

The Lonely Frog



Nakiete Mlaki

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The first edition of this book is published in English and Kiswahili by Readership for Learning and Development--**Soma** in its debut Kalamu Ndogo series. A print version in English is available from **Soma Book Café**. The ISBN for the print version is 978-9976-5637-0-2

Authored by Nakiete Mlaki in a Watoto na Vitabu facilitated research and writing project funded by Neil Butcher & Associates

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Edited by Demere Kitunga with Godfrey Mishomari and Latifa Miraji



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Editor's Note

The Lonely Frog is the first in **Soma's** newly launched 'Kalamu Ndogo' (little scribes) series of children's books authored by children. The first four books in this series were generated in a research and writing intervention; implemented with a grant from Neil Butcher & Associates (NBA) as part of Watoto na Vitabu Multimedia Storytelling Hub integral to **Soma Book Café**. The Hub engages children age 6 to 13.

The intervention is part of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation's efforts to support 'sustainable early reading eco-systems...'; through 'Successful experimentation with and documentation of projects on content creation, use, and quality of open licensed storybooks in Africa, to develop and test innovative content creation and usage models in early literacy.' This project is therefore one of those experiments.

Soma Book Café, a co-creation literary space for leisure, culture and learning operational since 2008 in Dar Es Salaam is the face of **Soma**; a Tanzanian NGO officially known as E&D Readership and Development Agency until 2019; and Readership for Learning and Development since. Its vision is to see '*A vibrant culture of reading, storytelling and enterprise among young people in Tanzania.*'

Kalamu Ndogo focused on children's agency and creative potential. With facilitation of children writers, teachers, editors, illustrators and designers, children took the lead in researching, writing, reviewing, editing, revising and sketching contemporary stories rooted in Tanzanian folkloric traditions, but drawing inspiration from their lived experiences and teasing out their creative imagination beyond the 'here and now'. We owe immense gratitude to this community of literati for grounding us; to Lisbeth Levey (fondly Liz) for trusting; to NBA for committing resources to actualise it and for connecting us with the Early Literacy Resource pool; to Liz, Kirsty von Gogh and Ken Harley for continuous support and encouragement.

We thank participating children, parents, teachers from HK Learning Centre, Sanje Academic Centre and Watoto na Vitabu for their resourcefulness and tenacity; facilitators and resource people: Godfrey E. Mishomari, lead research and writing facilitator, Gonsalves Mpili, Maria Mrindoko, Latifa Miraji, Patrick Gondwe and Alphonse Mapunda (co-facilitators); Nadir Tharani (children author, illustrator and book designer) who co-facilitated with us the editorial process; Mohamed Ismail the documentalist; Paulina George and Inviolata Mwakiwone who assisted with ideas, logistics, image taking and sharing; Mugisha Andrew Bassasingohe for IT support; and Ubongo Kids for sharing insights. Ultimately, a slice of this experience is available on our website www.somabookcafe.com.

The Lonely Frog ranked first out of 40 entries. Marco Tibasima the Illustrator respected the author's original sketches and subsequent feedback. Our editing was interactive and minimalist to retain the child's authentic voice. Informed consent was sought and obtained.

If any, proceedings will contribute to sustainability of this initiative. This was a labour of love. We hope it is equally loved by its audience and educators; lest it remains a 'once upon a time, a beautiful dream'.

Demere Kitunga,

February 2020, Dar es Salaam.

Beyond the green grass field was a pond. No ordinary pond, it was a special pond. How special you ask? It had all types of flowers with all the colours you could ever imagine. The pond had water of purple colour. All the people there say, “Whoever touches or drinks the water from that pond, turns into a frog.”









And not just a normal frog, a frog with unique powers. Powers like heat breath, teleportation, super strength, the power to jump ten times higher than an average human, the ability to stretch its tongue further than one metre and so many more powers.

The young ones of the frogs also had unique powers, powers just like the humans who were turned into frogs. But there was one frog who always separated herself from other frogs. Her name was Zakia. She separated herself because of her ability to live on land and in water. She was always bullied by her friends because of that. They thought she was lame and boring.

They would say, “Get out of here, we only hang out with cool kids, unlike you.”

They would push her and call her stupid and dumb.

Zakia was always unhappy, and would lock herself in her room and lie on her bed crying with her hands covering her face.

Zakia had no siblings. She always told her parents when she was bored. Her mother would say, “Don’t be sad Zakia. They are the ones missing out having an amazing friend like you.”

“What is wrong with me? Why am I being treated this way?” she would ask herself.



The pond was always beautiful and amazing. Humans thought that the pond and the organisms in it were a danger to their species. Not only because the water would turn them into frogs, but also because of the powers the frogs had. The humans tried to destroy the pond, but were not successful because the frogs would fight back.





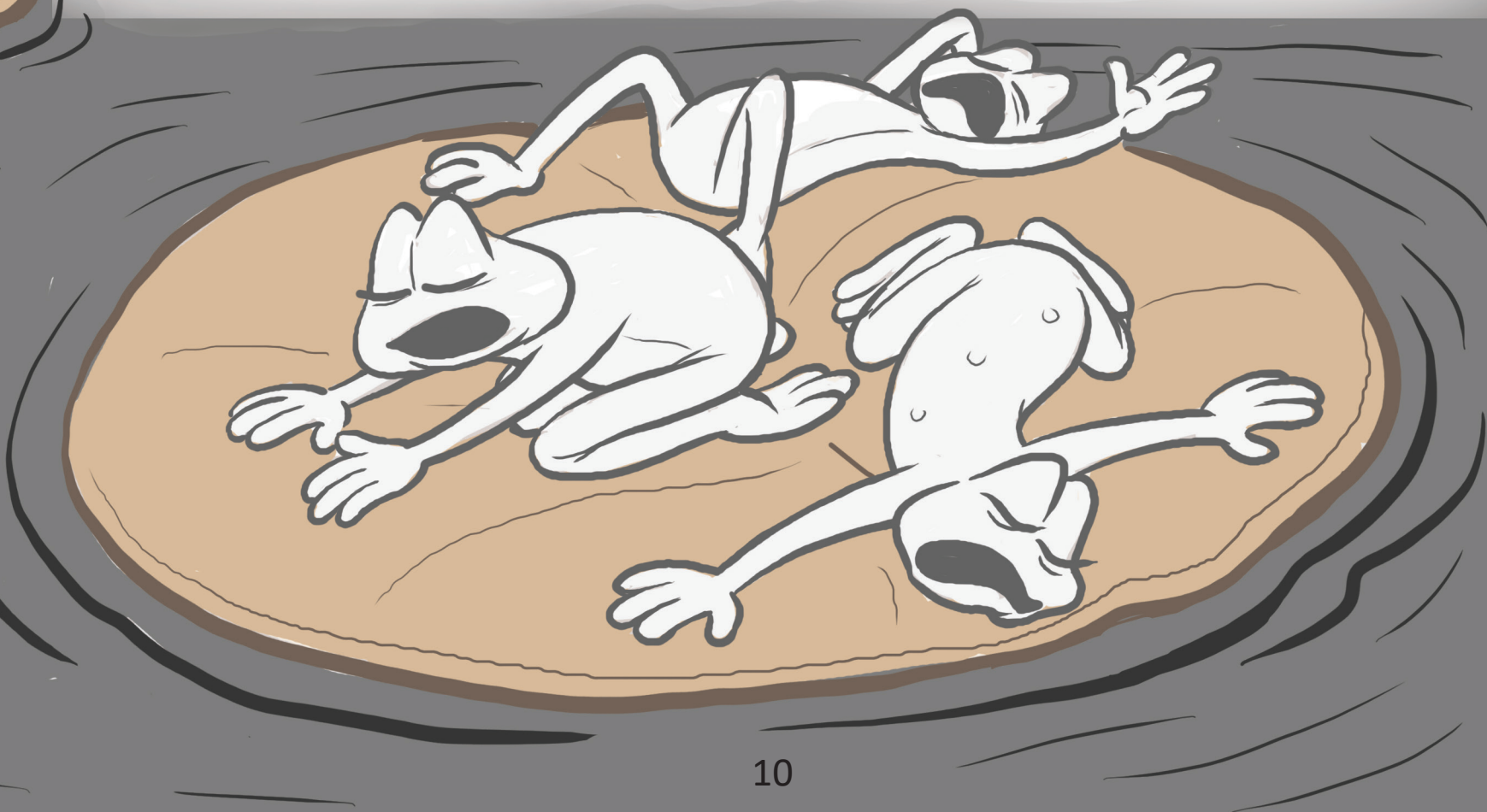
However, there was one thing that was able to destroy the magic of the pond. That was sand from the ocean. If the humans found out about this, the pond and its creatures would be doomed. This is because, if the ocean sand was spread around the pond, the frogs would turn into statues, the flowers would die, and the water in the pond would turn grey.



One morning, Zakia was woken up by the loud sound of her fellow frogs screaming.

“What is happening?” Zakia asked herself in a scared voice. She quickly ran outside to see what had happened only to find herself looking at the most horrible thing she could ever imagine, “Oh my goodness! Noooh!” she shouted.

She could not believe what she saw. The pond was grey. The frogs had frozen like statues and the flowers were dead.



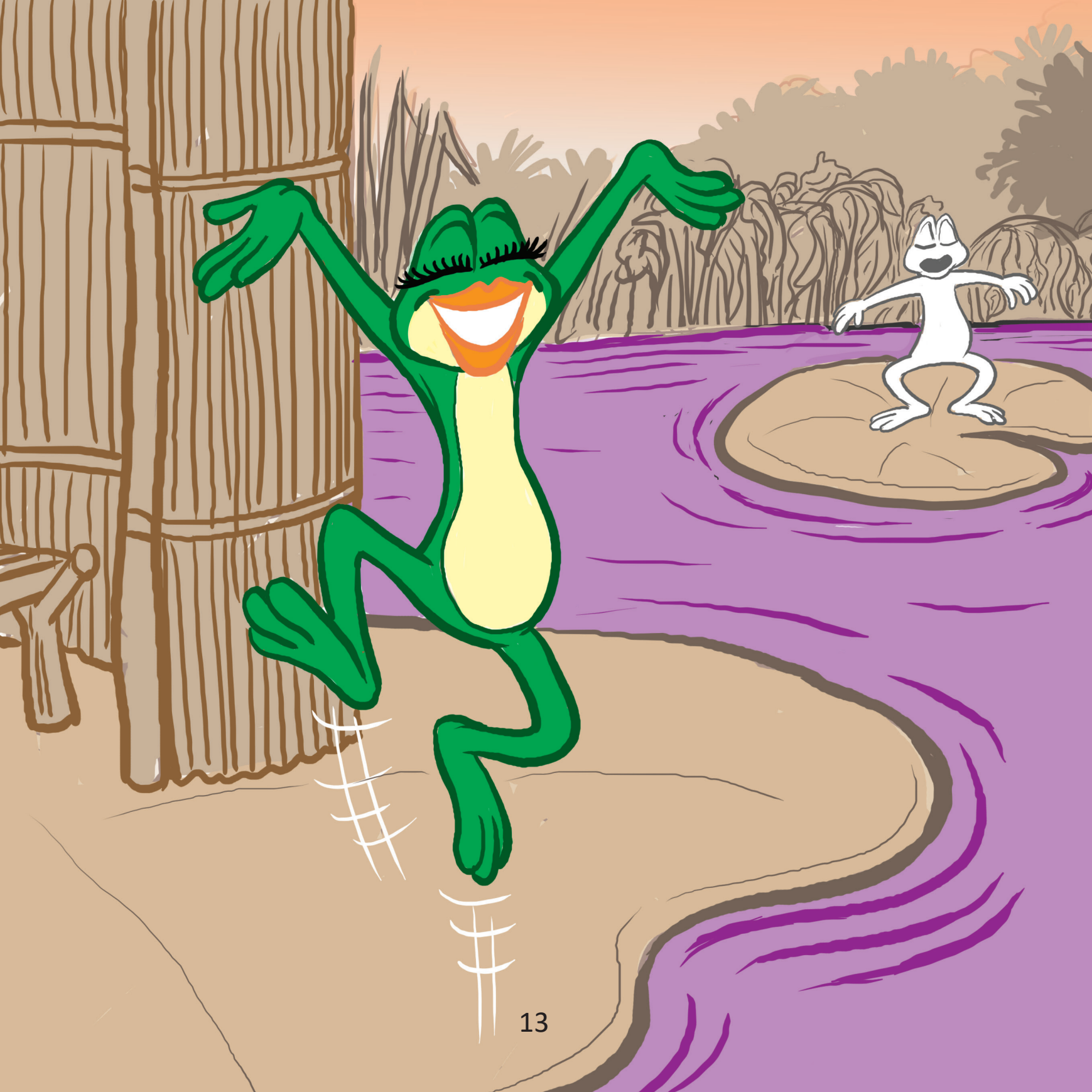
“This could only mean one thing: the humans have found out how to destroy the pond. And now I am the only frog here,” she told herself while staring at the pond from outside her home.

She started to cry. Tears were running down her cheeks like a waterfall.

“Why me? Why am I the only one left? Why am I not a statue like others?” she asked herself.

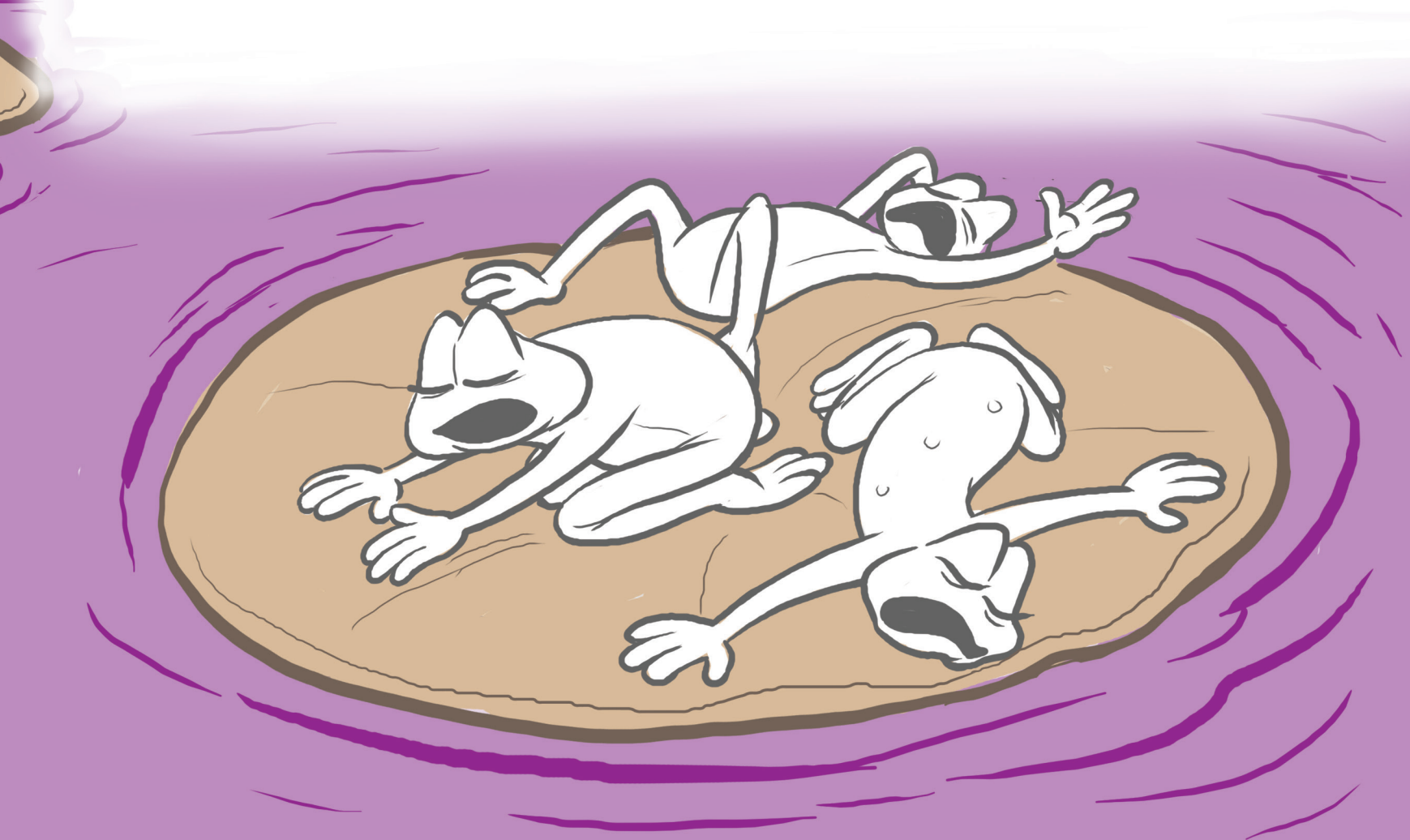
The more she asked herself these questions, the angrier she got. She started punching the water thinking how beautiful it used to be.





Then suddenly, the water turned purple again. You can only imagine how happy and shocked Zakia was. “Yes, yes, yes, oh my gosh!” she screamed with joy, while jumping up and down.

“How could this happen?” she asked herself, “What have I possibly done to turn the water purple again?”



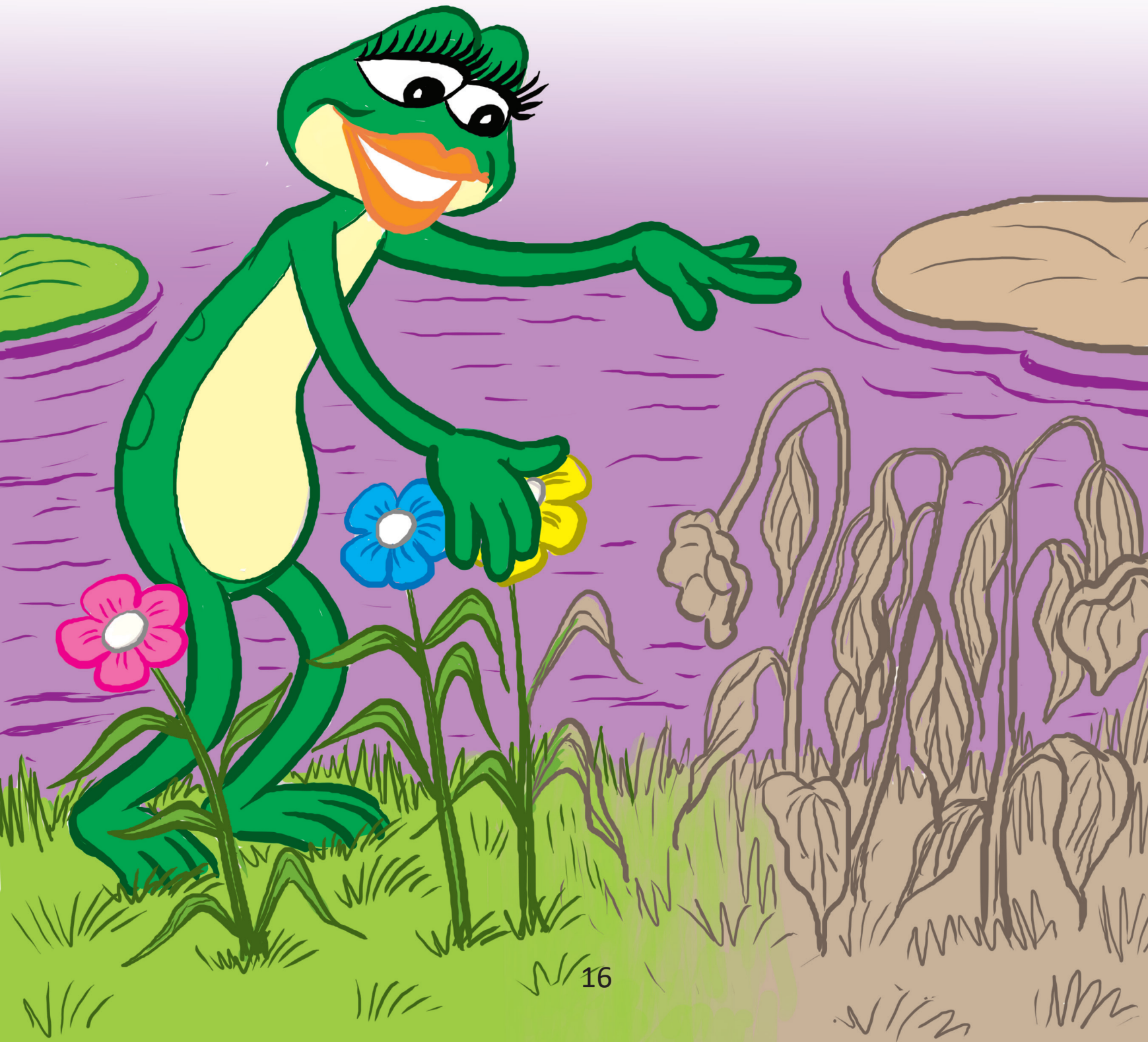
She touched the flowers near the pond.

“I remember how gorgeous the flowers were.”

Then suddenly the flowers she was touching came back to life. Zakia was shocked now even more than she was before and she could not move.

She figured out that she has the power to fix things and bring them back to their normal state just by touching them and thinking about how they used to be. She was so happy. Then she began to bring all the dead flowers back to life.

Then she sat down by the pond and thought, “If I can bring dead flowers back to life, can I bring my fellow frogs back? There is only one way to find out. I should try it.”





She rushed to her mother and stared at her with sadness and tears in her eyes. Then she finally tried to bring her mother back to life.

She thought, “I remember how my mom used to be, breathing and alive.” Then her mother opened her eyes.

“Mother! Mother! Can you hear me?” Zakia asked. “Yes, Zakia, I can hear you,” her mother replied.



Zakia's mother asked, "What happened?"

Zakia told her mother everything that had happened including her newly discovered powers.

Then she went on and brought back to life the rest of her fellow frogs.







When Zakia was 15 years old, she was chosen as the leader of her frog community. This was not only because of her powers but because of her bravery and quick thinking. Then she carried on leading her community and the pond remains immortal.



The Lonely Frog

Zakia lives in a magic pond with her community of extraordinary frogs. Every frog but her has a special gift, or so she thinks. This makes her sad and lonely. But she knows a secret that humans can use to destroy the pond and the frogs. What will she do? Will she discover her unique gift?

The Lonely Frog is the first in **Soma's** 'Kalamu Ndogo' (little scribes) children's book series. The first four books in this series are products of **Soma's** Watoto na Vitabu (Children and Books) research and writing with children experiment, implemented in 2019 with a grant from Neil Butcher & Associates.

Nakiete Mlaki, author of *The Lonely Frog*, is a 13 year-old girl in Grade Six. Nakiete loves to read, write and tell stories. She also draws and paints. The illustrator tried to represent as closely as possible the author's original drawings. *The Lonely Frog* is Nakiete's first published book.

Other books in the Kalamu Ndogo series are:

Chura Mpweke

The Poor Lady

Chungu cha Ajabu

Mbuguma na Nasiru



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