

## The Root of the Matter: African Stories

A porcupine came and asked a dog for food. The dog said he had no food but showed him a field of sugarcane belonging to a judge.

"Eat as much as you want," said the dog, "but leave the roots intact so that the plants will grow again." The porcupine found the sugarcane sweet and juicy. He began to visit the field every day. In the beginning he ate only the stems, as directed by the dog, but after a few days he began to eat the roots too. One day the judge saw the destruction in his field and was very angry.



He called the dog and accused him of destroying his crop. The dog said it was the porcupine that was to blame. The porcupine said he was innocent and suggested that the matter be settled in court. The judge agreed.

The porcupine waited till winter set in. Then one chilly morning he went to the dog's house and told him the judge had summoned them.

When they entered the judge's chamber the dog began to shiver with the cold.

"See how he trembles, Your Honor," said the porcupine. "Isn't that a sure sign of guilt?"

"What do you have to say for yourself?" asked the judge, looking sternly at the dog.

But the dog's teeth were chattering with the cold and he could not speak. Thinking that his silence was an admission of guilt, the judge pronounced him guilty and kicked him out of the house.

Whenever a dog barks incessantly, Africans say he is warning the judge that the porcupine has got into his field.

Adopted from: English for students