more with small characters like Tortoise, Tick Bird, Bush Baby, and the monkeys. When asked about their favorite characters, children cited these smaller animals, associating them with beauty, innocence, and intelligence. The producers skillfully use these contrasts to engage children emotionally and morally, making the stories both entertaining and educational.

The Art of Visual Communication

Film communicates through visual images and symbols, forming narratives that invite interpretation. In *Tinga Tinga Tales*, the saying "seeing is believing" holds true, children are more likely to believe a tortoise can fly when they see it on screen than when told through oral narration. The visual medium encourages suspension of disbelief, making fantasy appear real. In *Why the Vulture Is Bald*, Vulture boasts of her beauty, calling herself "a gorgeous ray of sunshine." Her radiance is shown only against the sun, reinforcing the metaphor that beauty, like the sun, rises and sets. This is visually supported by showing her glow with the sun and fade when it sets, foreshadowing the loss of her feathers. In *Why Tortoise Has a Cracked Shell*, the concept of eternity is symbolized by a circular sun-like path, complementing Tortoise's warning to Parrot: "If you get lost beyond the clouds, you could be flying around earth forever and ever." The imagery invites children to imagine endless wandering in the skies. In *Why Bat Hangs Upside Down*, a storm symbolizes trouble. Visual elements—rain, lightning, thunder—are enhanced by camera angles, motion, and sound effects. Color filters darken the sky, creating a realistic storm atmosphere. Children watching this scene reacted with awe, believing the storm was caused by animals beating feathers, stamping hooves, and trumpeting.



Fig 1.19

Animal made Thunderstorm

During the watching of this scene, amidst the excitement of the animal made storm Natasha (3.6yrs) asked the teacher if "the rain that usually rains is caused by the animals."

Folktales and Fantasy

Folkloric techniques offer imaginative ways to communicate ideas and transport audiences into fantasy. African oral traditions use proverbs, riddles, songs, myths, and etiological tales, stories that explain why things are the way they are. *Tinga Tinga Tales* follows this tradition, with each episode exploring the origins of animal traits through magical storytelling. Folktales naturally embrace fantasy, featuring talking animals, transformations, and surreal events like borrowing body parts. In *Why Snake Has No Legs*, Snake borrows eyes from Frog and trades her legs for Millipede's eyes, astonishing children with the idea of swapping body parts. In *Why Tortoise Has a Cracked Shell*, Tortoise borrows feathers to fly to heaven, drawing children into a world where anything is possible. The tales often begin with opening formulas that signal a shift from reality to fantasy. *Tinga Tinga Tales* uses "There was a time when..." to invite viewers into an undefined past, prompting imagination and speculation.



Osaaji (2006) notes that such openings mentally transport children from the present to a world of infinite possibilities, leaving gaps for the imagination to fill. Neuss (2003) highlights similar openings in children's media, like *Maya the Bee* and *Teletubbies*, which place stories in imaginary lands. These phrases act as reception cues, guiding children into fantasy spaces. The *Tinga Tinga* theme song reinforces this imaginative journey. Each animal sings about why they are the way they are, prompting children to wonder about their past forms and transformations. Since the song doesn't provide answers, children are encouraged to imagine their own versions of the past. For example, Shuffa Ali Mwabata (4) asked how long ago Tortoise had smooth skin—showing how the narrative sparked curiosity and fantasy.

Stylistics of Visual Arts

Visual storytelling in *Tinga Tinga Tales* employs dramatic and cinematic techniques to engage children's imagination and emotions. Devices like asides and soliloquies not only convey information but also create dramatic irony, allowing the audience to know more than the characters and prompting speculation. For example, in *Why the Parrot Can't Keep a Secret*, Lion confides in an aside, "Maybe Leopard won't like me anymore," hinting at a relationship and inviting the audience to imagine its implications. Similarly, in *Why Bush Baby Has Big Eyes*, the narrator adds, "But she would never admit it," creating humor when Bush Baby later denies being lost.

Interior monologues reveal characters' thoughts directly. In *Why Hyena Has Short Hind Legs*, Hyena's soliloquy allows viewers to follow his emotions and motivations, deepening their understanding of his character. In addition, sound design plays a key role in setting mood and enhancing narrative. In *Why Bat Hangs Upside Down*, tension builds through eerie background music as Bat scares the animals. When the animals retaliate with a storm, the soundtrack shifts dramatically—chaotic during the storm, then silent as Bat retreats to her cave. This contrast evokes sympathy, with children whispering "poor Bat" in response. In *Why Bush Baby Has Big Eyes*, sound effects create suspense when Tortoise mentions *Majitu*. The mysterious noises and aimless movements heighten fear, drawing children into a fantasy world. Their silence during the scene and relief when *Majitu* is revealed as friendly show how sound shapes emotional engagement.

Language and imagery also provoke imagination. Similes and metaphors—like describing Leopard's skin as "plain as plain can be" or Cheetah as "faster than the wind"—encourage children to visualize and interpret abstract ideas. Symbolic quests, such as Guinea Fowl seeking the sparkling mountain or Eagle flying to the sun, represent deeper human desires and determination. Symbolism also runs throughout the series. Night often represents danger, while sunrise signals hope. In *Why Bat Hangs Upside Down*, the storm occurs at night, and resolution comes with daylight. These symbolic contrasts reinforce moral lessons and emotional shifts.

Though the tales feature animals, they are allegorical, representing human traits and societal values. Hyena symbolizes greed, Tortoise selfishness, and Guinea Fowl determination. These personified characters make complex ideas accessible to children while inviting adults to interpret deeper meanings. Digital media enhances these narratives with layered sound and visual effects, combining orality with cinematic storytelling. This fusion creates immersive experiences that transport children into imaginative worlds where anything is possible.

Symbolism in *Tinga Tinga Tales*

Symbolism in *Tinga Tinga Tales* runs deep. Though told through personified animals, the stories are allegorical, representing broader social, spiritual, and moral themes. Animals, objects, and abstract elements symbolize ideas not directly stated, making the tales meaningful for both children and adults. Personification enhances engagement, allowing children to connect with talking animals and animated abstractions, while adults interpret deeper messages.

Hyena represents greed (*Why Hyena Has Short Hind Legs*), Tortoise selfishness (*Why Tortoise Has a Cracked Shell*), and Guinea Fowl determination (*Why Guinea Fowl Has Spots*). These allegories invite reflection and imagination, making the tales both entertaining and instructive. Digital media enriches these narratives with sound design that sets mood and enhances storytelling. Beyond spoken dialogue and songs, digital sounds keep children engaged and emotionally connected. In *Why Bush Baby Has Big Eyes*, drumbeats create a suspenseful atmosphere as children imagine the mysterious *Majitu*. In another episode, a gentle song accompanies Puff Adder crafting Leopard's coat, shifting the mood from sadness to hope and delight.

The series also uses pictorial stream of consciousness to reveal characters' inner thoughts. When Parrot tells Tortoise about the feast in heaven, viewers glimpse Tortoise's imagination, exposing his selfish motives. His fall from heaven becomes a symbolic homecoming, with Africa's outline shown as he descends—suggesting alienation, return, and redemption. The animals patch his broken shell, reinforcing themes of community and forgiveness. The setting further glorifies Africa through vibrant imagery: lush vegetation, rivers, lakes, and swamps symbolize life and continuity. These



physical elements are as vital as the psychological and moral dimensions of the tales, grounding fantasy in a rich cultural landscape.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that digital animation serves as a powerful medium for revitalizing African folktales and sustaining their imaginative and moral appeal among children. Through the analysis of selected *Tinga Tinga Tales* episodes and observation of children's responses, it was evident that animation enhances fantasy by blending visual imagery, sound, and motion to evoke wonder and belief. The children's spontaneous reactions—expressed through curiosity, empathy, and laughter—revealed that digital retellings preserve the didactic and entertainment value of oral traditions while making them more relatable to modern audiences. The stories not only entertained but also reinforced moral values such as honesty, kindness, and respect for others. In essence, *Tinga Tinga Tales* bridges traditional African storytelling and contemporary digital culture. It affirms that the fusion of folklore with technology can transmit cultural heritage effectively to new generations. By transforming oral narratives into vibrant visual experiences, animation rekindles children's imaginative thinking and emotional development while reinforcing their connection to African identity and moral consciousness. The study therefore underscores the role of digital storytelling as both an educational and cultural tool in the preservation and transmission of African folktales.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that educators and curriculum developers integrate locally produced animated folktales such as *Tinga Tinga Tales* into early childhood learning to foster creativity, moral development, and cultural awareness. Filmmakers and animators should continue to draw inspiration from African oral traditions, using digital media to make these stories accessible to contemporary audiences while preserving their linguistic and cultural integrity. Parents and teachers are also encouraged to engage children in reflective discussions after viewing such animations to deepen understanding of the moral lessons. Finally, future research could expand on this study by examining older children's interpretations of African digital folktales or comparing the impact of local and foreign animations on cultural perception and imaginative growth.

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