

## AESOP'S FABLES

---

**F**ables are short tales that use people, animals, and sometimes inanimate objects to teach a moral lesson. The ancient Greek storyteller Aesop is the most famous teller of fables. Aesop did not directly state the moral when he told his fables, even though later retellings of his work tacked morals onto them. For this reason these versions of Aesop's fables do not have their morals stated. Read them and try to determine what lesson each fable is trying to teach.



**The Fox and the Grapes** A hungry fox saw some fine bunches of grapes hanging from a vine that was trained along a high trellis and did his best to reach them by jumping as high as he could into the air. But it was all in vain, for they were just out of reach. So he gave up trying and walked away with an air of dignity and unconcern, remarking, "I thought those grapes were ripe, but I see now they are quite sour."

**The Goose That Laid the Golden Eggs** A man and his wife had the good fortune to possess a goose which laid a golden egg every day. Lucky though they were, they soon began to think they were not getting rich fast enough, and imagining the bird must be made of gold inside, they decided to kill it in order to secure the whole store of precious metal at once. But when they cut it open they found it was just like any other goose. Thus, they neither got rich all at once, as they hoped, nor enjoyed any longer the daily addition to their wealth.

**The Fox and the Crow** A crow was sitting on a branch of a tree with a piece of cheese in her beak when a fox observed her and set his wits to work to discover some way of getting the cheese. Coming and standing under the tree he looked up and said, "What a noble bird I see above me! Her beauty is without equal, the hue of her plumage exquisite. If only her voice is as sweet as her looks are fair, she ought without doubt to be queen of the birds." The crow was hugely flattered by this, and just to show the fox that she could sing she gave a loud caw. Down came the cheese, of course, and the fox, snatching it up, said, "You have a voice, madam, I see. What you want is wits."

**The Young Crab and His Mother** "Why in the world do you walk sideways like that?" said a Mother Crab to her son. "You should always walk straight forward with your toes turned out." "Show me how to walk, mother dear," answered the little Crab obediently, "I want to learn." So the old Crab tried and tried to walk straight forward. But she could walk sideways only, like her son. And when she wanted to turn her toes out she tripped and fell on her nose.

**The Lion and the Mouse** A lion asleep in his lair was woken up by a mouse running over his face. Losing his temper he seized it with his paw and was about to kill it. The mouse, terrified, piteously entreated him to spare its life. "Please let me go," it cried, "and one day I will repay you for your kindness." The idea of so insignificant a creature ever being able to do anything for him amused the lion so much that he laughed aloud and good-humoredly let it go. But the mouse's chance came, after all. One day the lion got entangled in a net which had been spread for game by some hunters, and the mouse heard and recognized his roars of anger and ran to the spot. Without more ado it set to work to gnaw the ropes with its teeth, and succeeded before long in setting the lion free. "There!" said the mouse, "you laughed at me when I promised I would repay you. But now you see, even a mouse can help a lion."

**The North Wind and the Sun** A dispute arose between the north wind and the sun, each claiming that he was the stronger than the other. At last they agreed to try their powers upon a traveler, to see which could soonest strip him of his cloak. The north wind had the first try; and, gathering up all his force for the attack, he came whirling furiously down upon the man, and caught up his cloak as though he would wrest it from him by one single effort. But the harder he blew, the more closely the man wrapped it round himself. Then came the turn of the sun. At first he beamed gently upon the traveler, who soon unclasped his cloak and walked on with it hanging loosely about his shoulders. Then he shone forth in his full strength, and the man, before he had gone many steps, was glad to throw his cloak right off and complete his journey more lightly clad.

**Belling the Cat** The Mice once called a meeting to decide on a plan to free themselves of their enemy, the Cat. At least they wished to find some way of knowing when she was coming, so they might have time to run away. Indeed, something had to be done, for they lived in such constant fear of her claws that they hardly dared stir from their dens by night or day. Many plans were discussed, but none of them was thought good enough. At last a very young Mouse got up and said: "I have a plan that seems very simple, but I know it will be successful. All we have to do is to hang a bell about the Cat's neck. When we hear the bell ringing we will know immediately that our enemy is coming." All the Mice were much surprised that they had not thought of such a plan before. But in the midst of the rejoicing over their good fortune, an old Mouse arose and said: "I will say that the plan of the young Mouse is very good. But let me ask one question: Who will bell the Cat?"

**The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing** A wolf resolved to disguise himself in order that he might prey upon a flock of sheep without fear of detection. So he clothed himself in a sheepskin and slipped among the sheep when they were out at pasture. He completely deceived the shepherd, and when the flock was penned for the night he was shut in with the rest. But that very night, as it happened, the shepherd, requiring a supply of mutton for the table, laid hands on the wolf in mistake for a sheep, and killed him with his knife on the spot.

**The Wild Boar and the Fox** A Wild Boar was sharpening his tusks busily against the stump of a tree, when a Fox happened by. Now the Fox was always looking for a chance to make fun of

his neighbors. So he made a great show of looking anxiously about, as if in fear of some hidden enemy. But the Boar kept right on with his work. "Why are you doing that?" asked the Fox at last with a grin. "There isn't any danger that I can see." "True enough," replied the Boar, "but when danger does come there will not be time for such work as this. My weapons will have to be ready for use then, or I shall suffer for it."

**The Frogs Asking for a King** Time was when the frogs were discontented because they had no one to rule over them, so they sent a deputation to Zeus to ask him to give them a king. Zeus, despising the folly of their request, cast a log into the pool where they lived, and said that that should be their king. The frogs were terrified at first by the splash and scuttled away into the deepest parts of the pool. But by and by, when they saw that the log remained motionless, one by one they ventured to the surface again, and before long, growing bolder, they began to feel such contempt for it that they even took to sitting upon it. Thinking that a king of that sort was an insult to their dignity, they sent to Zeus a second time and begged him to take away the sluggish king he had given them and to give them another and a better one. Zeus, annoyed at being pestered in this way, sent a stork to rule over them, who no sooner arrived among them than he began to catch and eat the frogs as fast as he could.

**The Boy Who Cried Wolf** There was a Shepherd Boy who tended his sheep at the foot of a mountain near a dark forest. It was lonely for him, so he devised a plan to get a little company. He rushed down towards the village calling out "Wolf, Wolf," and the villagers came out to meet him. This pleased the boy so much that a few days after he tried the same trick, and again the villagers came to his help. Shortly after this a Wolf actually did come out from the forest. The boy cried out "Wolf, Wolf," still louder than before. But this time the villagers, who had been fooled twice before, thought the boy was again lying, and nobody came to his aid. So the Wolf made a good meal off the boy's flock.

**The Lion's Share** A long time ago, the Lion, the Fox, the Jackal, and the Wolf agreed to go hunting together, sharing with each other whatever they found. One day the Wolf ran down a Stag and immediately called his comrades to divide the spoil. Without being asked, the Lion placed himself at the head of the feast to do the carving, and, with a great show of fairness, began to count the guests. "One," he said, counting on his claws, "that is myself the Lion. Two, that's the Wolf, three, is the Jackal, and the Fox makes four." He then very carefully divided the Stag into four equal parts. "I am King Lion," he said, when he had finished, "so of course I get the first part. This next part falls to me because I am the strongest; and this is mine because I am the bravest." He now began to glare at the others very savagely. "If any of you have any claim to the part that is left," he growled, stretching his claws menacingly, "now is the time to speak up."

**The Bee and Zeus** A queen bee from Hymettus flew to Olympus with some fresh honey from the hive as a present to Zeus, who was so pleased with the gift that he promised to give her anything she liked to ask for. She said she would be very grateful if he would give stings to the bees, to kill people who robbed them of their honey. Zeus was greatly displeased with this request, for he loved mankind. But he had given his word, so he said that stings they should

have. The stings he gave them, however, were of such a kind that whenever a bee stings a man the sting is left in the wound, and the bee dies.

**The Man and the Satyr** A man and a satyr became friends and determined to live together. All went well for a while, until one day in wintertime the satyr saw the man blowing on his hands. "Why do you do that?" he asked. "To warm my hands," said the man. That same day when they sat down to supper together, they each had a steaming hot bowl of porridge, and the man raised his bowl to his mouth and blew on it. "Why do you do that?" asked the satyr. "To cool my porridge," said the man. The satyr got up from the table. "Goodbye," said he, "I'm going. I can't be friends with a man who blows hot and cold with the same breath."

**The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse** A Town Mouse once visited a relative who lived in the country. For lunch the Country Mouse served wheat stalks, roots, and acorns, with a dash of cold water for drink. The Town Mouse ate very sparingly, nibbling a little of this and a little of that, and by her manner making it very plain that she ate the simple food only to be polite. After the meal the friends had a long talk, or rather the Town Mouse talked about her life in the city while the Country Mouse listened. They then went to bed in a cozy nest in the hedgerow and slept in quiet and comfort until morning. In her sleep the Country Mouse dreamed she was a Town Mouse with all the luxuries and delights of city life that her friend had described for her. So the next day when the Town Mouse asked the Country Mouse to go home with her to the city, she gladly said yes. When they reached the mansion in which the Town Mouse lived, they found on the table in the dining room the leavings of a very fine banquet. There were sweetmeats and jellies, pastries, delicious cheeses, indeed, the most tempting foods that a Mouse can imagine. But just as the Country Mouse was about to nibble a dainty bit of pastry, she heard a Cat mew loudly and scratch at the door. In great fear the Mice scurried to a hiding place, where they lay quite still for a long time, hardly daring to breathe. When at last they ventured back to the feast, the door opened suddenly and in came the servants to clear the table, followed by the House Dog. The Country Mouse stopped in the Town Mouse's den only long enough to pick up her carpet bag and umbrella. "You may have luxuries and dainties that I have not," she said as she hurried away, "but I prefer my plain food and simple life in the country with the peace and security that go with it."

**The Oak and the Reeds** A Giant Oak stood near a brook in which grew some slender Reeds. When the wind blew, the great Oak stood proudly upright with its hundred arms uplifted to the sky. But the Reeds bowed low in the wind and sang a sad and mournful song. "You have reason to complain," said the Oak. "The slightest breeze that ruffles the surface of the water makes you bow your heads, while I, the mighty Oak, stand upright and firm before the howling tempest." "Do not worry about us," replied the Reeds. "The winds do not harm us. We bow before them and so we do not break. You, in all your pride and strength, have so far resisted their blows. But the end is coming." As the Reeds spoke a great hurricane rushed out of the north. The Oak stood proudly and fought against the storm, while the yielding Reeds bowed low. The wind redoubled in fury, and all at once the great tree fell, torn up by the roots, and lay among the pitying Reeds.

**The Lion and the Three Bulls** Three bulls were grazing in a meadow, and were watched by a lion, who longed to capture and devour them, but who felt that he was no match for the three so long as they kept together. So he began by false whispers and malicious hints to foment jealousies and distrust among them. This stratagem succeeded so well that ere long the bulls grew cold and unfriendly, and finally avoided each other and fed each one by himself apart. No sooner did the lion see this than he fell upon them one by one and killed them in turn.

**The Dog in the Manger** A Dog asleep in a manger filled with hay, was awakened by the Cattle, which came in tired and hungry from working in the field. But the Dog would not let them get near the manger, and snarled and snapped as if it were filled with the best of meat and bones, all for himself. The Cattle looked at the Dog in disgust. "How selfish he is!" said one. "He cannot eat the hay and yet he will not let us eat it who are so hungry for it!" Now the farmer came in. When he saw how the Dog was acting, he seized a stick and drove him out of the stable with many a blow for his selfish behavior.

**The Old Hound** A hound who had served his master well for years, and had run down many a quarry in his time, began to lose his strength and speed owing to age. One day, when out hunting, his master started a powerful wild boar and set the hound at him. The latter seized the beast by the ear, but his teeth were gone, and he could not retain his hold; so the boar escaped. His master began to scold him severely, but the hound interrupted him with these words, "My will is as strong as ever, master, but my body is old and feeble. You ought to honor me for what I have been instead of abusing me for what I am."

**Hercules and the Farmer** A Farmer was driving his wagon along a miry country road after a heavy rain. The horses could hardly drag the load through the deep mud, and at last came to a standstill when one of the wheels sank to the hub in a rut. The farmer climbed down from his seat and stood beside the wagon looking at it but without making the least effort to get it out of the rut. All he did was to curse his bad luck and call loudly on Hercules to come to his aid. Then, it is said, Hercules really did appear, saying: "Put your shoulder to the wheel, man, and urge on your horses. Do you think you can move the wagon by simply looking at it and whining about it? Hercules will not help unless you make some effort to help yourself." And when the farmer put his shoulder to the wheel and urged on the horses, the wagon moved very readily, and soon the Farmer was riding along in great content and with a good lesson learned.

**The Prophet** A prophet sat in the marketplace and told the fortunes of all who cared to engaged his services. Suddenly there came running up one who told him that his house had been broken into by thieves, and that they had made off with everything they could lay hands on. He was up in a moment, and rushed off, tearing his hair and calling down curses upon the miscreants. The bystanders were much amused, and one of them said, "Our friend professes to know what is going to happen to others, but it seems he's not clever enough to perceive what's in store for himself."

**The Eagle, the Cat, and the Wild Sow** An eagle built her nest at the top of a high tree; a cat with her family occupied a hollow in the trunk halfway down; and a wild sow and her young took up their quarters at the foot. They might have got on very well as neighbors had it not been for the evil cunning of the cat. Climbing up to the eagle's nest, she said to the eagle, "You and I are in the greatest possible danger. That dreadful creature, the sow, who is always to be seen grubbing away at the foot of the tree, means to uproot it, that she may devour your family and mine at her ease." Having thus driven the eagle almost out of her senses with terror, the cat climbed down the tree, and said to the sow, "I must warn you against that dreadful bird, the eagle. She is only waiting her chance to fly down and carry off one of your little pigs when you take them out, to feed her brood with." She succeeded in frightening the sow as much as the eagle. Then she returned to her hold in the trunk, from which, feigning to be afraid, she never came forth by day. Only by night did she creep out unseen to procure food for her kittens. The eagle meanwhile was afraid to stir from her nest, and the sow dared not leave her home among the roots; so that in time both they and their families perished of hunger, and their dead bodies supplied the cat with ample food for her growing family.

**The Ants and the Grasshopper** One bright day in late autumn a family of Ants were bustling about in the warm sunshine, drying out the grain they had stored up during the summer, when a starving Grasshopper, his fiddle under his arm, came up and humbly begged for a bite to eat. "What!" cried the Ants in surprise, "haven't you stored anything away for the winter? What in the world were you doing all last summer?" "I didn't have time to store up any food," whined the Grasshopper; "I was so busy making music that before I knew it the summer was gone." The Ants shrugged their shoulders in disgust. "Making music, were you?" they cried. "Very well; now dance!" And they turned their backs on the Grasshopper and went on with their work.

**The Peacock** The Peacock, they say, did not at first have the beautiful feathers in which he now takes so much pride. These, Juno, whose favorite he was, granted to him one day when he begged her for a train of feathers to distinguish him from the other birds. Then, decked in his finery, gleaming with emerald, gold, purple, and azure, he strutted proudly among the birds. All regarded him with envy. Even the most beautiful pheasant could see that his beauty was surpassed. Presently the Peacock saw an Eagle soaring high up in the blue sky and felt a desire to fly, as he had been accustomed to do. Lifting his wings he tried to rise from the ground. But the weight of his magnificent train held him down. Instead of flying up to greet the first rays of the morning sun or to bathe in the rosy light among the floating clouds at sunset, he would have to walk the ground more encumbered and oppressed than any common barnyard fowl.

**The Tuna and the Dolphin** A tuna fish was chased by a dolphin and splashed through the water at a great rate, but the dolphin gradually gained upon him, and was just about to seize him when the force of his flight carried the tuna onto a sandbank. In the heat of the chase the dolphin followed him, and there they both lay out of the water, gasping for dear life. When the tuna saw that his enemy was doomed like himself, he said, "I don't mind having to die now, for I see that he who is the cause of my death is about to share the same fate."

**The Astrologer** A man who lived a long time ago believed that he could read the future in the stars. He called himself an Astrologer, and spent his time at night gazing at the sky. One evening he was walking along the open road outside the village. His eyes were fixed on the stars. He thought he saw there that the end of the world was at hand, when all at once, down he went into a hole full of mud and water. There he stood up to his ears, in the muddy water, and madly clawing at the slippery sides of the hole in his effort to climb out. His cries for help soon brought the villagers running. As they pulled him out of the mud, one of them said: "You pretend to read the future in the stars, and yet you fail to see what is at your feet! This may teach you to pay more attention to what is right in front of you, and let the future take care of itself." "What use is it," said another, "to read the stars, when you can't see what's right here on the earth?"

**The Two Goats** Two Goats, frisking gaily on the rocky steep of a mountain valley, chanced to meet, one on each side of a deep chasm through which poured a mighty mountain torrent. The trunk of a fallen tree formed the only means of crossing the chasm, and on this not even two squirrels could have passed each other in safety. The narrow path would have made the bravest tremble. Not so our Goats. Their pride would not permit either to stand aside for the other. One set her foot on the log. The other did likewise. In the middle they met horn to horn. Neither would give way, and so they both fell, to be swept away by the roaring torrent below.

**The Miser and His Gold** A Miser had buried his gold in a secret place in his garden. Every day he went to the spot, dug up the treasure and counted it piece by piece to make sure it was all there. He made so many trips that a Thief, who had been observing him, guessed what it was the Miser had hidden, and one night quietly dug up the treasure and made off with it. When the Miser discovered his loss, he was overcome with grief and despair. He groaned and cried and tore his hair. A passerby heard his cries and asked what had happened. "My gold! O my gold!" cried the Miser, wildly, "someone has robbed me!" "Your gold! There in that hole? Why did you put it there? Why did you not keep it in the house where you could easily get it when you had to buy things?" "Buy!" screamed the Miser angrily. "Why, I never touched the gold. I couldn't think of spending any of it." The stranger picked up a large stone and threw it into the hole. "If that is the case," he said, "cover up that stone. It is worth just as much to you as the treasure you lost!"

**The Eagle and the Roosters** There were two roosters in the same farmyard, and they fought to decide who should be master. When the fight was over the beaten one went and hid himself in a dark corner, while the victor flew up onto the roof of the stables and crowed lustily. But an eagle espied him from high up in the sky, and swooped down and carried him off. Forthwith the other rooster came out of his corner and ruled the roost without a rival.

**The Farmer and the Stork** A farmer set some traps in a field which he had lately sown with corn, in order to catch the cranes which came to pick up the seed. When he returned to look at his traps, he found several cranes caught and among them a stork, which begged to be let go, and said, "You ought not to kill me. I am not a crane, but a stork, as you can easily see by my

feathers, and I am the most honest and harmless of birds." But the farmer replied, "It's nothing to me what you are. I find you among these cranes who ruin my crops, and, like them, you shall suffer."

**The Milkmaid and Her Pail** A Milkmaid had been out to milk the cows and was returning from the field with the shining milk pail balanced nicely on her head. As she walked along, her pretty head was busy with plans for the days to come. "This good, rich milk," she mused, "will give me plenty of cream to churn. The butter I make I will take to market, and with the money I get for it I will buy a lot of eggs for hatching. How nice it will be when they are all hatched and the yard is full of fine young chicks. Then when May day comes I will sell them, and with the money I'll buy a lovely new dress to wear to the fair. All the young men will look at me. They will come and try to make love to me,—but I shall very quickly send them about their business!" As she thought of how she would settle that matter, she tossed her head scornfully, and down fell the pail of milk to the ground. And all the milk flowed out, and with it vanished butter and eggs and chicks and new dress and all the milkmaid's pride.

**The Dog and His Reflection** A Dog, to whom the butcher had thrown a bone, was hurrying home with his prize as fast as he could go. As he crossed a narrow footbridge, he happened to look down and saw himself reflected in the quiet water as if in a mirror. But the greedy Dog thought he saw a real Dog carrying a bone much bigger than his own. If he had stopped to think he would have known better. But instead of thinking, he dropped his bone and sprang at the Dog in the river, only to find himself swimming for dear life to reach the shore. At last he managed to scramble out, and as he stood sadly thinking about the good bone he had lost, he realized what a stupid Dog he had been.

**The Hare and the Tortoise** A Hare was making fun of the Tortoise one day for being so slow. "Do you ever get anywhere?" he asked with a mocking laugh. "Yes," replied the Tortoise, "and I get there sooner than you think. I'll run you a race and prove it." The Hare was much amused at the idea of running a race with the Tortoise, but for the fun of the thing he agreed. So the Fox, who had consented to act as judge, marked the distance and started the runners off. The Hare was soon far out of sight, and to make the Tortoise feel very deeply how ridiculous it was for him to try a race with a Hare, he lay down beside the course to take a nap until the Tortoise should catch up. The Tortoise meanwhile kept going slowly but steadily, and, after a time, passed the place where the Hare was sleeping. But the Hare slept on very peacefully; and when at last he did wake up, the Tortoise was near the goal. The Hare now ran his swiftest, but he could not overtake the Tortoise in time.

**The Tortoise and the Ducks** The Tortoise, you know, carries his house on his back. No matter how hard he tries, he cannot leave home. They say that Jupiter punished him so, because he was such a lazy stay-at-home that he would not go to Jupiter's wedding, even when especially invited. After many years, Tortoise began to wish he had gone to that wedding. When he saw how gaily the birds flew about and how the Hare and the Chipmunk and all the other animals ran nimbly by, always eager to see everything there was to be seen, the Tortoise felt very sad



and discontented. He wanted to see the world too, and there he was with a house on his back and little short legs that could hardly drag him along. One day he met a pair of Ducks and told them all his trouble. "We can help you to see the world," said the Ducks. "Take hold of this stick with your teeth and we will carry you far up in the air where you can see the whole countryside. But keep quiet or you will be sorry." The Tortoise was very glad indeed. He seized the stick firmly with his teeth, the two Ducks took hold of it one at each end, and away they sailed up toward the clouds. Just then a Crow flew by. He was very much astonished at the strange sight and cried: "This must surely be the King of Tortoises!" "Why certainly—" began the Tortoise. But as he opened his mouth to say these foolish words he lost his hold on the stick, and down he fell to the ground, where he was dashed to pieces on a rock.

**The Two Frogs** Two frogs were neighbors. One lived in a marsh, where there was plenty of water, which frogs love; the other in a lane some distance away, where all the water to be had was that which lay in the ruts after rain. The marsh frog warned his friend and pressed him to come and live with him in the marsh, for he would find his quarters there far more comfortable and—what was still more important—more safe. But the other refused, saying that he could not bring himself to move from a place to which he had become accustomed. A few days afterwards a heavy wagon came down the lane, and he was crushed to death under the wheels.