



How the Rhinoceros got his Skin by Rudyard Kipling

ABOUT THE STORY

How the Rhinoceros got his Skin is an 'origin' story. Origin stories say how things began or why things are the way they are. This story imagines why all rhinoceroses have wrinkly skin. It is part of a collection of stories known as the 'Just So Stories', which Rudyard Kipling told his daughter at bedtime. Other stories in the collection include *How the Whale got his Throat* and *How the Camel got his Hump*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Many people think Rudyard Kipling was one of the greatest short story writers ever. He was born in India in 1865 but moved to England to go to school. He moved back to India and started working as a journalist, writing poems and stories in his spare time. After getting married, he spent a few years in the US, but eventually moved back to England. He was an extremely popular writer during his lifetime, and was especially well-known for his children's books, including *The Jungle Book*, his most famous work. Kipling was the first English author to receive the Nobel prize for Literature. He died in 1936 at the age of 70.



How the Rhinoceros got his Skin

Once upon a time, on an island lived a man who only had a hat, a knife and a portable stove. One day he took flour, water, fruit and sugar, and made a cake which was a metre wide. He put it on the stove and baked it until it was all brown and smelt wonderful. But just as he was about to eat it, a Rhinoceros came by. He had a horn, two small eyes and no manners. In those days the Rhinoceros's skin was tight and had no wrinkles. When he came into the man's camp, the man ran up the nearest tree very quickly. The rhinoceros walked into the stove and the cake fell on the sand, so he picked up the cake with his horn and ate it, then left. Then the man came out of the tree and said 'Those that take cakes, that this man bakes, make mistakes.'

Five weeks later, there was a heatwave and everybody went to the beach to swim in the sea.

The rhinoceros took off his skin and carried it over his shoulder as he went down to the beach. In those days, his skin had three buttons under the belly so he could take it off. He walked slowly down to the water and blew bubbles through his nose, leaving his skin on the beach.

Soon, the man came by and found the skin, smiled to himself and clapped his hands. Then he went back to his camp and filled a bag with cake crumbs. He put the crumbs into the Rhinoceros's skin and left again.

When the Rhinoceros came back, he put on his skin and fastened the buttons but it tickled like cake crumbs in bed. He rolled and scratched but that didn't help. He rubbed and rubbed until there were great big folds of skin over his shoulders and legs, but it still didn't help. So he went home very angry and itchy and still with the cake crumbs inside his skin. That is why to this day, rhinoceroses have great folds in their skin and a very bad temper.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

portable stove (line 2): a small oven that you can cook with outside

no manners (line 9): not polite, rude

wrinkles (line 10): lines in the skin

heatwave (line 18): a period of very hot weather

belly (line 23): stomach

bubbles (line 25): balls of air surrounded by liquid

crumbs (line 30): very small pieces

tickled (line 33): touched the skin in an uncomfortable way

folds (line 36): areas of loose skin

bad temper (line 41): gets angry very quickly



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Before reading

- 1 Look at these animals. Match each animal (1–6) with the characteristics (a–f) you associate with it.

- | | |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 camel | a has long legs and tail, and hops |
| 2 rhinoceros | b has a hump |
| 3 leopard | c is very large but eats small fish |
| 4 whale | d has a long trunk |
| 5 elephant | e has wrinkly skin |
| 6 kangaroo | f has spots |

- 2a You are going to read a story from a collection of 'origin' stories by Rudyard Kipling, a Victorian writer. Some of the stories describe the animals in exercise 1. What do you think an 'origin' story is? Tick [✓] the correct answer.

- a a fairytale ☐
- b a story about a historical event ☐
- c a story that imagines why something is the way it is ☐

- 2b Now read the *About the story* section and check your answer.

- 3 Work in pairs. Predict how you think the rhinoceros got his skin.

While reading

- 1 Read the story and put the events in the correct order.

- a The rhinoceros took off his skin and went into the sea.
- b The man went back to his camp and got some cake crumbs.
- c There was a heatwave.
- d The rhinoceros ate the man's cake.
- e The rhinoceros developed folds in his skin and became bad-tempered.
- f The rhinoceros began to itch and rubbed his skin.
- g The man put cake crumbs in the skin.
- h The man made a cake.

- 2 Read the story again and answer these questions.

- What was the cake like?
- Why do you think the man went up the tree?
- What do you think the man means when he says 'Those that take cakes, that this man bakes, make mistakes'?
- Why do you think the man smiled and clapped his hands when he found the skin?
- What happened when the rhinoceros tried to rub and scratch himself?
- Why did the cake crumbs make the rhinoceros bad-tempered?

- 3 The rhinoceros changes between the beginning and the end of the story. How does he change? Complete the table with words to describe his appearance and personality.

Appearance at the beginning	Appearance at the end
Personality at the beginning	Personality at the end

- 4 Find an example of a simile used in the story to describe the feeling of the cake crumbs.

After reading

- 1 Although this is an origin story, there is also a moral to the story. What do you think the moral is? Discuss your ideas in groups.

- 2 Work in pairs. You are going to create your own origin story. Choose an animal and write down its key characteristic.

Animal:

Characteristic:

- 3 In the same pairs, invent a reason why that animal got that characteristic (you can be as creative as you like). Then think about other details of the story and complete the notes below:

Where does everything happen?	
What is the animal? What does it look like? What is its personality like?	
What happens? How does it change?	
What is the animal like at the end of the story?	

- 4 Now tell your story in pairs. You can draw a storyboard to help you remember the details. End your story: *And that is how the [animal] got its [characteristic].*