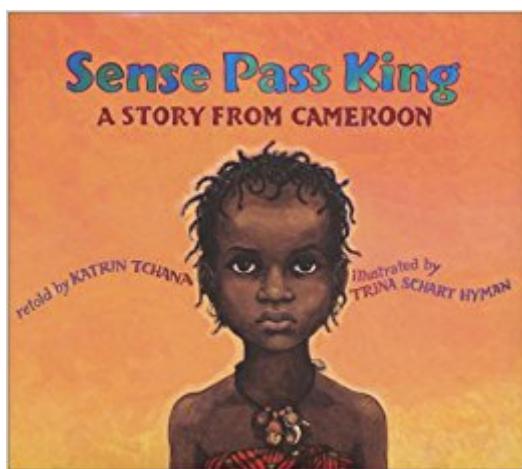


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# Sense Pass King: A Story From Cameroon



## **Synopsis**

An extraordinary child determines a kingdom's future.

## **Book Information**

Lexile Measure: 510L (What's this?)

Hardcover: 32 pages

Publisher: Holiday House; y First printing edition (October 1, 2002)

Language: English

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Product Dimensions: 9.3 x 10.3 x 0.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 13 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 7 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,370,434 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #55 in Books > Children's Books > Fairy Tales, Folk Tales & Myths > African #1275 in Books > Children's Books > Fairy Tales, Folk Tales & Myths > Multicultural #42297 in Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction

Age Range: 4 and up

Grade Level: Preschool and up

## **Customer Reviews**

Kindergarten-Grade 3-In this retelling of a traditional tale, young Ma'antah displays such extraordinary cleverness that she earns the nickname, Sense Pass King. The jealous monarch makes repeated attempts to dispose of the child, but ultimately brings her to live in his palace. When he falsely takes credit for slaying a seven-headed sea lizard and saving his future bride, feats accomplished by the pint-sized servant, the villagers have had enough of his dishonesty and cowardice. They drive him out of the kingdom, crown Sense Pass King queen, and all live happily ever after. Children will delight in the youngster's ability to outsmart grown-ups and find her way out of seemingly impossible predicaments. Expansive spreads of lush acrylic artwork are filled with humorous and, at times, magical details. In the final scene, Queen Ma'antah rubs the head of a panther with a snake perched on its back, while a curious audience of lizards, monkeys, and people look on in wonder. Such fantastic images and a clever story line make this a satisfying addition to folklore collections.

Ajokei T. I. Kokodoko, Oakland Public Library, CA  
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PreS.-Gr. 2. A wise, brave child outwits the silly powerful king in this lively West African folktale. Tchana first heard the story from her husband, who heard it when he was growing up in Cameroon. In the original, the child is a boy, but Tchana makes her a girl. Ma'antah is a prodigy, who, from the age of two, can speak the languages of all seven villages and communicate with animals. Soon the people call her Sense Pass King because she is cleverer even than their ruler. He tries to destroy her, but she escapes all his traps, and eventually the people drive him away, make Ma'antah their leader, and live in peace and prosperity. The triumph of the small, smart hero over stupid authority has elemental child appeal, and Hyman's sunlit acrylic double-paged paintings capture the traditional village setting and the individual people in clear, glowing detail. Always at the center is the proud, sturdy girl, who confronts a seven-headed fiery monster with the same wit and courage that she uses to defeat the jealous despot. Hazel Rochman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

Really amazing book for young girls that you want to teach the importance of wisdom.

I really enjoyed this book, especially since the author changed the main character to a girl instead of a boy for this traditional legend.

Expecting our first child and my husband is a native of Cameroon so I really wanted to like this book. The pictures are LOVELY and you can make up a story to go with them. But the plot of the wise little girl who helps the foolish king to take a child bride did not fit with my western sensibilities.

Sense Pass King is a traditional West African folk tale. It tells the story of Ma'antah, a brilliant child who the villagers call "Sense Pass King" because she has more sense than even the king. The king learns of this and becomes angry. He devises many plans to have Ma'antah killed, but she keeps outwitting him. Eventually, the villagers drive the king out of the village and make Ma'antah their queen. An author's note on the last page explains that in the traditional tale, Sense Pass King is a little boy. The author chose to make Sense Pass King a girl in this retelling because there are not enough stories about brave and clever girls. I would recommend this book for children ages 6 through 9. Children in this age group who are beginning to assert themselves will enjoy reading about Ma'antah outwitting the king. They are also developing a sense of right and wrong and will be happy that the book's ending is just. I would use this book as part of a storytime program with other

books of African folk tales. The beautiful acrylic paintings add to the text by showing children detailed images of a traditional West African village, such as straw huts, animals, and traditional dress and jewelry.

Last year around Christmas I saw this in the bookstore and had to get it. I love the illustrations. At that moment in the store I didn't have time to read it but after seeing the illustrations I couldn't put it down. The pictures in this book are incredible. I have always been somewhat bothered that this particular picture was chosen for the cover. It's the single worst picture in (or on) the book so please do not base your opinion on the cover illustration. They did not make kids books like this when I was a kid! If memory serves, I have never reviewed a book on this site before, so this is as good a place to start as any. I don't have any kids but maybe I will someday. I am disturbed by the fact that it is very rare to ever see a white child playing with, say, a black doll. Obviously this is not the fault of the child. Non-white American children have had to make do with white stories and dolls for generations, until fairly recently. I think that the sooner a child is exposed to the beautiful diversity (yet similarity) of humanity, the better it is for them and their world. I would hope that my fellow white people have had enough of the superficial and artificial world of Barbie, and are ready to open their eyes to the fact that beauty, art, love, expression, emotion, pain, and happiness occur in all shades, hues, shapes, and sizes. Beyond this being a fun, meaningful story about a smart girl, the illustrations really convey a feel and a location. The clothing and faces and hairstyles in these pictures are stunning. Sure to grasp and ignite the imagination of children, and many adults also. When the pages of this book start turning, you are engulfed in a world of beauty and color. Buy this book so you can entertain your children in a healthy way while also instilling in them the fact that just because not everyone looks alike doesn't mean we are all somehow "different" (in the negative sense). Cultural diversity is, for me, humanity's greatest gift to all of us. Explore it, nurture it, love it! Also, protect it and encourage its appreciation in those around you. I wish this were a whole series of books with a different character and story for each. If this illustrator worked with other authors so as to give this sort of treatment to stories, locations, and peoples of India, China, Vietnam, Chile, Ethiopia, etc... it'd be a great "world primer" for children. Easily one of the best kids books I've ever been around.

Trina Schart Hyman excellently illustrates this picture book retelling. It is a folktale from the West African nation of Cameroon. The plot centers on a young girl named Ma'antah, who is so smart that she is self sufficient and can speak many languages by the time she is three years old. The people

revere her. The king, on the other hand, is jealous that the girl is earning more respect than he is. So he concocts several plans to have her killed. Ma'antah outwits him every time. Tchana's protagonist is a brave child who is both confidant and a quick thinker. Though this is a very delightful story for an adult to experience and it offers very different themes in a different social context, it has some elements that may be disturbing to some western childcare givers or parents. Children in this story are treated like adults. For instance, the wife that the old king intends to marry, and Ma'antah at first helps him to secure, is a child who is even younger than Ma'antah. It is important to include international literature in readings with children to develop cultural literacy. However, this plot is very unusual to a western reader. Though the ending fits well into western ideas of good versus evil, themes like the arranged marriage of a very young child-princess to an old, cruel king would seem strange and frightening to most modern children (and parents). Many might suggest this reading is inappropriate and confusing for many young picture book readers. On the other hand, the wise Ma'antah prevents the marriage, even though it is not due to concerns about pedophilia, but rather the king's betrayal of her. She then becomes ruler of the people. She uses her wit and character to achieve greatness. This story read to a western child breaks cultural barriers by suggesting that even very young females can be leaders. Also, the idea of a young female ruler taking care of another younger female child as a happy ending may seem strange to a child from America. It would require much explanation, in my opinion. The illustrations are beautiful. The story is presented in an artful way. I think this book is inappropriate in the classroom, but parents may choose to read it with much caution.

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