"The Strongest One" is a play based on a Zuni folktale. The Zunis are Native Americans of the Southwest who live in pueblos. Pueblos are compact villages made up of multistoried buildings of adobe brick and beams. The Zunis’ pueblo, which is also called Zuni, is located in present-day New Mexico. The Zunis and the other pueblo people developed a way to grow their crops in the dry lands of the Southwest and are regarded as very sophisticated farmers.

The Zuni people are famous for their ceremonies, which are designed to give thanks to all living things.

Scene 1: Inside the Ants’ Hole

On a darkened stage, the ants crouch together.

Narrator: Little Red Ant lived in a hole under the Big Rock with all of its relatives. It often wondered about the world outside: Who in the world was the strongest one of all? One day in late spring Little Red Ant decided to find out.

Little Red Ant: I am going to find out who is strongest. I am going to go outside and walk around.

Second Ant: Be careful! We ants are very small. Something might step on you.

Third Ant: Yes, we are the smallest and weakest ones of all.

Fourth Ant: Be careful, it is dangerous out there!

Little Red Ant: I will be careful. I will find out who is strongest. Maybe the strongest one can teach us how to be stronger.

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multistoried: having many floors or levels
adobe: building material made of clay and straw hardened in the sunlight
brick: block of hard clay used as building material
beams: long, thick pieces of wood used to make buildings
sophisticated: ahead in development, complex
crouch: bend down at the knees

Reading Check

1. Recall facts. What is this play based on?
2. Compare and contrast. How is Little Red Ant different from the other ants?
Scene 2: The Mesa

Ant walks back and forth onstage.

9  Narrator: So Little Red Ant went outside and began to walk around. But as Little Red Ant walked, the snow began to fall. Snow walks onstage.

10  Little Red Ant: Ah, my feet are cold. This snow makes everything freeze. Snow must be the strongest. I will ask. Snow, are you the strongest of all?

11  Snow: No, I am not the strongest.

12  Little Red Ant: Who is stronger than you?

13  Snow: Sun is stronger. When Sun shines on me, I melt away. Here it comes!

As Sun walks onstage, Snow hurries offstage.

14  Little Red Ant: Ah, Sun must be the strongest. I will ask. Sun, are you the strongest of all?

15  Sun: No, I am not the strongest.

16  Little Red Ant: Who is stronger than you?

17  Sun: Wind is stronger. Wind blows the clouds across the sky and covers my face. Here it comes!

As Wind comes onstage, Sun hurries offstage with face covered in hands.

18  Little Red Ant: Wind must be the strongest. I will ask. Wind, are you the strongest of all?

19  Wind: No, I am not the strongest.

20  Little Red Ant: Who is stronger than you?

21  Wind: House is stronger. When I come to House, I cannot move it. I must go elsewhere. Here it comes!

As House walks onstage, Wind hurries offstage.

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mesa: flat-topped hill with steeply sloping sides
elsewhere: some other place
Little Red Ant: House must be the strongest. I will ask.
House, are you the strongest of all?

House: No, I am not the strongest.

Little Red Ant: Who is stronger than you?

House: Mouse is stronger. Mouse comes and gnaws holes in me. Here it comes!

As Mouse walks onstage, House hurries offstage.

Little Red Ant: Mouse must be the strongest. I will ask.
Mouse, are you the strongest of all?

Mouse: No, I am not the strongest.

Little Red Ant: Who is stronger than you?

Mouse: Cat is stronger. Cat chases me, and if Cat catches me, Cat will eat me. Here it comes!

As Cat walks onstage, Mouse hurries offstage, squeaking.

Little Red Ant: Cat must be the strongest. I will ask. Cat, are you the strongest of all?

Cat: No, I am not the strongest.

Little Red Ant: Who is stronger than you?

Cat: Stick is stronger. When Stick hits me, I run away. Here it comes!

As Stick walks onstage, Cat hurries offstage, meowing.

Little Red Ant: Stick must be the strongest. I will ask. Stick, are you the strongest of all?

Stick: No, I am not the strongest.

gnaws bites at something over a period of time
squeaking making a sharp, high-pitched sound that is not very loud

Reading Check
1. Recall facts Who does House say is the strongest?
2. Recall facts What does Mouse do when Cat walks on stage?
3. Understand cause and effect Why does Cat say that Stick is stronger?
Little Red Ant: Who is stronger than you?

Stick: Fire is stronger. When I am put into Fire, Fire burns me up! Here it comes!

As Fire walks onstage, Stick hurries offstage.

Little Red Ant: Fire must be the strongest. I will ask. Fire, are you the strongest of all?

Fire: No, I am not the strongest.

Little Red Ant: Who is stronger than you?

Fire: Water is stronger. When Water is poured on me, it kills me. Here it comes!

As Water walks onstage, Fire hurries offstage.

Little Red Ant: Water must be the strongest. I will ask. Water, are you the strongest of all?

Water: No, I am not the strongest.

Little Red Ant: Who is stronger than you?

Water: Deer is stronger. When Deer comes, Deer drinks me. Here it comes!

As Deer walks onstage, Water hurries offstage.

Little Red Ant: Deer must be the strongest. I will ask. Deer, are you the strongest of all?

Deer: No, I am not the strongest.

Little Red Ant: Who is stronger than you?

Deer: Arrow is stronger. When Arrow strikes me, it can kill me. Here it comes!

*arrow* long thin piece of wood, metal, or plastic with a point at one end and feathers at the other
As Arrow walks onstage, Deer runs offstage with leaping bounds.

50 Little Red Ant: Arrow must be the strongest. I will ask. Arrow, are you the strongest of all?
51 Arrow: No, I am not the strongest.
52 Little Red Ant: Who is stronger than you?
53 Arrow: Big Rock is stronger. When I am shot from the bow and I hit Big Rock, Big Rock breaks me.
54 Little Red Ant: Do you mean the same Big Rock where the Red Ants live?
55 Arrow: Yes, that is Big Rock. Here it comes!

As Big Rock walks onstage, Arrow runs offstage.

56 Little Red Ant: Big Rock must be the strongest. I will ask. Big Rock, are you the strongest of all?
57 Big Rock: No, I am not the strongest.
58 Little Red Ant: Who is stronger than you?
59 Big Rock: You are stronger. Every day you and the other Red Ants come and carry little pieces of me away. Someday I will be all gone.

Scene 3: The Ants’ Hole

Narrator: So Little Red Ant went back home and spoke to the ant people.
The ants crouch together on the darkened stage.

60 Second Ant: Little Red Ant has returned.
61 Third Ant: He has come back alive!
62 Fourth Ant: Tell us about what you have learned. Who is the strongest of all?
63 Little Red Ant: I have learned that everything is stronger than something else. And even though we ants are small, in some ways we are the strongest of all.