



How the Ostrich Got Its Long Neck: A Tale from the Akamba of Kenya

By Verna Aardema

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A three-time Caldecott Medalist provides the illustrations in a humorous African folktale that explains in playful language how the ostrich got its unusual shape.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In an inspired pairing, Aardema (Misoso; Jackal's Flying Lesson, reviewed June 26) and Caldecott Medalist Brown's (Stone Soup) pump up the energy in this animated Kenyan *pourquoi* tale. Suggesting the oral tradition from which the story comes, Aardema intersperses her narration with exotic, rhythmic sounds ("Kudu galloped away, ka-PU-tu, ka-PU-tu, ka-PU-tu!"). "Long long ago, when the earth was set down and the sky was lifted up," a crocodile with a toothache persuades a kind but foolish ostrich to pull out the offending tooth. When Crocodile's hunger proves mightier than his dentistry needs, he chomps down on Ostrich's neck, stretching it dramatically before the bird finally escapes. Right in step with this well-paced tale are Brown's vigorous, scribbly compositions of watercolor and markers. Raffish and bold, they are as spirited as the tale itself. Ages 4-7.

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From School Library Journal

PreSchool-Grade 4?An enchanting *pourquoi* tale from Kenya. Poor short-necked Ostrich cannot touch the ground with his beak. He must sit down to catch insects and, no matter how far he stretches, the berries on the bushes are always beyond his reach. Crocodile has her own problem?a raging toothache. When the kindhearted bird sticks his head into Crocodile's mouth to pluck out the painful tooth, her jaws clamp shut, beginning a humorous tug of war that leaves Ostrich with a versatile new neck and a more developed sense of caution. Aardema spins a tale full of tension and humor. Crocodile, with her tears splashing into the river, is easy to pity, while Ostrich, often forced to crouch in uncomfortable positions, evokes equal sympathy. Led by doom-saying Fish Eagle, who admonishes, "Don't do it," the other animals act as a Greek Chorus, and their warnings and reactions move the plot at a rapid pace. Sprinkled with the animals' wonderful sound effects, this story will be a natural to read aloud. Brown's paintings, done in watercolor and marker on hot press board, have a loose, informal look. River-mud tones and a few full-color spreads provide an appropriate landscape, but the real focus is on the characters. Outlined and accented with heavy black marker, they are humorous and appealing. Ostrich, in particular, is endowed with a full range of facial expressions, from trepidation at placing her head in Crocodile's mouth to a look of delight at picking her first berries. Totally satisfying.?Joy Fleishhacker, New York Public Library

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From [Booklist](#)

Ages 3[^]-8. In a laugh-out-loud picture book, Aardema retells a *pourquoi* tale from East Africa with sounds and actions that mimic the animal characters. Brown's watercolors, with their wonderfully loose, scribbly lines, extend the farce about foolish creatures bumbling into trouble. Long ago, Ostrich had a short neck ("It was most inconvenient, for he had to sit down to catch insects on the ground. And he could not reach berries that were high on the bushes"). Then Crocodile gets a terrible toothache; Ostrich feels sorry for him, and though Fish Eagle warns off the other animals, "*Kwark! Kwark!*" Ostrich sticks his head right into Crocodile's mouth and starts acting as dentist. He taps one tooth after another with his beak, "*tik tik tik*," and asks, "Is this the one that hurts?" Then Crocodile closes his mouth, and there's a huge tug-of-war; Ostrich pulls Crocodile right out of the water--and Ostrich's neck is stretched out forever. The early pictures show the great big ridiculous ostrich teetering on long legs, his little neck perched atop a bunch of black feathers. In contrast, at the end he stands tall and dazed, his elongated pink hairy neck and bristly head crowned with the red berries he can reach at last. Aardema includes a brief note on her sources and on other *pourquoi* tales to read with this one. *Hazel Rochman*

Users Review

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