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Child
education **PLUS+**

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Southern Africa:

Bushmen

Mantis steals fire from Ostrich

Long, long ago, when the Earth was new, the people did not know about fire. When the Sun went down they lived in terrible darkness. They did not even have moonlight, for the Moon had not been created yet. They had no fire to cook with.

But Mantis noticed something strange. He noticed that whenever Ostrich was eating, there always seemed to be a lovely, mouth-watering smell. He wondered why and decided to do some spying.

Mantis was very good at creeping about, and so the next time Ostrich was eating, he crept up ever so silently and hid behind a bush. What he saw amazed him.

Ostrich had fire. He put some meat on the fire and up came the lovely smell. When it was cooked, Ostrich ate the meat, picked up the fire, tucked it under his wing and trotted away.

Mantis was determined to have that fire, but he knew that Ostrich would be equally determined not to give it to him. Mantis put his mind to thinking of a way to trick Ostrich.

Then, one day, Mantis came across a tree heavy with a fruit he knew to be a favourite of Ostrich. So Mantis went to Ostrich and told him about the tree and said that he would show him where it was and that they would both have a feast. Ostrich was delighted.

When they got to the tree Ostrich began to peck at the fruits on the lower branches, but Mantis said that if he wanted the very best fruit, he needed to reach higher.

So Ostrich stretched up, opening his wings a little to keep balance. Mantis saw the fire glow, but Ostrich closed his wings before he could grab it.

Mantis told him to reach higher. Ostrich stretched even more, standing on tiptoe, and opened his wings again to keep balance.

This time Mantis grabbed the fire and ran off while Ostrich ate the fruit. He took the fire to the people, who were very happy.

They had a huge feast and they sat in the warmth of the fire glow and cooked their food. They sang and danced and ate their fill. And this is how Mantis brought fire to the Bushmen.

But poor Ostrich was so ashamed of being tricked and so worried that he would lose what little fire he had left, he never opened his wings again. That is why to this day, an ostrich never flies.

