

Selected Fables

By Aesop

About Words

Animal stories have been in existence since the beginning of literary history. In fact, some of the earliest tales in the world involve animals. These stories are so indelibly engraved in the human psyche and language, that we express truth about the world through them without realizing it. So many of the sayings and idioms that have come into the English language, for instance, are attributed to Aesop, whose fables involve personified animals and their experiences. Below are some of them. Do you know what stories they are from and more importantly, do you know what the sayings mean?

IDIOMS FROM AESOP'S FABLES

look before you leap

borrowed feathers

sour grapes

boy who cried wolf

Questions for Class Discussion

1. What is the message communicated by “The Archer and the Lion”? Can you think of a situation in modern American political or social life that this fable illustrates?
2. What kind of people do the goat and the wolf represent in the fable “The Wolf and the Goat”? Are there any situations in your own life that this fable aptly illustrate? Have you ever acted the goat or wolf?
3. The words of the crane literally apply to the peacock but figuratively can apply to human beings. Restate the crane’s statement so that it reads as a general maxim or saying.
4. What is the general message communicated by “The Moon and Her Mother”? What is an incident in history or your own life that illustrates its moral?
5. What is the general message communicated by “The Hares and the Frogs”? Do you believe that the animals chosen are apt figures for what is being expressed? If not, what animals would you have chosen?
6. “The Wolf and the Crane” concerns expected favors from doing good toward those who are cruel or unprincipled. Do you agree with the message communicated in the fable?
7. What is the moral of “The Lion and the Mouse”? Write down an incident in history or your own life that illustrates its moral.
8. The moral of “The Sheep and the Pig” is that often we give advice to those whose situation is very different from ours own. Another lesson possibly taught by the fable is

that often we look down on others, thinking that we are behaving more uprightly, when in fact our situation is very different. Think of a current history going on in your own community or abroad in which one individual is giving advice or admonishment to others, when in fact they are not in a position of giving either advice or admonishment.

9. Suppose the fable “The Frogs Who Wished for a King” were an allegory and not a fable. Who in history or your own experience would the frogs represent? Jupiter?
10. What are some characteristics that are common to all or most of the fables that you have read? What role do you think that these fables have in modern day? Do you think that they are applicable counsel for modern living? How do you think that they can be used for our writing or our public speaking?

Literary Terms: Fable

A fable is a short story in which animals or inanimate objects appear as characters and often talk and behave as humans do. The essential message is suggested by the details of the story and the traits of the animal characters. In Aesop’s Fables, the stories are like parables and the messages often form life proverbs, which are some of the oldest forms of literature in both Western and Eastern cultures. One attractive feature of the fables is their immediacy; readers immediately recognize the kinds of people represented by the animals and can apply the situations the animals find themselves in to situations in real life. Another attractive feature is the profound but very practical truth the fable expresses, which may be verified by ordinary human experience.

Writing Exercises

1. Write a short fable of your own which expresses a truth that you learned from experience. Be sure to choose your animals or inanimate objects carefully. At the end of your parable write down the message that you are trying to communicate.
2. In about one paragraph, write about a current problem in your own family, community, the nation, or the world. Describe the cause of the problem and then apply one of the fables that you have just read, or one that you know, to the situation. Here are some examples: the national debt and politicians’ seeming unconcern; the abandonment of traditional values and public morals and people’s fear of speaking up lest they appear to prudish; peers who like to boast of or show off their wealth, attractive appearance, or talents.

Mother Holle

By Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm

About Words

There are many words that have gone out of common usage merely because they refer to antiquated technology. With the fairytale Mother Holle you will be transported back in time when the *shuttle*, a type of device that was used in weaving, was a common household fixture. Another antiquated domestic device is the *distaff*, which is a wooden tool used for holding the wool that is being spun into yarn.

Multiple Choice Reading Questions

1. Why is the stepdaughter said to be the “Cinderella of the house” (paragraph 1)?
 - a) She is pretty.
 - b) She is industrious.
 - c) She is a step-daughter.
 - d) She looks a lot like Cinderella.
 - e) She is forced to do all the work.
2. Which of the following is NOT true regarding the step-daughter’s going down into the well?
 - a) She went down into the well to get a shuttle which had fallen.
 - b) A punishment turns out to be a reward.
 - c) She was in fact glad to go down into the well as she was she was looking for a better place to live.
 - d) It was a cruel request of the stepmother.
 - e) The stepdaughter jumped in with sadness.
3. Which of the following does NOT describe Mother Holle of the story?
 - a) Her appearance is frightening, but she is kind to the step-daughter.
 - b) She lives in a world inside a well.
 - c) She has magical powers.
 - d) She showed preference to the step-daughter for no apparent reason.
 - e) She punished the lazy daughter.
4. Both the industrious daughter and lazy daughter get blood on the shuttle, go down into the well, and serve Mother Holle. The shared experiences are all used to _____.
 - a) show that something good can turn bad
 - b) contrast their different characters
 - c) emphasize that those things that appear to be evil are really good
 - d) teach that it is by chance that things turn out evil or good

- e) show that Mother Holle was in control of their actions
5. Which of the following are the most obvious foil characters?¹
- a) the stepdaughter and the idle girl
 - b) Mother Holle and the widow
 - c) Mother Holle and the idle girl
 - d) the widow and the idle girl
 - e) the widow and the stepdaughter
6. The lazy daughter's response to the talking bread and apple tree may be best described as ____.
- a) obliging
 - b) astonished
 - c) curious
 - d) insolent
 - e) playful
7. Which of the following is the probable significance of the lazy daughter's lack of fear for Mother Holle?
- a) Despite her laziness, she loved to be helpful.
 - b) Although Mother Holle's teeth were large and frightening, the lazy daughter thought they were made of gold.
 - c) The lazy daughter was not aware how frightful she was.
 - d) The lazy daughter was really kind at heart.
 - e) The lazy daughter had no awareness of her fault and its consequences.
8. The lazy daughter at first does the work for Mother Holle in order to ____.
- a) prove her worthiness
 - b) be good to Mother Holle
 - c) overcome her laziness
 - d) get a reward
 - e) escape the well
9. Which of the following is NOT contrasted in the story?
- a) pitch and showers of gold
 - b) Mother Holle's feathers and Mother Holle's bed
 - c) industry and laziness
 - d) the widow's treatment of her two daughters
 - e) the world outside the well and in the well

¹ Foil characters are those that are very similar but differ in such a way so that the contrast is startling.

10. Which of the following is true regarding the end of the fairytale?

- a) The conclusion suggests that the punishment for the lazy girl was more harsh than she deserved.
- b) The lesson of the story is directly stated.
- c) The conclusion of the story suggests that the good are rewarded while the bad are punished.
- d) The conclusion suggests that the widow changes her attitude toward her stepdaughter.
- e) The lazy girl changes her behavior at the conclusion.

Questions for Class Discussion

1. What are the differences between the two girls in the story? How are these differences recognized or not recognized by the stepmother?
2. The obstacle or problem that faces a character in a work of fiction is called a “conflict.” What is the conflict in this story? What is the magical agency or means by which the conflict is resolved?
3. Write down a description of mother Holle. Why was she frightful to the unfavored girl and not frightful to the favored girl?
4. Why did the favored girl leave Mother Holle? Why did the unfavored girl leave?