



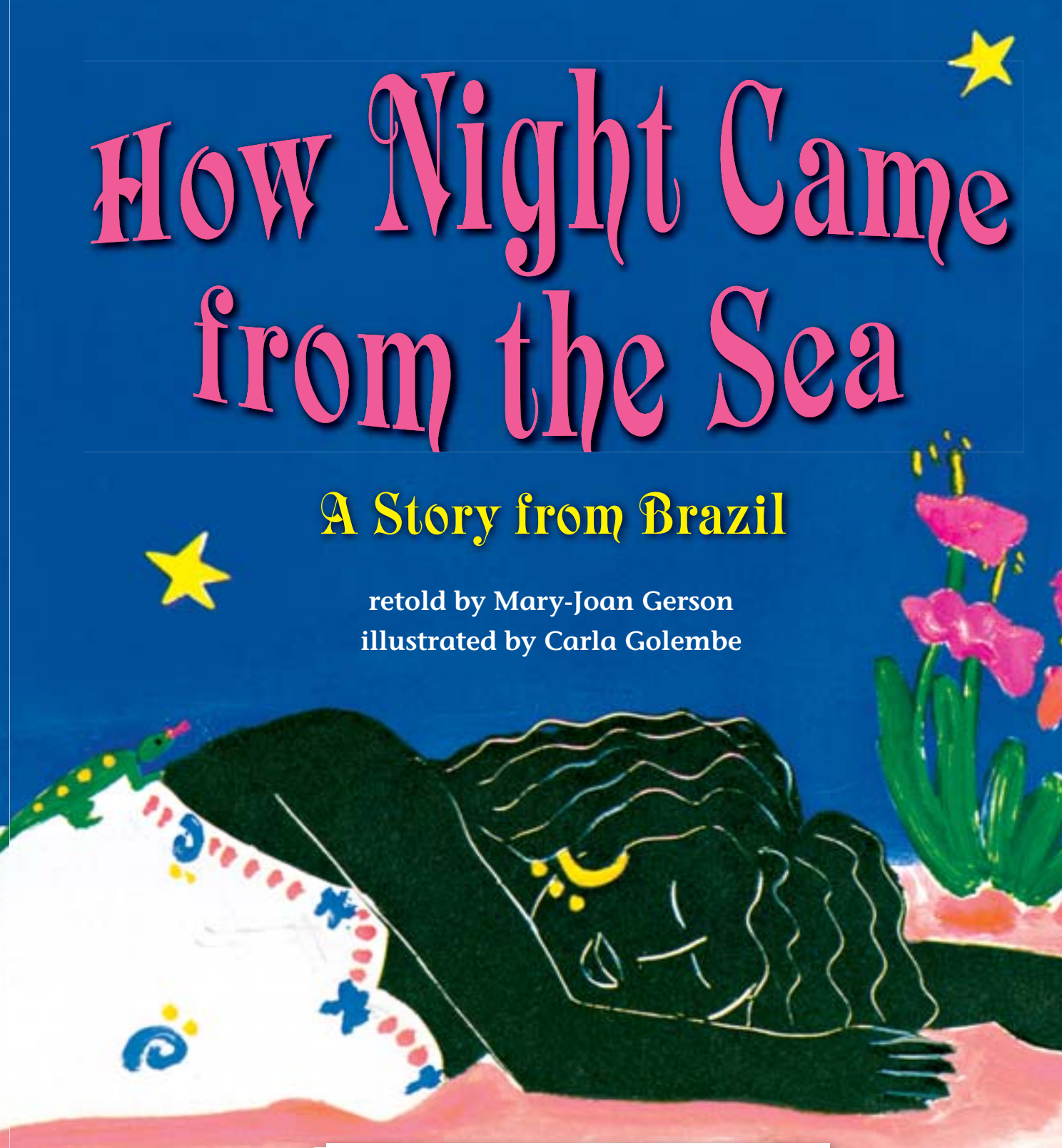
Genre

Myths are traditional stories that try to explain how things in nature came to be. Think about how you would explain the cycle of day and night as you read this story.

How Night Came from the Sea

A Story from Brazil

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Question of the Week

How have people explained the pattern of day and night?



Long, long ago, at the very beginning of time, when the world had just been made, there was no night. It was always daytime.

No one had ever heard of sunrise or sunset, starlight or moonbeams. There were no night creatures such as owls and tigers, and no night flowers that secretly open their petals at dusk. There was no soft night air, heavy with perfume. Sunlight always filled the sky. The light jumped from the coconuts at the top of the palm trees, and it **gleamed** from the backs of the alligators wading at the edge of the sea. Everywhere there was only sunlight and brightness and heat.

In that time, the great African goddess Iemanjá dwelt in the depths of the sea. And Iemanjá had a daughter who decided to marry one of the sons of the earth people. With sorrow and with longing, the daughter left her home in the deep ocean and came to live with her husband in the land of daylight.

Iemanjá's daughter loved her husband, and she loved the magic of daylight that he showed her: the **shimmering** sand of the beach, the rows and rows of cocoa and sugarcane baking in sunlight, and the sparkling jewels and feathered costumes worn in harvest festivals.





But with time, the light became too bright and hard for Iemanjá's daughter. The sight of the workers bent over in the fields day after day hurt her eyes and her heart.

And finally even the brilliant colors worn by the dancers at the festivals burned through her drooping lids.

"Oh, how I wish night would come," she cried. "Here there is always daylight, but in my mother's kingdom there are cool shadows and dark, quiet corners."

Her husband listened to her with great sorrow, for he loved her. "What is this night?" he asked her. "Tell me about it, and perhaps I can find a little of it for you."



"Night," she said, "is like the quiet after crying or the end of the storm. It is a dark, cool blanket that covers everything. If only we could have a little of the darkness of my mother's kingdom to rest our eyes some of the time."

Her husband called at once his three most faithful servants. "I am sending you on a very important journey," he told them. "You are to go to the kingdom of Iemanjá, who dwells in the depths of the seas. You must beg her to give you some of the darkness of night so that my wife will stop longing to return to her mother's kingdom and will be able to find happiness on land with me."





The three servants set forth. After a long, dangerous journey through the surging waves of the ocean, over the cliffs of underwater sand, and past the razor-sharp reefs of coral, they arrived at the palace of Iemanjá. Throwing themselves at the feet of the goddess, they begged her for some night to carry back with them. “Stand up, you foolish men,” she commanded. “How can you beg a mother whose child is suffering?” And without a second lost, she packed a big bag of night for them to carry through the circling currents of water. “But,” she said, “you must not open this until you reach my daughter, because only she can calm the night spirits I have packed inside.”

The three servants pulled the big bag alongside them as they swam back through the cool, swirling sea. Finally they emerged into the bright sunlight of the shore and followed the path home, bearing the big bag upon their heads. Soon they heard strange sounds. They were the voices of all the night creatures squeezed inside. The servants had never heard this strange **chorus** of night screeching before, and they shook with fear.

The first servant stared at the screaming bag of voices and began to tremble.

“Let us drop this bag of night and run away as fast as we can,” said the second servant.

“**Coward!**” said the third, trying to sound brave. “I am going to open the bag and see what makes all those terrible sounds.”

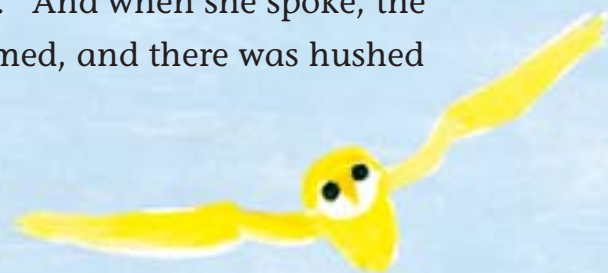
He laid the bag on the ground and opened its sealing wax with his teeth. **Out rushed the night beasts, the night birds, and all the night insects. Out jumped the stars and the moon.** The servants ran terrified into the jungle.





But the servants were in luck, because Iemanjá's daughter was standing at the shore, waiting and waiting for their return. Ever since they had set out on their journey, she had stood in one spot under a palm tree at the edge of the sea, shading her eyes with her hand and praying for the darkness. And she was still standing in that spot when the servants let night escape.

"Night has come. Night has come at last," she cried as she saw the blue-black shadows gather on the horizon. "I greet you, my kinship spirits." And when she spoke, the night spirits were suddenly calmed, and there was hushed darkness everywhere.



Then the gentle hum of the night creatures began, and moonbeams flickered across the sky. The creatures of the night appeared before her: the owl hunting by moonlight and the tiger finding its way through the forest by smelling the dark, damp earth. The soft air grew heavy with the smell of night perfume. To Iemanjá's daughter, this coming of night was indeed like the quiet after crying or the end of the storm. It was like a dark, cool blanket covering everything, and just as if a soft hand had soothed her tired eyes, Iemanjá's daughter fell fast asleep.

She awoke feeling as if she were about to sing. How rested she was after the coolness of her night dreams! Her eyes opened wide to the brightness of the glistening day, and in her heart she knew she would find peace in her husband's land. And so to celebrate the beauty of her new home, Iemanjá's daughter made three gifts.





To the last bright star still shining above the palm tree she said, "Glittering star, from now on you will be our sign that night is passing. You shall be called the morning star, and you will announce the birth of each day."

To the rooster standing by her, she said, "You shall be the watchman of the night. From this day on, your voice will warn us that the light is coming."

And to the birds all about her she called, "You singing birds, you shall sing your sweetest songs at this hour to announce the dawn of each day."

To this day, the gifts of Iemanjá's daughter help celebrate each new sunrise. In Brazil the early morning is called the *madrugada*. As the *madrugada* slides onto the horizon, the morning star reigns in the sky as queen of the dawn. The rooster announces the day's approach to the sleeping birds, and then they sing their most beautiful songs.

And it is also true that in Brazil night leaps out quickly like a bullfrog just as it leapt quickly out of the bag in the beginning of time. The night flowers suddenly open their petals at dusk. And as they do, the owl and tiger begin their hunt for food.

The beasts and birds and insects of the night begin to sing their gentle chorus. And when the dark, cool blanket of night covers everything, the people of the earth take their rest.

