

# A theatrical **Play**

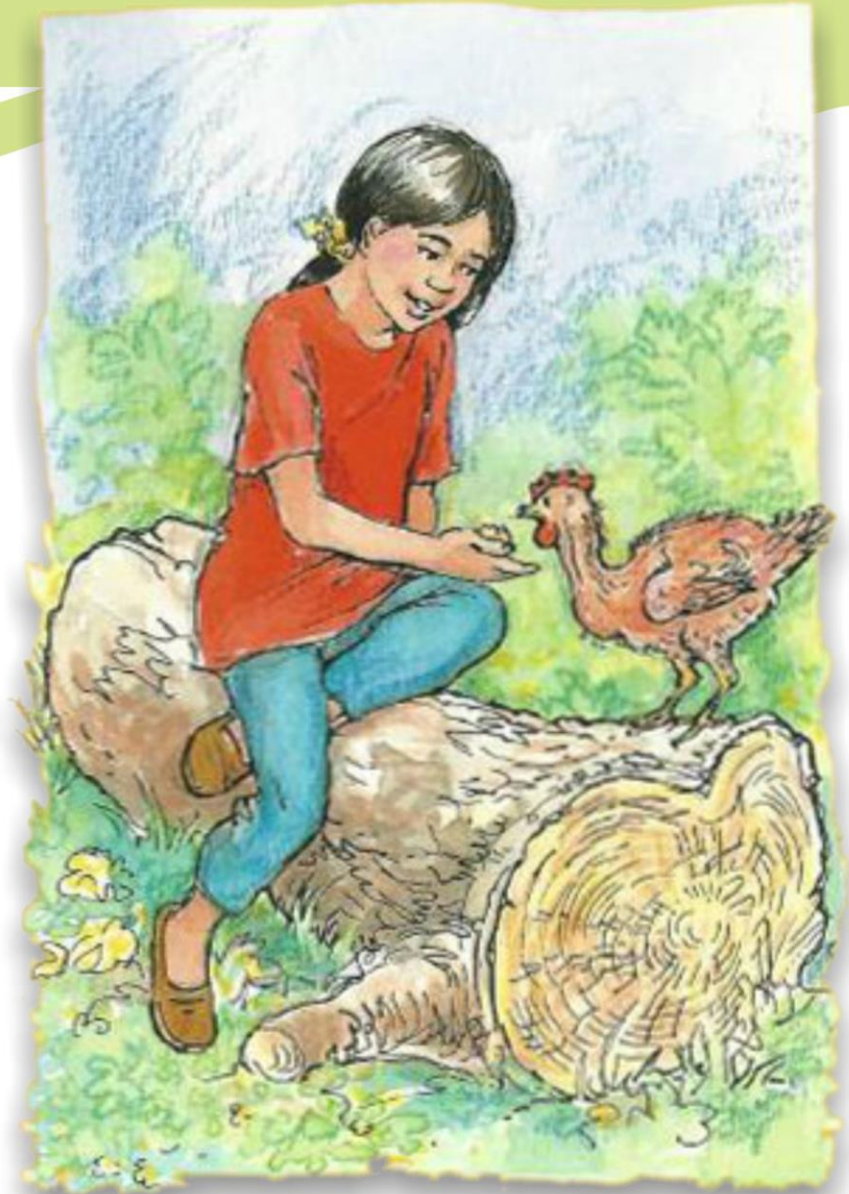
***NOW let's turn our focus  
to a laying hen...***

Prepare to perform this play as an  
**end-of-year online treat**  
for your school:

Goosie's Story : THE PLAY  
(based on Goosie's Story)

Caring Classrooms

<https://caringclassrooms.co.za>



## ACTORS AND ACTRESSES

3 hens

Gabrielle (*a young girl*)

Farmer Brown

A Talking Tree

A Priest

An Imam (Muslim Priest)

An African Sangoma

A Judge

A Supermarket Manager

A Housewife

A Group of Street Children

A Philosopher

Caterpillar, bird, flower (*optional*)

## PROPS AND SET DESIGN

A Bench

A Table

Two glasses

Jug of orange juice

## SCENE ONE

THERE IS GENERAL DARKNESS, EXCEPT FOR THE PROJECTION OF A BATTERY SHED SCENE ON THE BACK WALL OF THE STAGE.

GABRIELLE ENTERS THE DIMNESS TOGETHER WITH FARMER BROWN.

FARMER BROWN

Choose whichever one you like! They're all headed for the pot tomorrow!

GABRIELLE

She walks into the dimness, looking up and down the imaginary rows of battery hens with an air of amazement.

There're so many...

FARMER BROWN

Business-like manner.

Well, hurry up and choose one. They've still got a few good eggs left in them.

GABRIELLE

I don't know which one to choose... Because the ones that I don't choose will be left behind and they'll never know my garden.

FARMER BROWN

It's no use being all sentimental now. Make a choice and let's get on with it.

GABRIELLE

Points to one of the hens.

I'll take her. She's got such beautiful eyes. Just like jewels.

THE FARMER REACHES INTO THE CAGE AND DRAGS OUT A 'HEN' BY HER WINGS.

THEY BEGIN TO WALK OUT.

GABRIELLE

Anxiously.

Oh be careful. I know she doesn't like that!

FARMER BROWN

Don't say you're going to grow up to be one of those irritating bunny-huggers.

THE FARMER HANDS GABRIELLE THE CHICKEN. SHE TAKES IT CAREFULLY AND THE TWO OF THEM SIT THEMSELVES DOWN ON A BENCH OUTSIDE THE BATTERY. TREE, CATERPILLAR, BIRD, FLOWER (OPTIONAL FOR THIS SCENE)

TWO GLASSES OF ORANGE JUICE ARE ON A TABLE AND THE FARMER HANDS HER ONE, TAKING THE OTHER FOR HIMSELF.

GABRIELLE

I want her to be my friend.

FARMER BROWN

Why don't you choose a dog or a cat? They make good pets. What about a budgie?

GABRIELLE

I've got a dog and a cat. And a budgie.

FARMER BROWN

Then what more do you want?

GABRIELLE

I want this little chicken to be my friend too. (PAUSES)  
Farmer Brown, why do we call dogs and cats and budgies pets? And pigs and chickens and sheep and goats and cows are not pets. What makes them different?



FARMER BROWN

Well, some animals have to work for a living. This hen here (POINTS TO GOOSIE) ... Well, she's got to lay 300 eggs before she's ready for the pot. That's the way it is. Some animals are born pets and some are born farm animals.

GABRIELLE

But why?

FARMER BROWN

I've just told you. Because that's the way it is. Always has been. Always will be.

SCENE CLOSSES AS LIGHTS DIM.

## SCENE TWO

GABRIELLE IS SEATED IN A GARDEN BENEATH A GREAT SHADY TREE. GOOSIE IS THERE TOO. THIS IS AN IDEAL SPOT FOR NON-TALKING PARTS SUCH AS A CATERPILLAR, BIRD, FLOWERS AND SO ON.

GABRIELLE

I wonder why some people are so harsh towards chickens....

TREE

It's not convenient for humans to see beyond what they want to see.... Especially if they plan to eat the animal.

GABRIELLE

(Excited) Oh Look! (Pointing)  
There... Beneath the gooseberry bush.... What is she doing that for?

TREE She's dust-bathing, Gabrielle. Chickens like to wallow in the dust and kick it up onto themselves. That's how she keeps herself clean. It's part of her recreation. She's never seen soil before.

GABRIELLE **Excited.** And now!?! Why is she spreading her wing flat on the ground like that?  
**Suddenly anxious.** Don't say she's ill!

TREE Oh, not at all, Gabrielle. These are the first rays of sun she has ever felt in her life. She's sun-bathing, spreading her wings to soak up as much of the sun's warmth as possible.

GABRIELLE **Musing.** She's so beautiful. I'm going to call her Goosie. Because she likes the gooseberry patch. **Pause.** But why did they cut off the end of her beak like that?

TREE Well, you see, Gabrielle, they call her a 'cannibal'. **Pause.** In the battery cage, she can scarcely move, she can't even spread her wings. And there's nothing to peck at. Just wire bars. Like a prison really. And sometimes the frustration gets to her. And she pecks at her cage-mates. Sometimes she draws blood and she pecks more and more. That's why they burn off the end of her beak – so that it is blunt. After all, she's not going to need her beak to find worms and seeds and grass in a battery cage, is she!

GABRIELLE

But why don't they let her be free so that she can peck at the grass and scratch for worms? So that she can dust-bath and sunbathe. So that she can be what she is..... Why?

TREE

Well, in human terms that wouldn't make good economic sense. In the cages, all the chickens' energy is put into laying eggs instead of walking and running and foraging. That way you get more eggs.

GABRIELLE

**(Thoughtfully)** Maybe I'd turn into a cannibal too if I was imprisoned my whole life. Is it right, Tree? Is it right to imprison an animal? Imagine if we put my budgie in a cage so small that he couldn't even stretch his wings... That would be cruel, wouldn't it?

TREE

Yes, I believe it would be cruel, Gabrielle. But I'm not one of your kind. And your kind rules the world. They could cut me down tomorrow if they liked.

**(CATERPILLAR RECOILS IN HORROR AND THE BIRD TWITTERS AND FLAPS NERVOUSLY)**

Go, Gabrielle. Go ask the great minds of your own kind to find your answers.

**SCENE CLOSES AS LIGHTS DIM.**

## SCENE THREE

LIGHT REMAINS DIM BUT THE SPOTLIGHT SHINES ONTO THE FACES OF EACH OF THE FOLLOWING IN TURN AS IT BECOMES THEIR TURN TO SPEAK.

GABRIELLE

You're a man of God, Reverend. Did God mean for us to treat His beautiful creation like this? Did He mean for us to take away from them the basic gifts of life like sunshine and soil? Did He?

PRIEST

Well, Gabrielle, there are many people who think God put animals on this earth specifically for our use. But when God gave us dominion over the animals, He did not mean that we should be their masters, and they our slaves. On the contrary, when God gave us dominion over the animals, He meant us to be their guardians. We are God's caretakers, entrusted to care for all of His creation on this beautiful Earth. (See Genesis 1:27 and 28)

IMAM

It is true, Gabrielle. The Qur'an tells us that Allah gave the earth to all living creatures. The holy scriptures show how animals are valued by Allah. Kashf al-Khafa says "All creatures are God's dependants and the most beloved to God, among them, is he who does good to God's dependants."

SANGOMA /  
TRADITIONAL HEALER

It is a strange thing that modern man believes he is superior to all other living things, Gabrielle. The people of old Africa worshipped the great herds; had reverence for them; sang praise songs for all, from the rooster to the goat, from the hyena to the crab.



SANGOMA /  
TRADITIONAL HEALER

In his Praise Song to the rooster, the great African poet Credo Mutwa said:  
*Rooster of roosters*  
*You who wakes me up in the morning before others have awoken*  
*You are my alarm*  
*Bayete!*

(AN OPPORTUNITY FOR OTHER RELIGIONS TO MAKE RELEVANT COMMENTS TOO)

THE STAGE DARKENS FOR A FEW MOMENTS.

A COURT SCENE LIGHTS UP:

GABRIELLE

Your Honour, is it cruel to put animals into tiny cages where they can't even walk forward – or backwards?

JUDGE

(With an air of authority) To answer this question, we need to study the law.

(JUDGE TAKES OUT A BIG BOOK AND QUOTES FROM IT WITH AN AIR OF WISDOM, USING HIS FINGER TO POINT TO RELEVANT PASSAGES).

According to the law, we may not maim an animal. We may not keep an animal in inadequate space. We may not cause an animal unnecessary suffering.

GABRIELLE

(Impassioned).

But we are doing ALL of those things to her. Why doesn't the law protect her? Why?

JUDGE

Call the witnesses to testify!

FARMER BROWN COMES ON STAGE, LOOKING FORLORN.

JUDGE

What is your name?

FARMER BROWN

Farmer Brown, your Honour.

JUDGE

(Accusingly) Why do you keep your chickens in these conditions?

(Judge indicates the battery cage containing chickens)

FARMER BROWN

Because, your Honour, the supermarkets want farmers to supply food at the cheapest possible price! And battery farming is the cheapest possible way to produce eggs.

JUDGE

Next witness!

FARMER BROWN WALKS OFF AND SUPERMARKET MANAGER WALKS ON,  
LOOKING SELF-CONSCIOUS.

JUDGE Are you the manager of a supermarket?

SUPERMARKET MANAGER I am, your Honour.

JUDGE Why do you ask the farmers to produce eggs in the cheapest possible way?

SUPERMARKET MANAGER **(Defensively)** It's not my fault, your Honour. It's the consumers who want cheap eggs! And if I don't give them what they want, they'll go to another supermarket, and I'll go out of business!

JUDGE Next witness!

### THE SUPERMARKET MANAGER WALKS OFF AND A HOUSEWIFE WALKS ON

JUDGE Are you a housewife?

HOUSEWIFE **(Confidently)** I am, your Honour.

JUDGE The supermarket manager says you want eggs at the cheapest possible price. Is this true?

HOUSEWIFE Yes, of course, your Honour. That way I have more money to spend on other things and to buy my Lotto ticket each week!

JUDGE

(Shaking his head in confusion)

It seems to me, Gabrielle, that it's at least partly your fault.

After all, you're a consumer too, aren't you?

**GABRIELLE LOOKS PERPLEXED. THE JUDGE WALKS OFF.  
THE STAGE DARKENS FOR A FEW MOMENTS.**

**A GROUP OF STREET CHILDREN APPEAR.  
THE FOLLOWING DIALOGUE IS SHARED BETWEEN THEM:**

STREET CHILDREN

What about us, Gabrielle?

My stomach isn't full. My stomach is empty.

Please give us some money so we can eat.

Don't you care about us, Gabrielle?

We have no home. We sleep under the bridge at night.

Why do you worry about the chickens, Gabrielle, when we are suffering?

Why don't you worry about us, Gabrielle?



THE STREET CHILDREN WALK OFF. THE STAGE DARKENS FOR A FEW MOMENTS.

PHILOSOPHER IS SITTING ON STAGE AMID A NUMBER OF BOOKS.

GABRIELLE

**(Distressed)** They say you're a philosopher... that you study the truths about life. I can't explain why all my joy has gone. Can you help me understand so that I can get it back? Can you help me to forget all the chickens in the battery shed that I left behind? Can you help me put warmth and hope into the lives of the street children?

PHILOSOPHER

**(Compassionately)** Gabrielle, you have learned a great truth. Injustice to any form of life is demeaning of us. It takes away the very essence of our humanity. It takes away our dignity, our pride, our joy. We lose our self-respect. We must fight injustice on all fronts. The street children have the right to education and shelter and food and dignity as surely as the animals also have the right to be treated with respect and decency. We cannot justify cruelty to chickens because we have not yet solved all the other challenges which we face. Nor can we justify cruelty because it produces cheap eggs. Fight for justice everywhere on this beautiful earth, Gabrielle, so that you can help mankind become God's triumph, not His mistake.

THE STAGE DARKENS

## SCENE FOUR

GABRIELLE IS SITTING IN THE SHADE OF THE GREAT TREE ONCE AGAIN.  
THE STREET CHILDREN SIT WITH HER.

GABRIELLE

(Laughing) Come Goosie, come and share my sandwich.

(SHE STRETCHES OUT HER HAND TO GIVE GOOSIE A PECK OF HER SANDWICH. SHE GIGGLES)

Do you see that, Tree? Do you see how she comes running when she sees me?  
Do you see how much she's enjoying life?

THE TREE SWAYS IN AGREEMENT WHILE ONE OR TWO OF THE STREET CHILDREN  
ALSO BREAK OFF PIECES OF THEIR SANDWICHES TO OFFER GOOSIE.

TREE

I see, Gabrielle. And at night I enjoy having her roost in my branches (PAUSE).  
Did you find the answers to your questions?

GABRIELLE

The philosopher told me that I should fight for justice for all of life, Tree.

TREE

And will you?

GABRIELLE

I will, Tree. But who will listen? My voice is so small. Who will even hear it?

TREE

Yet, for Goosie and her kind, and all the other animals, your voices are their only hope. Use your voices, children. Shout it from the mountains, sing it in the streets. Already, many people have heard you. **(THE TREE INDICATES THE AUDIENCE)**. And if they use their voices too.... **(EXCITEDLY)** then others will hear them and so it will go on until all the world knows. Children, there's no limit to what we can achieve!

GABRIELLE

**(SMILING)** You're right, Tree. **(SHE LIFTS GOOSIE ONTO A BRANCH OF THE TREE)**. Let's sing it from the branches....

THE ENTIRE CAST

**GATHERS TO SING/SAY THE FOLLOWING VERSE**

*Let us set the animals free  
So we can live in harmony  
Though they're hidden away from sight  
Let us help them find the light  
For sun and soil are not ours alone  
They're there to share with all that roam  
Let us set the animals free  
So we can live in harmony  
And then, my friends, and then we'll find  
There is glory in being mankind.*

**SCENE CLOSAS AS PICTURE ON BACKDROP CHANGES AND SAYS:  
'PLEASE BUY FREE-RANGE PRODUCTS'**