

**Missouri Assessment Program
Spring 2006**

Communication Arts

Released Items

Grade 5

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Directions

This article is about a job that some boys have in an African village. Read the article. Then answer Numbers 1 through 6.

Boys vs Baboons

by Cecil Dzwowa

In Zimbabwe,¹ where I live, corn is the staple food crop for most people. We call it *maize*. For farmers who live in the countryside, selling maize is the only way of earning money.

Farmers hope for good rainfall, because a poor harvest can be a serious problem. But dry weather is not the only cause of poor harvests. Maize also happens to be the favorite food of certain wild monkeys that live nearby: baboons.

In the countryside, baboons sometimes raid maize fields. Only thirty baboons can wipe out most of a crop. As they eat, they also bring down much of the crop as they fight and chase one another.

Most farmers can't afford fences. Instead, it is the duty of boys to frighten away the baboons.

Farai, Tabi, and Simon

When I visited the village of Nyajena in southern Zimbabwe, three of these boys—Farai, Tabi, and Simon—were taking their turn in the fields.

¹**Zimbabwe:** an inland country in the southern part of Africa



Teams of boys must take turns so they can also go to school. In the countryside, there are many kids but very few schools. Most schools hold two sessions each day to teach all the students.

Farai, Tabi, and Simon spend the mornings guarding the fields while the other boys attend school. In the afternoons, other boys guard the fields while Farai, Tabi, and Simon go to school.

I wanted to go along with my new friends and watch them do their job. The team leader, Farai, told me that the morning duty is the most challenging. “Baboons are very active in the morning, so you must wake up before dawn,” he said.

By sunrise the next morning, we were hurrying to the field. The boys carried their most effective weapon, the *tyava* (tih-ah-vah), or boom-stick. This is a stick with a bark rope tied to one end. It can produce a frightening *pow! pow! pow!* sound when a boy strikes it on the ground.

By the time we arrived, we could hear the baboons barking on the nearby hills. We sat under a tree and waited. On the summit² of a hill, the troop came into view. It consisted of about twenty adult baboons and a number of babies that rode on their mothers' backs.

The baboons did not seem to notice us as they fought among themselves. They disappeared into the thickets on their way to the fields.

A Raid Begins

Within a few minutes, some of the baboons were at the edge of the field eating the maize. The boys seemed to be excited, but I knew they were nervous and aware of the important task ahead. They picked up their boom-sticks. "One, two, three!" Farai shouted to the other boys. In unison the three boys struck their boom-sticks on the ground: *pow! pow! pow!* The sound was so loud that it hurt my ears.

²**summit:** highest part of a hill

The sound caught the baboons by surprise, and most of them ran up the hills. We laughed with excitement, and the boys high-fived each other.

Some of the animals ran away only after snatching a few ears of maize. One of the large males walked away as if nothing had happened. The boys had given this baboon the nickname Nharo (nih-hah-row), which means "stubborn." Baboons live and hunt in the same area for a long time. So the boys could easily identify the various baboons by their scars, size, or (in the case of Nharo) a limp.

That day the boys won. However, some days the fields can be raided by so many noisy baboons that the boom-sticks do not work. Then the boys call for help from the adults.

Respect for Baboons

Even with the baboons' mischief, the villagers do not hurt or kill them. After all, the monkeys rarely attack humans. In fact, in this culture, baboons are regarded as sacred animals.

Farai and his friends are young, but their task is big. Without boys to protect the maize, many villages would face months of food shortage. To these villages, the work of these boys is as important as good rainfall.

1 How does the reader know the author of “Boys vs Baboons” probably gives information that is true?

- The author is an expert on maize.
- The author teaches at the village school.
- The author lives in Africa and studies baboons.
- The author lives in Zimbabwe and has visited the village.

2 What is one responsibility of Farai, team leader of the Zimbabwe boys?

- to make the *tyava*, or boom-stick
- to make all the boys get up on time
- to make sure the boys get to school on time
- to make sure the boys use the sticks in unison

3

What is the farmers' main problem with the maize crop? What is the farmers' solution to the problem? Use information from the article in your answer.

Problem: _____

Solution: _____

4

Name two ways the *tyava*, or boom-stick, is a good tool for the boys to use. Use information from the article in your response.

1. _____

2. _____

5

What are two reasons schools in the villages of the Zimbabwe countryside hold two sessions each day? Use information from the article in your answer.

1. _____

2. _____

Go On ►

6 The boys who guard the corn show characteristics of being both brave and responsible. Complete the chart with one example from the article of how the boys are brave and one example of how they are responsible. Be sure to add labels to the chart.

The Boys Who Guard the Fields

Label: _____	Label: _____
Brave	_____ _____ _____
Responsible	_____ _____ _____

