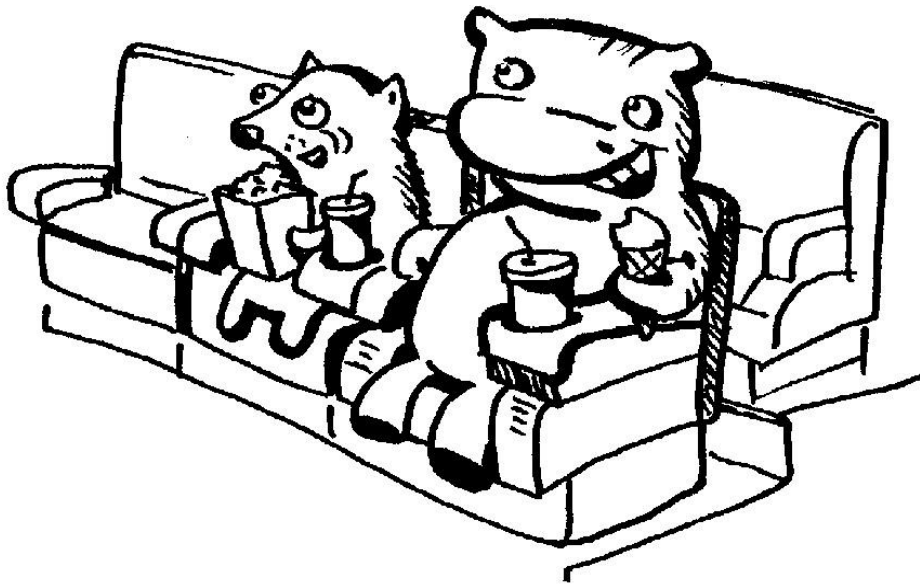


### Story 3. The Prodigal Hippopotamus



Happypotamus had two sons. The younger son was named Hippy and his elder brother was Hoppy. Happypotamus loved her two sons and they worked happily together on the farm. As harvest time neared, the work would get harder and longer and at the end of the day they would go to bed early – very tired.

One day after a very busy harvest, Hippy was grumpy; he'd been thinking about it for a long time. Now he'd made up his mind. After dinner he stood up, looked at his mother, and said, "I'm leaving. I'm tired of working on the farm. I'm going to live in the big city. It's boring here – I want to have fun."

Happypotamus was shocked. "Aren't you happy living on the farm?" she asked.

"I'm not happy," replied Hippy. "The work is too hard and there's no fun. I want to have fun."

"But if you leave, Hoppy will have to work much harder – and so will I," said Happypotamus looking very sad.

"Too bad. I've made up my mind. I'm going," said Hippy. "I'm going tomorrow. I'm going to the city where I'll have lots of friends, get rich, wear the best clothes and have fun – day and night. No more dirty farm work for me. I'm not coming back."

"But you have no money. How will you survive?" asked Happypotamus.

"I'm never coming back so give me all the money you promised to give me when I get older. I want it now. All of it - now" said Hippy. He looked straight into his mother's sad eyes. How could she say no?

Next day Happypotamus went to the bank to get the money for Hippy. She gave it all to him. He took it without looking at her, stuffed it in his pocket and went on packing his bag. It was a large sum of money but Hippy didn't even say 'thank you'.

The next morning Happypotamus and Hoppy were so sad as they waved goodbye to Hippy as he walked down the dusty road to catch the bus to the city. Hippy didn't even turn to wave goodbye.

"I'll never see my son again," sobbed Happypotamus. That night she cried herself to sleep.

When Hippy arrived at the big city, he met an old friend - Wombrat. They set about having a good time. They had lots to eat – chocolate – potato chips - lemonade and plenty of other junk food. Hippy always paid for the food but Wombrat ate most of it. At night they would go to the movies – popcorn – chocolates – choc-top icecreams. Hippy always paid.

*Each day Happypotamus would go out to the front gate and look down the road hoping to see Hippy coming home.*

Hippy was so happy as he ate more and more junk food. Wombrat was always by his side, eating most of the food. They were both getting fat – very fat.

"I'm so pleased I met you. We'll be friends forever," said Wombrat as he chewed on a chocolate bar Hippy had bought him. Together they went to see another movie. As usual Hippy bought the popcorn, the chocolates and the choc-top icecream. As usual Wombrat ate the most.

*The next day, each day, every day Happypotamus looked down the road. Each day, every day she was sad. There was no sign of Hippy.*

Day by day, Hippy's money became less and less. He sold the expensive car he had bought so that he could still have a good time; junk food, movies and ice skating. Hippy bought less and less food for himself but Wombrat always ate the same amount. Hippy was getting hungrier and thinner each day but he did not want to tell his friend that his money was running out.

One day Hippy and Wombrat went to the movies. "You'll have to pay for the tickets today," said Hippy. "And you'll have to buy the popcorn, the chocolate and the choc-top icecream. I've spent all my money."

"Spent it all? Nothing left? Spent every cent? Nothing left at all?" Wombrat spoke in a very cross voice.

"No money at all. I have no money left. Wombrat, you are my friend, so now you'll have to pay," replied Hippy sadly.

"Me pay?! No way. You've gotta be joking! What sort of friend are you? If you've got no money, I've got no time for you." Wombrat pushed to the front of the queue and bought one ticket, one bag of popcorn, one box of chocolates and one choc-top icecream. As he went into the movies he called out to Hippy, "Tomorrow I'll find a real friend. One who doesn't run out of money."

"What will I do now?" Hippy asked himself. "I have no money, no work, no friends and nowhere to sleep. I'll have to sleep out in the cold. I'll have to beg for my food. I'll probably die."

Two weeks later, Hippy was feeling very sick and was very very hungry. "What will I do?" he pondered. After a while he thought of the only solution. "I know. I'll go home to the farm and I will say to my mother that I'm sorry."

Early next morning, a very hungry, very thin and very sad Hippy began the long walk home. He had no money for the bus fare.

*Later that day Happypotamus, as usual, looked down the road to see if Hippy was coming home. The bus stopped but Hippy did not get off. Hoppy said, "Mum. You're wasting your time. Hippy is not coming home. Let's just get on with our work and forget about him."*

"Wait!" said Happypotamus her voice trembling. "What is that I see in the distance? Walking. Can it be? Will it be? Is it? Yes! It is! It is my son."

Most people think that a big animal like Happypotamus would not be able to run, but Happypotamus ran so fast that in no time at all she was beside Hippy giving him the biggest hug she'd ever given.

Hippy shook himself free from his mother's hug and said, "Mother I have been very bad and very silly. I'm not good enough to be your son. Please give me a job as one of your servants. I'll sweep the barns and eat the left-over vegetables that are not good enough to go to market. And I'll sleep in the chicken coop."

"Nonsense, nonsense. Absolute nonsense!" said a very excited Happypotamus. "You are my son. I will always love you. You are special. You will live in my house once more and eat the same food as Hoppy and me. Now let me get you some clean clothes."

To Hoppy she said, "Go and get his room ready for him. Prepare that very special food that we've been keeping for an important occasion. Lots of our very best cabbages. Tell the other animals we're having a party. Phone Cupine, Crocosmile, Dog and Geelaugh. Tell them to come to a huge party – to celebrate Hippy's return. We'll have the happiest party ever. Wombrat is on holiday in the city so don't call him."

"I don't deserve a party," said Hippy, his head bowed low. "I don't deserve anything."

"Nonsense, nonsense, nonsense," said Happypotamus. "You are my son and I will always love you."

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## **Source Notes and Discussion**

### **Story 3. The Prodigal Hippyopotamus**

#### **Parable of The Prodigal Son: Luke 15: 11 - 32**

This story closely follows the spirit of the Bible parable but in the interests of a "happy ending" the Bible emphasis on the reaction of the elder brother is not mentioned. Children could be asked - "Would Hoppy have been pleased that his brother returned home?" Discussion should not focus on Wombrat's infidelity (he can't help it) but on Happypotamus' forgiveness.