

## AESOP'S FABLES

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**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 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.

**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 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 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 Eagle and the Arrow** An Eagle sat perched on a lofty rock, keeping a sharp lookout for prey. A huntsman, concealed in a cleft of the mountain and on the watch for game, spied him there and show an arrow at him. The shaft struck him full in the breast and pierced him through and through. As he lay in the agonies of death, he turned his eyes upon the arrow. "Ah, cruel fate!" he cried, "that I should perish thus. But oh, fate more cruel still, that the arrow which kills me should be winged with an eagle's feathers!"

**The Oxen and the Butchers** Once upon a time the oxen determined to be revenged upon the butchers for the havoc they wrought in their ranks, and plotted to put them to death on a given day. They were all gathered together discussing how best to carry out the plan, and the more violent of them were engaged in sharpening their horns for the fray, when an old ox got up upon his feed and said, "My brothers, you have good reason, I know, to hate these butchers, but, at any rate, they understand their trade and do what they have to do without causing unnecessary pain. But if we kill them, others, who have no experience, will be set to slaughter us, and will by their bungling inflict great sufferings upon us. For you may be sure that thought all the butchers perish, mankind will never go without their beef."

**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 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."

**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 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 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 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.

**Source:**

Aesop. *Aesop's Fables*. W. Heinemann, Trans. New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003.