

How the Leopard Got His Spots

Based on Rudyard Kipling's Just So Stories



In the beginning of the world, things looked different than they do today. In Africa, Leopard lived in a hot and sandy-colored place called the Highveld. In those days the animals' coats were different than what you see today. Leopard was a sandy yellow color, Zebra was a light grey color, and Giraffe was a light yellow color. When Leopard lay on the ground, the color of his coat perfectly camouflaged him and made it nearly impossible to spot him lying on the ground. He played a game where he would lie around waiting for Zebra and Giraffe, then he would jump out and scare them half out of their wits. This game delighted Leopard, but Zebra and Giraffe were far less thrilled.

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Zebra and Giraffe decided to move to the Bushveld to get away from Leopard. The Bushveld was covered in tall trees and shady forests. They hid in the forest, where the light that shown through the trees cast stripy and blotchy shadows. They hid in the shadows for so long that their coats changed color. Zebra, who stood in the stripy shadows, grew dark stripes all over his body. Giraffe, who stood in the blotchy shadows grew large spots all over his body. Soon, they were as well camouflaged in the forest as Leopard was in the Highveld—you could stand right next to them and not even see them.



Leopard missed his friends Zebra and Giraffe, so he asked his friend the Ethiopian if he knew where they went. The Ethiopian was a man and in those days, he was a sandy yellow color, too. The Ethiopian didn't know where Zebra and Giraffe were, but he decided to go along with Leopard to look for them.

One hot sunny day, they came to the Bushveld. It was dark and shady inside the forest and the sandy yellow Leopard and Ethiopian stood out in the patchy light.

"I can smell Zebra, but I can't see him," said Leopard.

"I can smell Giraffe, but I can't see him," said the Ethiopian.

"Let's try looking for them again at night. Maybe we'll have more luck," said Leopard.

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And they did. Leopard felt Zebra. He smelled Zebra, but the stripy thing he caught didn't look like Zebra. The Ethiopian had the same experience with Giraffe. Zebra and Giraffe explained how their spots and stripes hid them in the forest. Leopard and the Ethiopian knew that if they were going to move into the forest, they would have to look more like Zebra and Giraffe.

The Ethiopian found some black mud. He covered himself in it and it changed the color of his skin.

"Wow," said Leopard. "Can you camouflage me, too? I don't want to be black all over. Maybe some spots like Giraffe, but smaller."

So the Ethiopian took the mud and put spots on Leopard. He made them with the tips of his fingers. He pressed his fingers close together. Then he pressed them all over Leopard. And Leopard has kept his spots forever after.

