

## Ono and Rene



The true story of two children from the Democratic Republic of  
Congo.

"Look out, the weirdo is coming!"



Ono knows why the other kids in the neighborhood call him weird. Often he falls asleep watching them play because he is so tired from fishing all night. The other kids always tease him.



One of them yells, "Let's go play in the river!"

Ono follows, hoping they will let him swim with them. But then, another child yells, "No, Ono, you know we don't want you to come. You're so dirty, you'll make the river dirty!"

All of the other kids laugh. Ono hangs his head. It's true that he doesn't bathe very often, but he has so much to do helping his family.

As Ono is walking home, he sees some boys playing soccer.

"Jambo!"\* one of the boys calls. But Ono knows that all the other kids do is make fun of him, so he keeps on walking.

\*Jambo: hello in the language of Swahili.

Ono is twelve years old. He lives with his two brothers, his sister, and his mother in a small mud house that's not very solid. Ono's mom is always there to welcome

him when he comes home in the morning from fishing. They all eat together before Ono's mother and his little sister Janda go to sell fruit in the market.

"Here Ono, come eat. I made you manioc."\*

"It's really yummy," adds Janda.

\*manioc: a plant whose roots are used to make flour.



That night the fishing was not good. In this case, he must find other work during the day. Ono goes to the carters and offers to help with unloading of sugarcane.

When he finishes, Ono heads back home. He's happy to have earned a little money to help support his family.

From far away he recognizes the boy he had seen the other day. Ono didn't know him, but the other day the boy said hi to him and Ono did the same, but didn't dare to stop.

This time Ono decides to stop. He's a little bit afraid. Maybe today the other boy won't even talk to him. But when he sees Ono he smiles.

"Jambo, my name is Ono, and you?"

"Jambo, my name is Rene."



Ono's eyes sparkle when he sees the soccer ball that Rene's holding.

"The ball isn't mine. It belongs to my Tabori group, the Star Kids. I'm just in charge of the ball," explains Rene. "Would you like to play?"

Ono is surprised. It's the first time another kid has invited him to play. But he doesn't wait for long before saying yes and the two boys start playing. After a while, Rene picks up the ball and says,

"It's really hot! Let's go down to the river together."

Ono is happy to follow his new friend. Swimming in the Chula River is one of the children's favorite games around here.

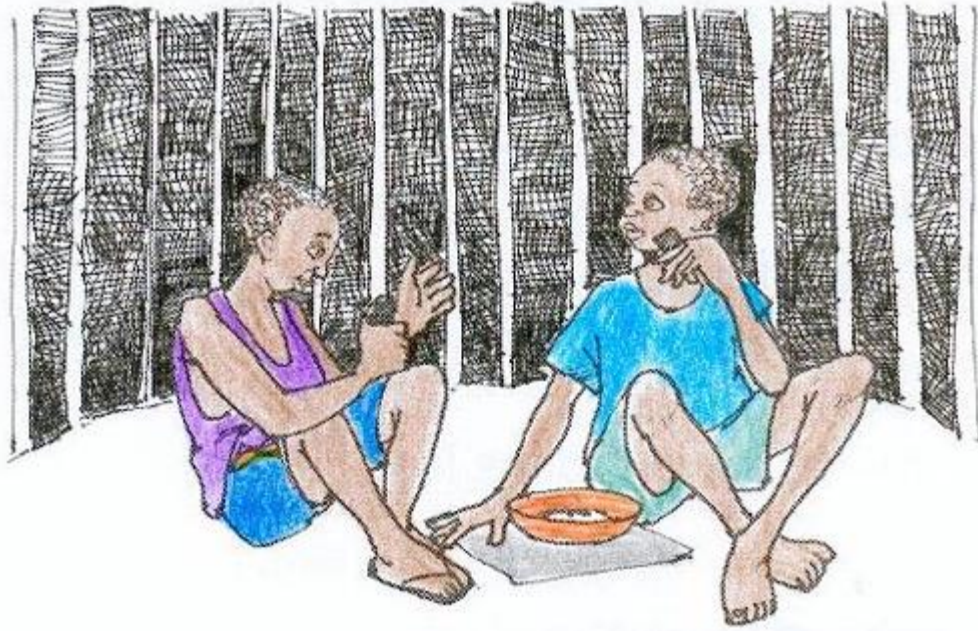
After his night of fishing, Ono keeps two fish that he gives to Rene. Rene takes them with a big smile.

"So how was the fishing last night?"

"I didn't catch much. The fish that I try to catch don't come out when the moon is too bright."

Rene cleans and cooks the fish. He goes and gets some leftover manioc and they eat together. Ono feels good with his new friend.





A week later, Ono is putting mortar\* on the walls of his house. He's surprised to see Rene walking slowly toward him on the muddy path. He told Rene where he lived, but he didn't know if Rene would dare to visit him here.

"Jambo Ono! Do want to come to the Star Kids meeting on Saturday?"

Ono isn't sure. What if the other kids don't want him there? But then Rene says, "You know, I used to think I was the most unhappy kid in the world. My head was filled with all my worries. But with the Star Kids I read the story of a child from Guatemala who had a hard life. He didn't have a lot of time to play, but he was proud to be able to help his family. This story gave me courage. I learned that

when we get together, we can work out our difficulties. You'll see too if you come to the meeting with me."

Ono is still nervous, but he agrees to go.

\*mortar: a mixture of sand and mud that hardens as it dries



On Saturday Ono gets ready very early. Rene comes to get him and they leave together. His mother has a big smile as she watches Rene and her son disappear into the distance.

Janda wants to go too, but she's still too young.

The meeting starts. Rene introduces Ono to the fifty other children there. Everyone claps for him. Everyone has a chance to talk. Ono is surprised to hear them tell about what they do to help their friends and families. He pays good attention as Imani tells about what he did to help his friend Mwindo to rebuild his house. The adult facilitator even asks Ono what he thinks. At the end everyone sings together, while clapping to the beat. Ono is very satisfied with the day.

A few years later... Ono is a teenager now. He comes regularly with Janda to the Star Kids group.

Today the children and teenagers decided to clean the fountains in the neighborhood. Rene, who is now a facilitator of the group, explains to the children, "It's important to have clean fountains so that the water we use isn't polluted."





Right away all the children get to work. Ono takes a shovel and starts to clean out the canals. It's hard work but Ono is strong. When the parents see their children, they pick up their tools too and finish the jobs the children aren't strong enough to do.

A boy walks up. It's Patient and he wants to help. But the other children yell, "Go away, you maibobo!\*"

Right away Ono gathers all the children around him.

\*maibobo: a name used for children who live in the street.



"When I was your age, no one wanted to play with me. The other kids said I was crazy. Only Rene believed in me. He brought me to the Star Kids group."

The children look at each other in surprise. Ono makes them all laugh and he's just like a big brother to them. They never would have thought that he could have been left out by the others.

They turn back to Patient, who's about to leave. He looks sad. One of the girls holds out a spade to him and asks him to help.

It's the end of the day and all of the children are going home. They're tired but happy after this day of working together.

Ono and Rene go over to Janda and her friend, Samouka. They noticed that the two young children are having a hard time walking. Ono and Rene look at each other and say:



**"Come here and climb up on our backs. We'll bring you home."**

Did you read the story about Ono and Rene?

What did you think about this story?