



## **The Iron Man and the Blacksmith**

### **Readers Theater Play Script and Performance Notes**

***AUTHORS:** Elaine Lindy & Benjamin Knight, **COUNTRY:** Uganda, **GENRE:** Riddles*



#### **CHARACTERS**

**NARRATOR**

**WAKALUGA**

**TIAN**

**HANIF**

**RAFIKI**

**GUARD #1**

**GUARD #2**

**KING**

**SERVANT #1**

**SERVANT #2**

**WAZIMU**

*If there are performance notes, they can be found on the pages following the script*

## Scene 1 – Wakaluga's Forge

[**Stage set:** The stage is divided in thirds for three different scenes. In the first area, for both Scene 1 and Scene 3, is WAKALUGA's forge - a forge is where a blacksmith heats iron to shape tools and decorative metals. The second area for Scene 2, in the middle, is a palace. And the third area for Scene 4, shows a bushland.]

[At WAKALUGA's forge, WAKALUGA stands beside a blacksmith's anvil. (See **Performance Notes** on how to create an anvil.) WAKALUGA is working hard and focuses on hitting a long piece of metal with a hammer.]

[NARRATOR enters.]

**NARRATOR:**

Hello, everyone. This is "The Blacksmith's Dilemma," a story from Uganda. It is brought to you by *Stories to Grow by*.

[NARRATOR steps forward.]

**NARRATOR:**

Ki kati (pronounce: chi-KAH-tee), my friends! That means "welcome." This hard-working man, Wakaluga (pronounce: wack-a-LOO-gah) (*gestures to Wakaluga*) is flattening a big piece of iron. He is the greatest and most talented blacksmith in the land. Only the finest metal objects come from this forge - Wakaluga's. In fact, just last week, he made ALL the horseshoes for ALL the King's horses. Let's meet him. (*turns to Wakaluga*) Wakaluga?

**WAKALUGA:**

(*looks up*) Yes?

**NARRATOR:**

Is it true you made all the King's horseshoes in just one day?

**WAKALUGA:**

Indeed. And I have the blisters to prove it!

[WAKALUGA turns his or her hands upward to show NARRATOR.]

**WAKALUGA:**

Uh, is that all? Because I should go back to work now.

**NARRATOR:**

Of course. (*to audience*) A hard-working fellow.

[RAFIKI, HANIF and TIAN enter. They approach WAKALUGA.]

[NARRATOR exits.]

**TIAN:**

Wakaluga! What marvel of metalsmithing are you working on now?

**WAKALUGA:**

*(looks up)* Ah, hello my friends! I'm making a new hammer. And not just any old hammer. It's a hammer that is so perfectly proportioned, it will seem to strike a nail all by itself.

**TIAN:**

If anyone can pull that off, you can, Wakaluga.

**WAKALUGA:**

*(holds up the hammer)* And it also will be beautiful to behold.

**HANIF:**

*(peers at the hammer)* Look at that detail!

**RAFIKI:**

Wakaluga, have you even left your forge in the last few days? Have you heard the news?

**WAKALUGA:**

No, what news?

**TIAN:**

It's about you! The word is the King is seeking your services. Again!

**WAKALUGA:**

Really? I wonder what kind of commission he has in mind now?

**RAFIKI:**

I hear it's something REALLY special this time. Who knows? Maybe a royal staff.

**HANIF:**

Or throne! Wouldn't that be something?

[Pause.]

**HANIF:**

Whatever it is, hopefully you'll be able to please the King. As you always have, of course.

**TIAN:**

Our ruler is fine when he's pleased. But if he is not ... *(motions with a hand across his neck)*

**HANIF:**

You'll please him again, no doubt! If anyone will, you will. No need to worry, Wakaluga.

**WAKALUGA:**

I'm not worried. Besides, it'll probably take his messengers at least a week to get here. (*shrugs*) So I don't need to think about it for awhile.

**RAFIKI:**

(*looks off-stage*) Think again, Wakaluga. Look – here they come!

[GUARD #1 and GUARD #2 enter.]

**WAKALUGA:**

(*runs hands through hair*) Do I look all right?

**GUARD #1:**

Wakaluga?

**WAKALUGA:**

That is I.

**GUARD #1:**

You are hereby summoned by the King.

**GUARD #2:**

You must come now.

**WAKALUGA:**

Very well. (*to Rafiki, Tian and Hanif*) Friends! Would you watch over my forge for me?

**HANIF:**

Of course.

**RAFIKI:**

Good luck!

[GUARD #1 and GUARD #2 exit, with WAKALUGA following.]

**TIAN:**

(*picking up the hammer and holding it at a distance*) So what does this thing do?

## Scene 2 - Palace

[In a large room, KING sits on a large chair that looks like it's carved from a tree trunk, and is fanned by weary SERVANT. (See **Performance Notes** for how to simulate the tree trunk stool.) WAKALUGA, GUARD #1 and GUARD #2 enter. GUARDS immediately move to KING's side.]

**KING:**

Ah, Wakaluga! Please, take a seat.

[WAKALUGA looks around for a chair, before finally shrugging and sitting cross-legged on the floor.]

**WAKALUGA:**

What do you request of me, O King?

**KING:**

You are the finest blacksmith in the land. This you have proven over and over.

**WAKALUGA:**

You flatter me, Your Majesty.

**KING:**

Just stating the facts.

**WAKALUGA:**

Thank you, Your Majesty. You are most kind.

**KING:**

Because of your skill, I have summoned you again. This time, I have a very special project in mind.

**WAKALUGA:**

What would you like, Sire? ! I'm sure I can make it, my King.

**KING:**

No doubt.

[KING claps his hands. SERVANT #1 and SERVANT #2 appear. They walk in, carrying several large pieces of iron as if the iron is very heavy, then set them down beside the throne. (See **Performance Notes** on how to simulate the iron.)]

**KING:**

I need you to fashion what I have in mind using these pieces of iron.

**WAKALUGA:**

And what would that be? Perhaps a statue?

**KING:**

No, nothing that ordinary.

**WAKALUGA:**

Ah! A likeness of your royal self?

**KING:**

Wakaluga, if I wanted a likeness of my royal self, any number of blacksmiths would be up to the task.

[A pause for two seconds. WAKALUGA is confused.]

**KING:**

You are to take this metal and change it into a MAN. Not a statue of a man, mind you. But a living, breathing, human man.

**WAKALUGA:**

But... my King, I'm afraid I must have misheard you. I could have sworn you asked me to make a real living man, out of this iron. (*gestures to the pieces of iron*)

**KING:**

You heard right! A man that is made from this metal, but able to walk and talk and think, and who has blood running in its veins.

**WAKALUGA:**

I... uh... (*to audience*) What can I say? I cannot fail the King. He will kill me for sure! (*to King*) Ah... of course! I'll be able to forge you a... a MAN... in no time at all! (*to audience*) What will I do?

**KING:**

Splendid! I knew I chose the right man for the job! The festival is in three weeks and my new metal man must be ready by then. I'll have the iron delivered to your forge first thing in the morning. Surely this gives you enough time.

**WAKALUGA:**

(*gulps*) Uh... yes?

**KING:**

That's what I thought. (*waves hand to dismiss Wakaluga*) Now get along, I have royal matters to attend to.

**WAKALUGA:**

Thank you, Your Majesty, you won't regret it. (*to audience*) But I already do!

[WAKALUGA bows to KING, and exits.]

### Scene 3 – Wakaluga's Forge

[RAFIKI, TIAN and HANIF are standing around the anvil, picking up various tools. (See **Performance Notes** for images of blacksmith tools and ideas on how to make them.) WAKALUGA enters, looking down at his shoes.]

**TIAN:**

You're back!

**RAFIKI:**

How did it go?

**HANIF:**

What's wrong, Wakaluga? You look kind of green.

[WAKALUGA shuffles across the room, plants his forehead firmly on the anvil and wraps his arms over his head.]

**TIAN:**

Uh-oh.

**RAFIKI:**

Something happened.

**WAKALUGA:**

*(muffled)* He wants me to make a man.

**HANIF:**

A statue? Surely you could whip off the most lifelike statue in the kingdom.

**WAKALUGA:**

*(raises his head)* Not a statue! He wants me to create a real, living man - from iron!

**TIAN and HANIF, together:**

What?!

**WAKALUGA:**

A genuine, honest-to-goodness human being, who can walk and talk and who has blood in his veins. Those were the King's very words.

[WAKALUGA covers his head again. TIAN, RAFIKI and HANIF look at each other for a few moments before turning back to WAKALUGA.]



**RAFIKI:**

Look. There must be some way out of this. (*strokes his chin, and snaps his fingers*) What if you make a hollow shell of a man and have somebody climb inside it, so it can (*makes airquotes with his fingers*) walk and talk?

**WAKALUGA:**

A person can't stay inside forever. The King would find out eventually.

[HANIF and TIAN pace in a circle.]

**TIAN:**

I've got it!

**HANIF:**

What?

**TIAN:**

(*to Wakaluga*) You run away to Kenya and start your life afresh!

**WAKALUGA:**

You think I didn't think of that? But the King's spies are everywhere. I'll be tracked down in no time. Besides, everyone I know - my family, my friends – and my forge, everything's here. I can't just leave my whole life behind!

**HANIF:**

Hmm.. (*thinks for a moment*) This may sound drastic, my friend, but listen. You know as well as we do once the King finds out you can't make a human out of iron, he'll have you killed. But if you can manage to poison him first, you'll get to him before he gets to you.

**TIAN:**

You can't be serious – poison the King?

**HANIF:**

Right, scrap that. Sorry.

**WAKALUGA:**

Forget it, there is no way out. (*sighs*) I am in the soup. Thanks for trying to help. But please, I need to be alone right now.

**RAFIKI:**

We understand, Wakaluga.

**HANIF:**

(*puts hand on Wakaluga's shoulders in sympathy*) It's a tough break.

[RAFIKI, TIAN and HANIF exit. WAKALUGA changes positions to sit on the ground at the base of his anvil. He hugs his knees.]

[NARRATOR enters.]

**NARRATOR:**

The hours ticked away. Wakaluga couldn't sleep. Dawn was breaking and Wakaluga was still wide awake.

[NARRATOR exits.]

**WAKALUGA:**

*(shakes head)* I just can't think anymore. I'll go outside for a walk. Maybe that will clear my head.

[WAKALUGA exits.]

## Scene 4 – Bushland

[**Stage set:** This set is at the opposite end of the stage as Wakaluga's forge in Scenes 1 and 3. A backdrop is painted to show the bushland - a plain land with at least one large baobab tree painted onto it, along with some large bushes. There should be a path, and at least one freestanding bush at the front of the stage. (See **Performance Notes** for suggestion on the bush).]

[Crickets chirp among the bushes beneath a leafy green canopy. (See **Performance Notes** for how to create the sound of crickets.) WAZIMU is hidden behind the bush.]

[WAKALUGA enters, walking down a beaten path.]

**WAKALUGA:**

*(to audience)* This is the bushland where I used to go when I was a boy. I remember climbing that baobab (pronounce: BAY-oh-bab) tree *(points to the baobab tree in the backdrop)* Those were the days! Before all my worries...

**WAZIMU:**

*(from behind the large bush)* One crocodile went to see the elephant, saying goodbye to her family!

**WAKALUGA:**

*(looks around)* Wait a minute. I know that voice! I know it from years ago. But I can't quite place it.

**WAZIMU:**

TWO crocodiles went to see the elephant, saying goodbye to their family!

[WAKALUGA pulls the bush to one side, and reveals WAZIMU. WAZIMU is squatting and playing with twigs.]

**WAKALUGA:**

Wazimu (pronounce: WAH-zee-moo)! My childhood friend! It's me, Wakaluga!

**WAZIMU:**

Wakaluga! Come play with my crocodiles.

**WAKALUGA:**

*(looks around, worried)* Crocodiles?

**WAZIMU:**

Right here! *(gestures and Wakaluga sees there are no crocodiles)* And my elephants *(gestures*

*with other hand*). Wakaluga, your face. (*leans toward Wakaluga's face*) Your face has changed so much! What have I told you about stealing faces, my friend?

**WAKALUGA:**

I just look different because I'm grown up now. (*to audience*) Wazimu was a strange boy when I knew him. Now he's become a hermit. Living alone in the bushland all these years has really gone to his head. (*to Wazimu*) It's good to see you, too. Helps take my mind off my troubles.

**WAZIMU:**

Troubles? You must join me for dinner and tell me all about it! I have the best tasties in the bushland.

**WAKALUGA:**

Sounds great. Thanks.

[WAZIMU emerges from the bushes carrying a small sack. He sits on the ground in the center of the stage, placing down the bag in front of him. WAKALUGA joins WAZIMU, sitting across from him. WAZIMU opens the sack.]

**WAKALUGA:**

(*pulling a face at the food*) Berries and cassava (pronounce: kah-SAV-ah) root. (*sniffs at the root*) Hmm... (*doubtfully*) Is that root still ok to eat? Well, the berries look okay.

[WAZIMU does not respond, and simply shovels the berries and root into his or her mouth. WAKALUGA cautiously eats one berry, then one more.]

**WAKALUGA:**

Wazimu, these berries are delicious! now I remember - I haven't eaten at all since yesterday morning.

**WAZIMU:**

Many berries for you! Found these in the grass amongst the elephants, yes I did! The elephants and the crocodiles! Now friend, tell me what troubles you.

**WAKALUGA:**

(*to audience*) Found them in the grasses, did he? Ah well, they do look fine. (*eats some berries, then to Wazimu*) You see, here's the thing. I am a blacksmith, and the King summoned me to the palace for a special blacksmithing project.

**WAZIMU:**

Whoa-Ho!

**WAKALUGA:**

You would think! But that's before I found out what the special project IS. I'm to smith for him a living man. A real man, forged from IRON.

**WAZIMU:**

But... that's impossible!

**WAKALUGA:**

*(stands and paces)* Of course it is! But if I fail... *(motions with one hand across his or her neck)* I'm a goner!

**WAZIMU:**

Hmm. *(he strokes his chin for a moment, then jumps up)* Oh! OH!

**WAKALUGA:**

What?

**WAZIMU:**

Tell the King *(giggles)*... tell him in order to make his metal-man, you require special ingredients.

**WAKALUGA:**

Special ingredients?

**WAZIMU:**

You bet. One thousand loads of charcoal made from the very hair of his subjects. That's the ONLY way you can make the fire hot enough. And... tell him you need a hundred pots filled with tears! Only that kind of water can keep the fire at just the perfect temperature. *(laughs)*

**WAKALUGA:**

What do you mean? He can't do that. No one could!

**WAZIMU:**

*(slyly)* Rrrright!

**WAKALUGA:**

I get it! *(to audience)* It's worth a try! *(to Wazimu)* Wazimu, you're a genius!

**WAZIMU:**

Glad to assist.

**WAKALUGA:**

Hope to see you sooner, this time.

**WAZIMU:**

The world will go as it goes.

[WAKALUGA exits.]

**WAZIMU:**

Ah, more berries for me, then. (*eats a berry*) And now, back to you, my elephant and crocodile friends. (*pantomimes talking to pretend friends*)

## Scene 5 – Palace

[**Stage set:** KING sits in his throne, as before, fanned by SERVANT #1 and SERVANT #2. GUARD #1 and GUARD #2 stand nearby.]

**KING:**

I hope Wakaluga is making progress. The festival is in two weeks. (*to Servant #1*) Servant! What do you suppose my new metal man is going to want to eat?

**SERVANT #1:**

(*whispers to Servant #2*) No way I'm getting in the middle of this!

**SERVANT #2:**

(*whispers*) I don't blame you!

**SERVANT #1:**

(*to King, louder*) Erm, I couldn't say, Your Majesty.

**KING:**

(*displeased*) No doubt you COULD.

[WAKALUGA enters.]

**KING:**

Ah, Wakaluga! I was expecting you. Making excellent progress, I expect.

**WAKALUGA:**

Well, Your Majesty. (*kneels*) My King, I have found that in order to create a real, living man from iron, I am going to need some special ingredients.

**KING:**

Of course! Just tell me what you need.

**WAKALUGA:**

To make the fire hot enough, I'm going to need a thousand loads of coal, made from the hair of your subjects.

**KING:**

Indeed! Well, if that's what it takes.. Anything else, Master Blacksmith?

**WAKALUGA:**

One more thing. To keep the fire burning at just the right temperature, I also need a hundred pots filled with the tears of your subjects.

**KING:**

Hmph! Odd requests. Very well then! I'll send out my servants to collect the resources, right away. I will have them delivered to your forge in three days.

**WAKALUGA:**

Thank you, Sire.

[WAKALUGA exits.]

**KING:**

*(shouts)* Guards!

[GUARDS step forward.]

**GUARD #1 and GUARD #2:**

*(together)* Yes, Sire!

**KING:**

Listen, I need you both to go into the village and collect enough hair from my subjects for a thousand loads of coal.

**GUARD #1:**

Uh...Sire?

**KING:**

You heard me! And enough human tears to fill a hundred pots.

[GUARD #1 and GUARD #2 look at each other, confused.]

**KING:**

What are you waiting for? Go!

[GUARD #1 and GUARD #2 rush offstage.]

**KING:**

Wakaluga's metal man must be finished in time for the festival. My man made of iron will be the envy of three kingdoms!

[NARRATOR enters.]

**NARRATOR:**

Two days pass.

[NARRATOR exits.]



[GUARD #1 and GUARD #2 enter, each carrying one wooden bucket. SERVANT #2 stops fanning and watches.]

**KING:**

You're back! (*points to Guard #1*) So! Is that the hair, in the basket? That doesn't look a thousand loads of charcoal.

**GUARD #1:**

I shaved the heads of all of your subjects, Sire, and burned down the hair to make charcoal. But it barely made enough charcoal stones to fill one pot, much less a hundred pots.

**GUARD #2:**

People keep their hair short these days, my Liege.

[GUARD #1 and GUARD #2 brace for a scolding.]

**KING:**

Bah! I'll order they grow their hair back immediately so we can shave them over and over till we have enough. (*points to Guard #2*) You there! What of the tears?

**GUARD #2:**

Everyone tried, really they did, Your Majesty. People thought about their lost pets and other sad memories. I collected every drop of tears. But it came to only a puddle's worth, I'm afraid!

**KING:**

Rats! At this rate, I'll never have my metal man. I must speak with the blacksmith. Guards! (*he snaps his fingers*) Bring me Wakaluga!

[GUARD #1 and GUARD #2 exit, leaving behind their buckets.]

**KING:**

(*to Servant #2*) What are you doing? Keep fanning, I'm sweating here!

[SERVANT #2 fans KING more heartily than ever. GUARD #1 and GUARD #2 enter, followed by WAKALUGA.]

**WAKALUGA:**

(*bows*) My King.

**KING:**

Wakaluga, those special ingredients you require – they are impossible! There is nowhere near enough hair in my kingdom for a thousand loads of coal made of hair. And we are a far cry from a hundred pots of tears. As a result, I cannot provide you the special ingredients required for

the job. I must say I regret having to say this, but you will not be able to complete my metal man.

**WAKALUGA:**

*(kneels soberly before the King)* Your Majesty, I completely understand. Now that we know the limitations of this task, as your loyal subject, am I at liberty to say something to the Crown?

**KING:**

Certainly. It is no fault of yours we could not collect enough coal or tears.

**WAKALUGA:**

The truth is, Sire, if I may be so bold to say, what you asked of me was also quite impossible. The truth is that it is simply not possible to forge a real live man from metal.

**KING:**

Even with a thousand loads of coal and a hundred pots of tears?

**WAKALUGA:**

Ah! That was a suggestion of a wise hermit friend of mine who lives in the bush. Yes, Sire, even with that.

**KING:**

*(frowns, not pleased)* Hm..

[KING glares at WAKALUGA for a moment, before chuckling to himself. This chuckle turns into laughter.]

**KING:**

You are a wiser man than I, Wakaluga. Or was it that hermit friend of yours? There are some feats of magic, I suppose, that are beyond what even a King can perform.

**WAKALUGA:**

You are surely the wisest amongst us, Sire.

**KING:**

But for wasting my time, you must make another ten thousand horseshoes.

[NARRATOR enters.]

**NARRATOR:**

And so Wakaluga narrowly avoided disaster, thanks to his hermit friend, who Wakaluga took care of for the rest of his days. And every day that passed seemed like a feat of magic to Wakaluga.

[All bow.]

# Performance Notes for The Blacksmith's Dilemma

## THREE WAYS THAT STUDENTS AND TEACHERS CAN UTILIZE THIS PLAY

- 1.** Students can read the play aloud while sitting in the classroom. Ask the readers to skip all bracketed stage directions. You may prefer to rotate your actors to give all students a chance to read the speaking parts.
- 2.** Students can perform the play in the classroom. Clear an area that can be used as the stage. Have the audience sit on the floor in front of the stage. Students in the play can make simple costumes and/or sets as described below. When the scene change, the characters "on stage" simply walk to the back of the room where they wait until their next appearance "on stage."
- 3.** Students can perform the play on stage. Refer to the production notes that follow. Ask the actors to enter from the back of the room and move through the audience as they approach the stage.



## COSTUMES

- NARRATOR – Simple modern day clothes, such as black or brown pants and a white button-up shirt, or traditional Ugandan clothes. Traditional clothes can be represented by a long white or off-white gown and a black blazer for a male or brightly colored dress with a sash for a female.
- WAKALUGA – Simple clothes, such as brown or tan linen pants and a white or tan t-shirt. A black apron overtop, leather if possible, but if not any fabric will do.
- TIAN, HANIF and RAFIKI – Traditional tribal clothing, with bright colors and animal pelts.
- GUARDS #1 and #2 – Traditional tribal clothing, with bright colors and animal pelts. They hold spears and tall shields (See Props Notes for how to make these.)
- SERVANTS #1 and #2 – Long white or off-white garments.

- KING – A red robe and a tall crown.
- WAZIMU – Simple rags.



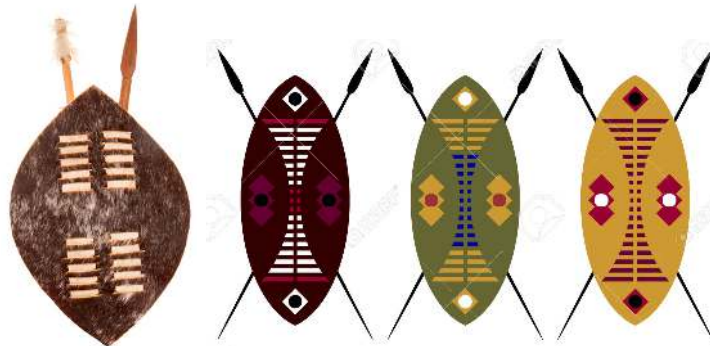
## PROPS

### Scene 1

- Long piece of metal. You can cut a long strip of cardboard and cover in tin foil, or paint with a metallic paint.
- Hammer (real or cardboard.)
- Spears and shields for GUARDS. You can cut spears out of cardboard, or cut a spearhead and tape it to a long stick.

For the shield, you can cut a football-shaped piece of cardboard and paint a tribal design on the front. You can cut a strip of cardboard to tape on the back to be used as a handle. Paint the front to resemble traditional African Swords- can be brown or black with white strips, or a colorful design.

See below for some ideas for options:



### Scene 2

- A big palm leaf that SERVANT uses to fan KING. This can be cut from paper.
- Pieces of iron to be carried by SERVANTS. These can be made from various pieces of cardboard wrapped in foil or painted silver-gray.

### Scene 3

- Various tools for RAFIKI, TIAN, and HANIF to use. You can make these out of cardboard and paint them black. See below for some images of blacksmith tools.



#### Scene 4

- Cloth bag, filled with berries and bits of root. Actors can pretend to eat the berries and root or you can use pieces of cardboard, painted.

#### Scene 5

- Two big palm leaves that SERVANTS use to fan KING. Leaves can be cut from paper.
- Two large buckets.



### SETS

To make scene changes easy, the stage can be divided into three sections. You can make a backdrop to show the three locations, or just rely on the sets. The locations are:

- 1) Wakaluga's Forge, on one side of the stage.
- 2) The palace, in the middle of the stage.
- 3) The bushland, on the other side of the stage.

- **Scene 1** – Wakaluga's Forge has an anvil as the centre of focus. You can cut out a large anvil shape from cardboard and paint gray. You can add different shades of gray to create a 3D effect, like the picture below. Use another piece of cardboard to create a stand or rest the piece against a chair or milk crate. Optional: If you want to cut out the shape twice, and use other pieces of cardboard to attach the two pieces together at the top and the sides, you can create a free-standing anvil.

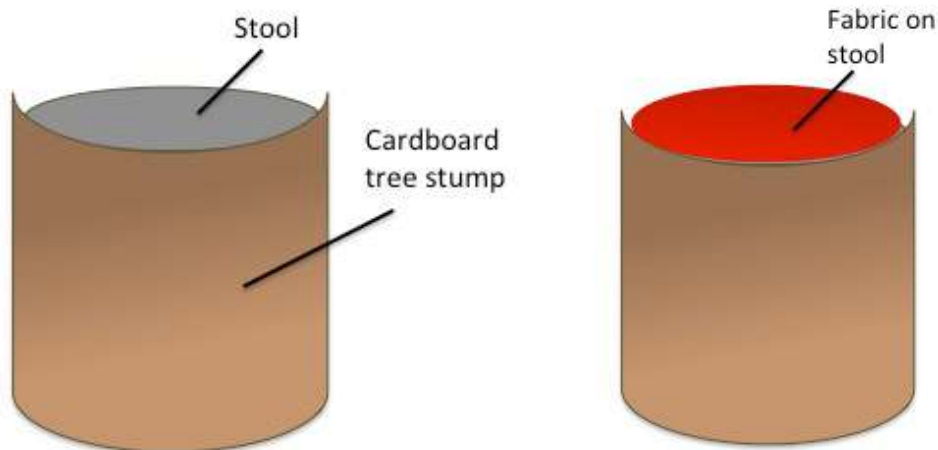


- **Scene 2** – The Palace has a throne made from a tree trunk, which sits on one side of the stage.

For the throne, start with a tall stool. Cut a piece of cardboard that is the height and width of the stool. You can cut the top to curve down a little to give the look of a 3D tree stump. Paint to look like a tree stump.

Tape to chair, ensuring that it still allows for KING to sit.

Optional: You can cover the top with a red fabric to make it look more “royal”.



- **Scene 3** – Same as Scene 1.
- **Scene 4** – The Bushland can be decorated with leaves and twigs made from paper and cardboard. Also, at least one bush for WAZIMU to sit behind. This can be made from a large refrigerator box sized piece of cardboard painted green and cut to resemble a bush. You can use the whole box, so that it stands on its own, or if it is flat, you can use another piece of cardboard to help prop it up.
- **Scene 5** – Same as Scene 2.